

Shit!

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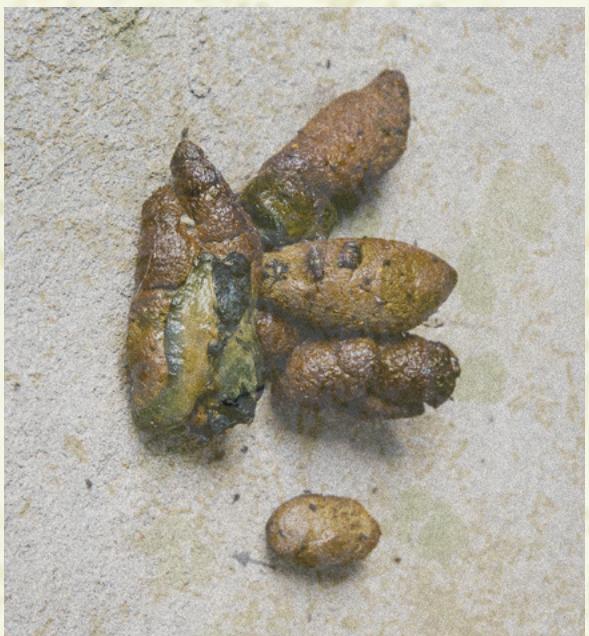
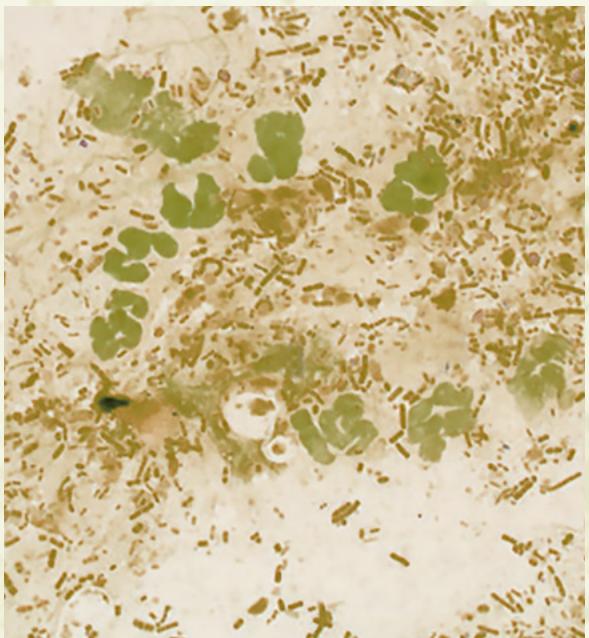


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Shitty and Shittier

By TJ Shin

TJ SHIN

“It goes like this: we aren’t born men or women; we aren’t even born boys or girls. When we’re born we are a patchwork of liquids, solids, and gels covered by a strange organ whose extension and weight is greater than that of any other: the skin. This tegument ensures that all of it remains contained, presenting that appearance of isolated unity we call body. Wrapped around the digestive tube, the skin opens up at its ends, leaving two muscular orifices visible: the mouth and the anus. So there are no differences, then: we’re each a flesh ribbon that, due to the law of gravity, begins in the mouth and ends in the anus.”

— Paul B. Preciado, *Anal Terror*

Plumbing is one dermal tube. Sewer rats swim through our waste pipes and crawl out of our toilets. In a recent case in 2020, a couple contracted COVID-19 from their neighbors more than 10 floors below. Research shows that the virus can be transmitted through fecal aerosols or droplets; through the unfortunate combination of leaky pipes, neglectful landlords, and bad drainage—the city's poorly irrigated gut.¹

Fecal microbiota transplant (FMT), or stool transplant, is another instance of our shared digestive tube. FMT can reportedly treat gastrointestinal diseases, obesity, irritable bowel syndrome, and inflammation. It involves transferring fecal matter from a donor into a recipient's colon in order to change the individual's microbial and hormonal (fecal estrogen and testosterone) composition. Our feces is incredibly diverse: there are an estimated 100 billion bacteria and 100 million to 1 billion viruses per gram of wet stool.

