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by [therockawaysiren](#) | January 23, 2012 · 3:15 pm

## [Duke Riley, Beach 98th Street's Subway-Glass Artist. Not your average Hipster.](#)

**Subway Artist Has a Respect and Appreciation for Rockaways Past**



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At first look, his RISD pedigree and his Hipster Haven Brooklyn address, Duke Riley did not seem to be the most obvious choice to capture the essence of Rockaway's history. Taking a deeper look he definitely is more salt of the earth than most and seems to be really be a man of the people. Who else would fish from the East River and have clam bakes on the Brooklyn side River banks! Truly, it is obvious that this man has done a lot of research on Rockaway's rich history and really tried to pay homage to the people who have lived here through his art. His thoughtful installation is now a permanent structure to greet us off the A train. Lets take a

deeper look into his provocative body of work.



The artist who along with Willet Hauser Architectural Glass has created a series of faceted glass installations for the Beach 98th Street. He is also the owner of the [East River Tattoo shop](#) in Brooklyn. This man has a very interesting and defined point of view.

A native Bostonian, Duke Riley told the [Village Voice](#) that he has “always been interested in the space where water meets land in the urban landscape.” His intricate drawings are reminiscent of scrimshaw and are done on parchment paper.



First St Patricks Day Parade in Havana

A self proclaimed “Patriot” with a pension for “stirring the pot” ([like organizing the first St. Patricks Day Parade in Havana!](#)) is a self proclaimed “Patriot” with a soft spot for the hobo-life. He is known for elaborate projects that provide witty and thought provoking confrontation for those who have stifled human liberties (see below).

## Be Good or Be Gone: Rockaway’s Subway Stop Missive

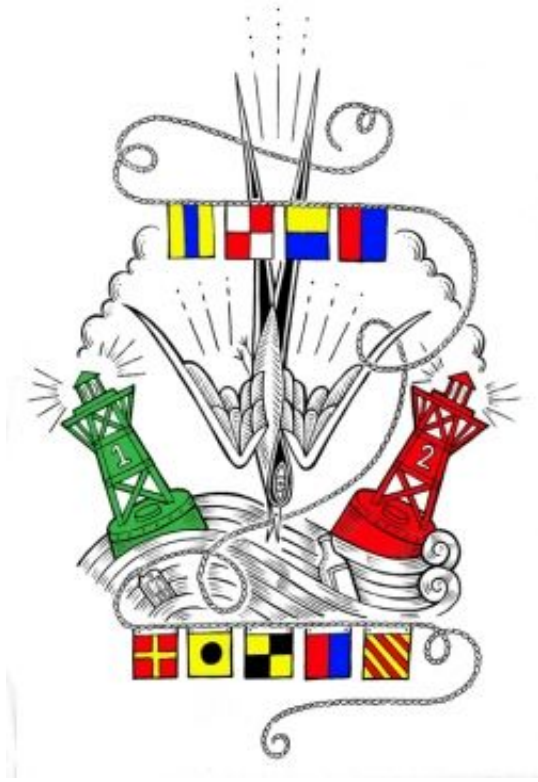
From his website, [dukeriley.info](http://dukeriley.info)

“The nautical flags spell out the popular phrase “Be Good or Be Gone” which can be seen behind the doors of several pubs and restaurants in the neighborhood. I am using the phrase as a reminder for visitors to take care and appreciate the fragile environment of the area.”



Glass work in progress







"This installation beginning with "Cead Mile Failte-In Irish: "100,000 Welcomes Before You' (is a ) nod to the welcoming of summer tourists."

It then goes on to say "Be Good or Be Gone" in nautical flags.