Our excreta can also reveal a host of information about our education, occupation, and socioeconomic class.² Fresh poop contains around 75% water; the rest is 25–54% bacterial biomass: 2–25% protein or nitrogenous matter, 25% carbohydrate or undigested plant matter, and 2–15% fat. The organic solids show the variety of drugs, sweeteners, plastics, household chemicals, and environmental risks that make it into our bodies. For example, antidepressants and opioids are more common in lower-income communities along with low dietary fiber and citrus consumption for those who did not finish high school. Coffee and vitamin B biomarkers are higher in wealthier communities. Obversely, your socioeconomic class affects the collection of solid waste. Renters in metropolitan areas and low-income neighborhoods are more likely to have incomplete plumbing. Poor infrastructure of health and sanitation are clearly racialized: indigenous, black, and brown American households have increased odds of being plumbing poor.³

¹ — Probable Evidence of Fecal Aerosol Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in a High-Rise Building. Published online 2020 Sep 1. doi: 10.7326/M20-0928

² — Bob Yirka, "Study of sewage gives clues about socioeconomic status, habits." Phys.org, October 9, 2019. <https://phys.org/news/2019-10-sewage-clues-socioeconomic-status-habits.html>

³ — Shiloh Deitz & Katie Meehan (2019) Plumbing Poverty: Mapping Hot Spots of Racial and Geographic Inequality in U.S. Household Water Insecurity, Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 109:4, 1092-1109, DOI:10.108

IMAGE

McSpedon & Baker. Five Points, 1827. ca. 1850. Museum of the City of New York. 97.227.3.

In New York City before the formation of a sanitation department, residents would dump buckets of food scraps, animal carcasses, trash, and dung onto the streets, producing a terrible stench described as “a nasal disaster.” Pigs were crucial to the city’s urban landscape: they were our first working-class and unemployed sanitation workers who ate household food scraps that were tossed into the gutters. In 1849, the cholera epidemic was spreading throughout New York City and soon after, there was a city-wide attack on piggeries. Over 3,000 hogs were captured in the raid and many hog pens were destroyed. By 1860, the city pushed the pigs up north above 86th Street.

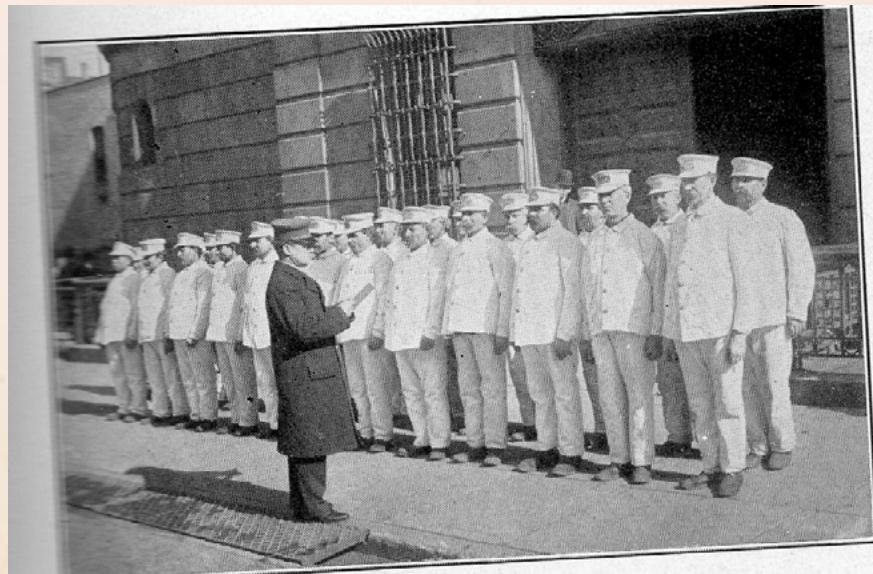
The city formally established the Department of Sanitation in 1881 and, in 1895, commissioned George Waring to form an army of street cleaners nicknamed the “White Wings”. They wore white uniforms, collected waste from the streets, and sold animal remains to bone-boiling plants. Before 1860, bone-boiling was a vibrant industry in the pre-Central Park of New York City. It would produce bone char (or bone black or animal char), which was a valuable commodity: it was used in the sugar industry as a decoloring filter, which allowed sugar cane to achieve its desirable white color. The residual grease from bone-boiling was used for soap production.



SHITTY AND SHITTIER

IMAGE

White Wings and George Waring, 1898.



IMAGE

Streets of New York, 1900



4 — Wastewater Treatment Plants, NYC Environmental Protection, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/wastewater-treatment-plants.page>

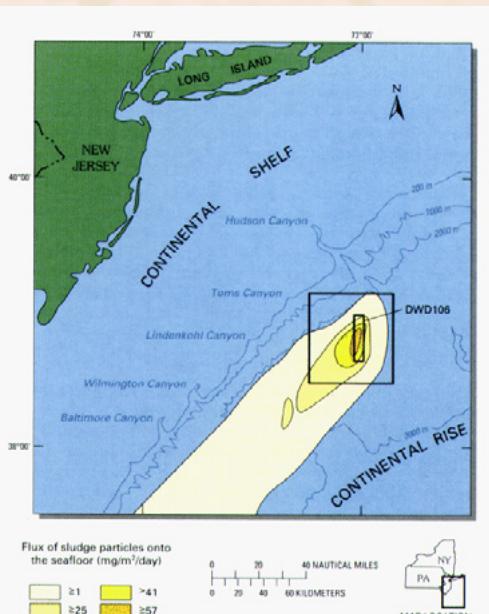
After its first Wastewater Treatment plant in Jamaica in 1903, New York City continued to expand until the most recent plant in Red Hook in 1987. Currently, there are 14 plants that treat 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater per day.⁴ That's around 1,400 tons of biosolids or the equivalent to 60 truckloads of pure shit. Biosolids are a semi-solid slurry of fecal matter and a natural byproduct of wastewater treatment systems. Unprocessed sewage is 90% liquid and goes through a process of purification and dewatering. In the first sedimentation tank, oil and grease rise to the surface and are skimmed off. In the second tank, anaerobic bacteria like protozoa eat away the fecal matter. In the final step, water disinfected with sodium hypochlorite is discharged to a nearby receiving water (like Newtown Creek or the Hudson River). The remaining solid matter that settles to the bottom of the basin is called biosolid, or sewage sludge.

Even as early as thirty years ago, unprocessed sewage and biosolids in New York City were dumped directly into the water. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created the Federal Ocean Dumping Ban Act of 1988, which banned the toxic dumping of sewage in the water and required proper disposal in a sanitary landfill. New York City continued to dump sewage into the Hudson River until 1992, 12 miles off of New York City, and then 106 miles into the Atlantic Ocean as a precautionary measure. Not surprisingly, the Senate Report has shown that there are irreversible impacts from sludge dumping on marine life: massive bacterial contamination and closure of shellfish areas, diseased fish, and an alarming elevation of toxic metals at the bottom of the ocean.⁵

4 — Sewage contamination in New York Bight. Coprostanol as an indicator. Environmental Science & Technology. Publication date: October 1, 1979. <https://doi.org/10.1021/es60158a015>

IMAGE

A site for sludge dumping in the Atlantic Ocean, 106 miles away from New York City.



Predicted deposition rate of sludge particles on the seafloor near the 106-Mile Dumpsite.

IMAGE

Since 1926, the city of Milwaukee has been selling its biosolids as a fertilizer called Milorganite. Milorganite is solid in retailers like Home Depot. According to their website, “10 billion pounds of waste has been diverted from landfills to slow-release nitrogen fertilizer.”

**IMAGE**

NYC sludge in 252 tractor-trailers stuck in Parrish, Alabama.



After the passing of the federal act, the EPA promoted the use of biosolids for agricultural fertilizer or soil conditioner. It was common for farmers to use animal manure to improve soil fertility. After proper treatment, biosolids can be applied directly onto the soil, helping retain moisture and slowly release nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus for plants. In 1992, trains filled with thousands of tons of the City's sewage sludge headed to farms in Colorado and Alabama where inexpensive land and permissive zoning allowed for its disposal. The response was mixed: some farmers praised New York City's microbially diverse biosolid that helped with crop yield and pest control (at its peak, there were 153 poop trains that covered 10,000 acres a year), while others complained about the lack of regulation and the stench for the local residents. In 2012, poop trains stopped running because they were too expensive to operate. Presently, 65% of NYC's biosolids end up in the landfill in low-income rural areas.⁶

⁶ — In 2018, 250 containers full of New York City's sludge were stranded at a transfer point in Parrish, Alabama for two months. The residents complained about the overwhelming stench.



IMAGE

WE ACT for Environmental Justice co-founders Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton addressing the poor air quality in Harlem. Poster reads, "Breathing in this neighborhood is hazardous to our children."