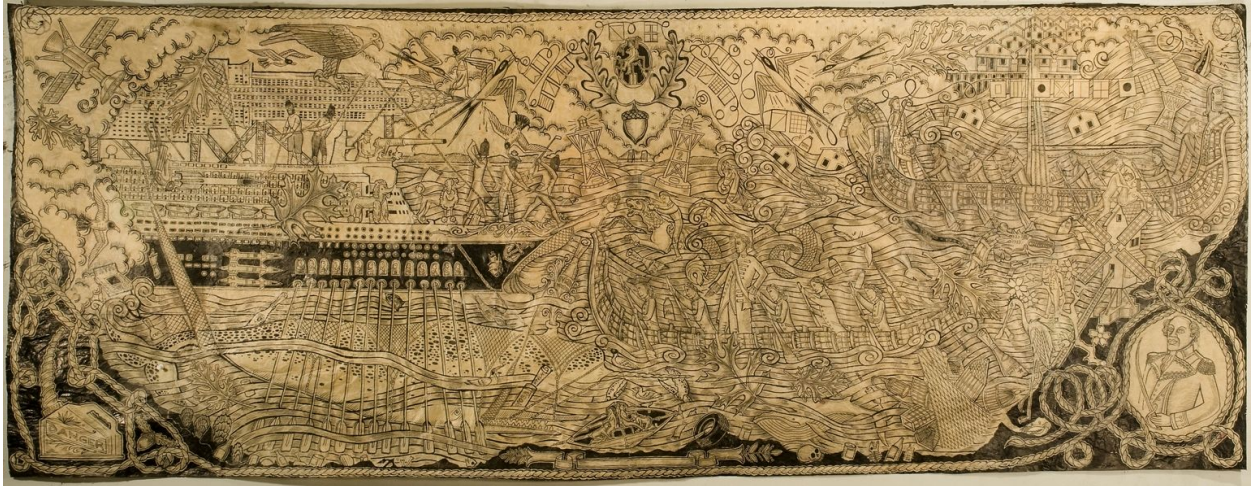


Is This ROGER's Ale House? Anyone?

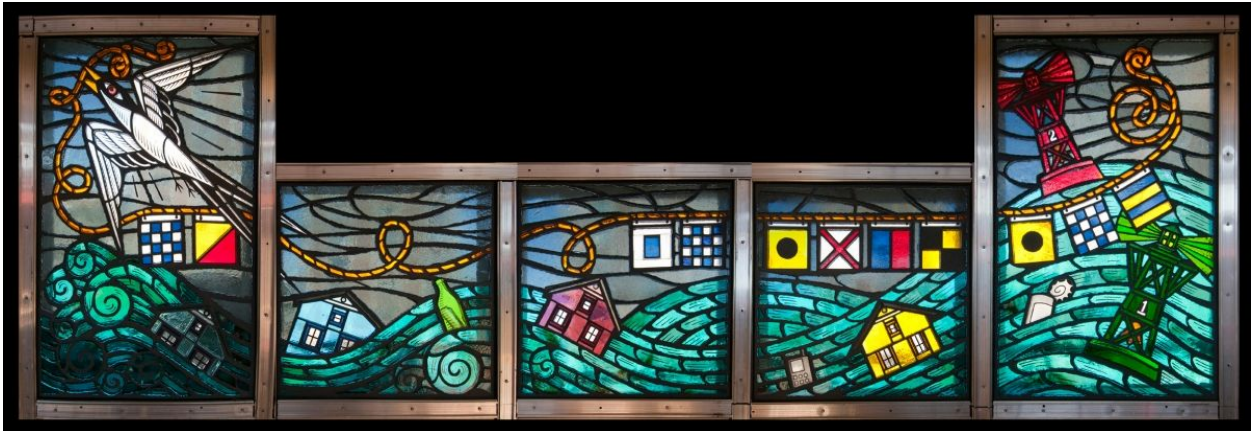
I guess anyone can put a spin on the ominous overtones to "Be Good or Be Gone". What I take from it is, that it may serve as a gentile omen to the entering "gentry". While some delight in the idea that that they have "discovered" this gem of a beach in NYC and take solace in turning Rockaway into a more "desirable" neighborhood to live in, all should understand that there is and has been a very rich history here that is to be respected and understood, not taken over. "The designs I proposed relate to all three of the Rockaway beach subway stations, which hold personal significance for me. Eleven years ago they gave me my first glimpse of the Rockaways, and I've been grateful to them ever since."-Duke Riley



This is an incredible Art Card he made for the MTA [Be Good or Be Gone](#). There is so much going on in here—some of it quite comical and um—risque . It is really worth a long look. Go to his site to see more of his work....[DukeRiley.info](#).



“The other diptych has nautical flags above images of seaside bungalows that also bear a common Rockaway phrase, “No Sniveling” which simply means no complaining. In the past 150 years, Rockaway beach endured more destruction from storms and fire than any other part of New York City. As often is the case with waterfront communities, the unwavering determination to rebuild has shaped the resilient culture of the community”



## So who is this guy anyway?

“Duke Riley became fascinated by the culture and topography of waterfronts while he was still a child, following his uncle to the docks where they bought wholesale fish. That early urban-aquatic absorption has informed Riley’s life and work ever since, from his vocation as the owner and operator of Cherry Bomb, soon to be known as Mossbunker Tattoo,





From [updownacross.net](http://updownacross.net) -Duke Riley tattooing in [Greenpoint](#); to his creation of a tremendous body of artwork that incorporates nautical history and seafarer's handicraft; to his hosting of legendary parties that involve fresh-dug clams and

fragrant maritime waste, which provides an authentic “low-tide” ambience at secret locations along the Brooklyn shoreline.” From [Village Voice](#)