Shit plays a key role in urban infrastructure and reveals just how shitty our waste management is. The newest of New York City's wastewater treatment plants, North River Sewage Treatment Plant, was originally planned for construction on 72nd Street in a predominantly white and wealthy neighborhood but was later relocated to West Harlem in 1988 along 137th to 145th streets, a predominantly low-income Black neighborhood. The treatment plant processes 170 million gallons of raw sewage every day and serves a population of 600,000 residents, many of whom are diagnosed with asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases due to endotoxin exposure.⁷ Shit centralizes working-class struggles over public space, the value of labor, and health: it divides the people who create waste and the people who collect it or live nearby it. Waste also reveals how we dump disease and mortality onto specific geographies, assigning laboring bodies to dispose of industrial pollution and soak up toxic waste. The first environmental justice organization in New York City, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, was founded to address the unequal access to proper sanitation, healthcare, and public space for low-income Black communities in West Harlem.

We live in a city built on trash. In 1968, there was the New York City Garbage Strike during which 7,000 city sanitation workers went on strike demanding fair wages, benefits, contract work, and safe working conditions. On the ninth day, the city accumulated so much garbage that 100,000 tons of trash were piled chest-high in the streets. Freshkills Park in Staten Island, once the world's largest landfill, reopened after 9/11 with all the debris from the World Trade Center buried under, what is now known as, the West Mound.

IMAGE

Documentation of the New York City Garbage Strike in 1968 during which garbage filled the streets when sanitation workers went on strike for nine days.





IMAGE

A smokestack at the North River Sewage Treatment Plant.

TJ SHIN

IMAGE

Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island in 1950. The dumping ground reopened after 9/11.



So the question remains: what do we make of our shit?
How can we re-imagine our current systems of disposal?

In Newtown Creek, between the border of Brooklyn and Queens, there are vessels called “digester eggs” that capture methane gas to prevent it from entering the atmosphere and store it for renewable energy that fuels New York City houses. Methane gas is produced from anaerobic decomposition, the second biggest contributor to human-caused climate change after carbon dioxide. The eggs are engineered to mimic human and cow stomachs: they utilize the same bacteria found in our gastrointestinal tract that allows us to break down and release gas. We are co-digesters.

New York City has announced zero-sludge landfill waste by 2030. Garbage and shit are no longer discards for decay but are fertilizers of our shared ecosystem. Plumbing is our digestive tract, the treatment plant our fermentation tank, and we remain the main sources of fuel. Sewage sludge is processed into manure, foraged as food, and expelled as feces back into our toilets. The cycle is infinite and we continuously close the loop. We become, essentially, one dermal tube.

IMAGE

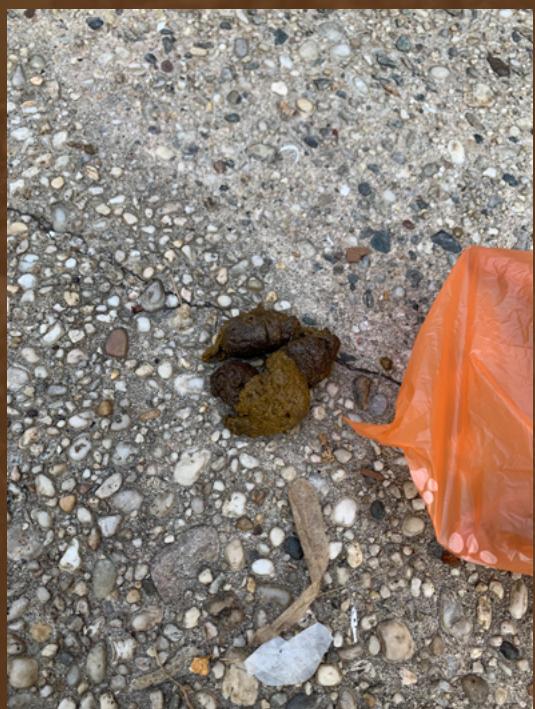
Newtown Creek's digester eggs.



Some Other Beginning's End

By Christopher Lin

SOME OTHER BEGINNING'S END



The Indigenous Bunun people of Taiwan have a creation myth in which humans originate from canine fecal matter and animals from melon seeds. In *Some Other Beginning's End*, I collaborated with my dog Odin to scarify melon seeds, activating them in their passage through his digestive tract. These seeds were then germinated, grown, and set within a sculptural creation narrative.



CHRISTOPHER LIN



Vueon® 12-18" LED
OptiBright (sold separately)



Dirt Spheres

By Karen Kuo

KAREN KUO

IMAGE

Different colored dirt sourced from different locations in the yard.

Our soil at home has green manure mixed into it—a combination of our kitchen compost of fruit and veggie peels and trimmings from our grapevines and fig tree, all broken down to enrich the quality of the soil.

The green manure does not affect the quality of the final sphere, as the goal is to gradually decrease the size of dirt particles that arise to the sphere's surface, which allows for ease of polishing and a greater shine.



DIRT SPHERES



IMAGE (TOP RIGHT)

Large dry chunks of clay-based California garden dirt.



IMAGE (TOP LEFT)

Fresh dig left to air dry prior to the sifting stage. At this stage there are a lot of large pebbles and rocks that I want to get rid of before hand-shaping the spheres.



Crushing rocks with a mallet through a mesh screen.

Crushing rocks second time around with mallet and rolling pin.

Crushing dirt clumps with rolling pin.



IMAGE (TOP LEFT)

Dirt colors.



IMAGE (BOTTOM RIGHT)

Dirt shades sorted and set aside for dusting.

Soft and sifted dirt from the front yard.



DIRT SPHERES

KAREN KUO



IMAGE (TOP LEFT)

Newly sifted yard dirt.



IMAGE (TOP RIGHT)

Hand shaping the dirt core.



IMAGE (BOTTOM RIGHT)

Core of sphere shaped and dusted repeatedly with sifted dry dirt over the course of a few days.

DIRT SPHERES

IMAGE

Final polishing with sake cup.



IMAGE

Finished sphere, polished to a shine at sunset.

I've made dirt spheres as part of my meditation since 2017. Each sphere represents a chance to connect to my own physicality by being outdoors surrounded by Nature.

This project teaches me important lessons about being at ease and in flow through observing the simple beauty and humility of life-giving soil.



Cerulean Waters

By Johann Diedrick &
Laura Kung

JOHANN DIEDRICK & LAURA KUNG

Cerulean Waters is a textile and sound installation by Laura Kung and Johann Diedrick that highlights the combined sewage overflow in the Dutch Kills section of Newtown Creek and its environmental impact on the local community. Kung and Diedrick reflect on our archaic water treatment infrastructure and the need for green alternatives for stormwater collection to counteract human-generated wastewater. With Cerulean Waters, the two artists unveil the current damaged conditions of the Dutch Kills tributary and re-imagine the future potential it holds as a gathering ground for the community to engage with the water's healing powers.

Johann Diedrick

JOHANN DIEDRICK & LAURA KUNG



Cerulean Waters is an audio/visual work that highlights the Newtown Creek, a body of water separating Brooklyn and Queens known both as one of the largest superfund sites in the city and one of the most polluted areas in the country. The work reveals the area's post-industrial present, its storied past, and its uncertain future through an unhurried sonic composition composed of original music and field recordings taken while boating along its water and walking around its neighboring streets at night. The work features original music composition inspired by the waterway, weaving in underwater field recordings and voice-overs from local historian Mitch Waxman, who talks about the development of the area from a small residential neighborhood to the center of industrial gas and oil refinement. The sounds of waste management trucks, industrial cranes, and cars zooming past overhead on highways offer a stark reminder of how a former marshland was paved over and dredged from below in order to create a paradise for toxic dumping, rapid development, and unrestrained activities that diminished a local ecosystem.



IMAGES

By Johann Diedrick

From Diedrick's Notes

"For the past year or so, I've turned my ears to the underwater rumblings, industrial gnashings, and overhead zoomings that make up the sonic environment surrounding the Newtown Creek, a body of water that separates Brooklyn and Queens and is one of the most polluted Superfund sites in the country. The creek is infamously known for the Greenpoint Oil Spill, where somewhere around 17 to 30 million gallons of oil and petroleum products seeped into the creekbed over the span of decades, only to be discovered by a Coast Guard patrol helicopter in 1978. Since being designated a federal Superfund site in 2010, many environmental remediation projects in the area aim to clean the water and surrounding ecosystem. Still, the area remains environmentally compromised due to industrialization, continued oil pollution from nearby refineries, combined sewage overflow events that regularly dump human waste into the creek, and toxic runoff from cars and trucks that drive across the busy streets, bridges, and highways that pass over and through the area.