“After graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design and moving to New York several years ago to be an artist, Mr. Riley said, he became fascinated with the increasingly few forgotten parts of the city, ones that development has still not claimed, many of them along, or in the middle of, the water.” [From NY Times](#)

“I studied painting, so ultimately I wanted to be an artist. I worked as a tattoo artist, and it was something that I had always had an interest in. It was something I enjoyed, even when I was younger, as was painting and art. Whether or not I thought it was something I thought I was actually going to stick with, I’m not really sure. As much as making art was something that I always thought I was going to do, I don’t really think I believed it was possible... I felt like there were plenty of people who I was studying with who seemed extremely confident that they were going to move to New York and start having a career as an artist. I never even thought that was possible.” from Interview with Duke Riley [White Hot Magazine](#)



**Duke Riley, Patriot**

## Projects:

For more info see: <http://www.dukeriley.info/projects/>

“The boisterous sea of liberty is never without a wave.”

-Thomas Jefferson

### Project Patriot 1: The Acorn

“Riley – dubbed the “Duke of Egg” in the album – is a self-proclaimed “artist patriot.” He said he hoped to re-create the first time a wooden submarine trolled New York waters in 1776, when the American Turtle sub attempted to sink a British warship in the Hudson River.”



Property of NY Times-Duke Riley was detained after his Revolutionary-replica vessel neared the Queen Mary

Police said Bushnell, one of the men arrested Friday with Riley, claims to be a descendant of David Bushnell, the inventor of the Turtle.” Read more: [NY Daily News](#)





A replica of the Turtle (submarine) not made by Riley, at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, UK



From Dailiy News: Duke Riley works on the interior of his replica Revolutionary-era submarine, chronicling his adventure in photos posted on flickr.com.



Duke Riley, aka the Duke of Egg, takes his wooden contraption for a test run

### **Project Patriot 2:**

#### **“The Dead Horse Inn**

The Dead Horse Inn is a temporary bar installation created by Duke Riley. It exists for only one night a year providing diversion, libation, and fresh crabs for a nickel. The bar is hidden among the woods of Plumb Island, in an area known as Dead Horse Bay.



The Dead Horse Inn project draws a connection between the current lay of the land and the similarly transgressive spirit of its former inhabitants. Plumb Island has always been a place where people socialize in ways otherwise prohibited in New York City. The human condition unfolds outside prescribed social boundaries, reacting and looking for free spaces, creating culture on the fringe of the city, where the land meets the water.

#### History of the Site

From 1891 to 1907, Plumb Island was occupied by a group of homesteaders who set up a series of shacks and tents that eventually developed into bars and inns. Because the island was outside New York City's jurisdiction, alcohol and tobacco were tax-free. In 1907, the US army was sent by the city to break up the party and evict the homesteaders. The land was then leased to former judge Winfield Overton, who allowed the homesteaders to return shortly after his arrival. The judge quickly declared himself ruler of the island and began organizing boxing matches, which were also illegal in New York at the time. The US military was then called again to ““depose the dictator” they had unwittingly installed.” from [dukeriley.info](http://dukeriley.info)

[Also see: NY TIMES ARTICLE: When Making Art Becomes a Night at the Beach](#)

It was built from the excavated ruins of the shantytown that actually occupied the island from 1891 to 1935.:



Not Bad! Nickle Drinks? I'm game.





View of Marine Parkway Bridge & Rockaway from Plum Beach

Also see the video for this Project . Film Taken of Belmont island, right outside of the UN.

[Duke Riley Check out some of his writings on his website](#): Following are a few excerpts:

‘THOUGHTS ON DEMOCRACY’, WRITTEN FOR ‘A GUIDE TO DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA’,  
CREATIVE TIME BOOKS

by Duke Riley

“Our American democracy requires constant movement. Like a bicycle, it functions best when in motion and will fall to one side or another when standing still. The greatest threat to democracy is stagnation and complacency.”

“Stagnation in our democracy occurs when the right to the pursuit to happiness becomes mistaken for the right to happiness”

For a deeper look: here are some articles that were referenced. Check them out!

<http://www.artloversnewyork.com/zine/the-bomb/2007/08/04/duke-rileyscores-ny-post-front-page/>

<http://www.dukeriley.info/projects/be-good-or-be-gone>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/14/duke-riley-and-the-naval\\_n\\_259609.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/14/duke-riley-and-the-naval_n_259609.html)

<http://www.theawl.com/2011/10/how-they-got-there-a-conversation-with-artist-duke-riley>

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<http://magnanmetz.com/artists/selectedworks.php?artist=Riley>  
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<http://www.thelmagazine.com/gyrobase/exploration-art-janet-biggs-and-duke-riley-scout-forgotten-islands-and-dark-tunnels/Content?oid=1989979&storyPage=2>



Welcome to Rockaway Beach, NY