Despite this, the area piques my curiosity as both a harbinger of the climate crisis at our doorsteps and also as a potential stage for how we might learn to coexist with such a present-future. Sonically I'm drawn to the whooshing of cars that pass above on the Long Island Expressway, the stochastic bubbling of aeration systems meant to re-oxygenate the murky waters, and the resilient wildlife that still makes this once vibrant marshland home. If you're lucky you may catch a glimpse of a stray egret searching for food among patches of sawgrass planted by ecological restoration projects. Crabs, jellyfish, and the occasional seal still swim below the creek's still surface. Closer to the nearby Fedex distribution facility, cacophonous calls of fake bird calls suggest an area that isn't so devoid of wildlife after all."



IMAGES

By Johann Diedrick



CERULEAN WATERS

IMAGE

By Johann Diedrick



IMAGES

By Johann Diedrick





IMAGE

Johann Diedrick,
Cerulean Waters, 2019.
Sound installation,

The Cerulean Waters installation is co-sponsored by Green Shores NYC as part of their Bridging the Creek project and is made possible through a grant from the Hudson River Foundation. Bridging the Creek is a community-driven project designed to connect those living and working on the Queens and Brooklyn sides of Newtown Creek with both the waterway and each other.

Laura Kung

JOHANN DIEDRICK & LAURA KUNG

IMAGE

By Johann Diedrick

Cerulean Waters II is a series of miniature landscapes fossilizing the bacterial presence in the water from the Newtown Creek, generated by human waste. Water samples were collected and tested for fecal coliform bacteria using a water quality testing kit: an agar solution containing a chemical substrate that causes bacterial coliform to emit a cerulean blue pigment through an enzymatic reaction. The presence of cerulean blue correlates to levels of bacteria within drop of water and an indicator of CSO (Combined Sewage Overflow) events. These bacterial cultures were then dyed onto imported silk fabric as a dialogue between native and non-native sources and a visual reflection of the conditions of the water.



IMAGE

By Laura Kung



IMAGE

By Laura Kung



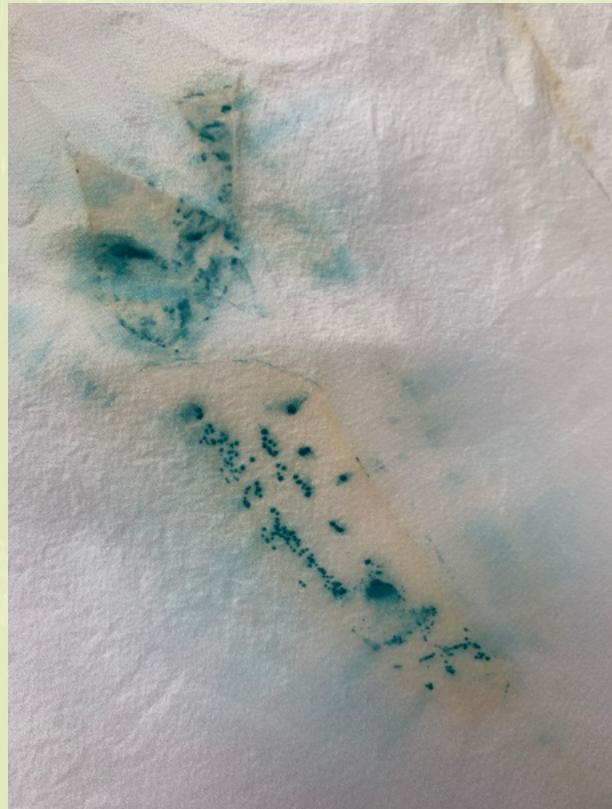
CERULEAN WATERS

IMAGES

By Laura Kung



CERULEAN WATERS



IMAGES

By Laura Kung

Sophie Friedman-Pappas

SOPHIE FRIEDMAN-PAPPAS



IMAGE

Title: Bill Bound at entrance to his underground smog alert chamber in Manhattan Beach, California, 1971

Collection: Los Angeles Times Photographic Archives

Owning Institution: UCLA, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library

Source: Calisphere

Date of access: July 15 2021 01:21

Permalink: <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/21198/zz0002nh82/>

Manhattan Beach inventor Bill Bounds has built a three-room, fully furnished-underground escape chamber.

He did not erect it because he fears an atomic blast.

He built it to escape the smog.

“It’s no laughing matter,” insisted the inventor of the first automatic cartridge camera, “I’m deadly serious.”

“Did you ever think the day would come when children wouldn’t be able to play outside because of smog?

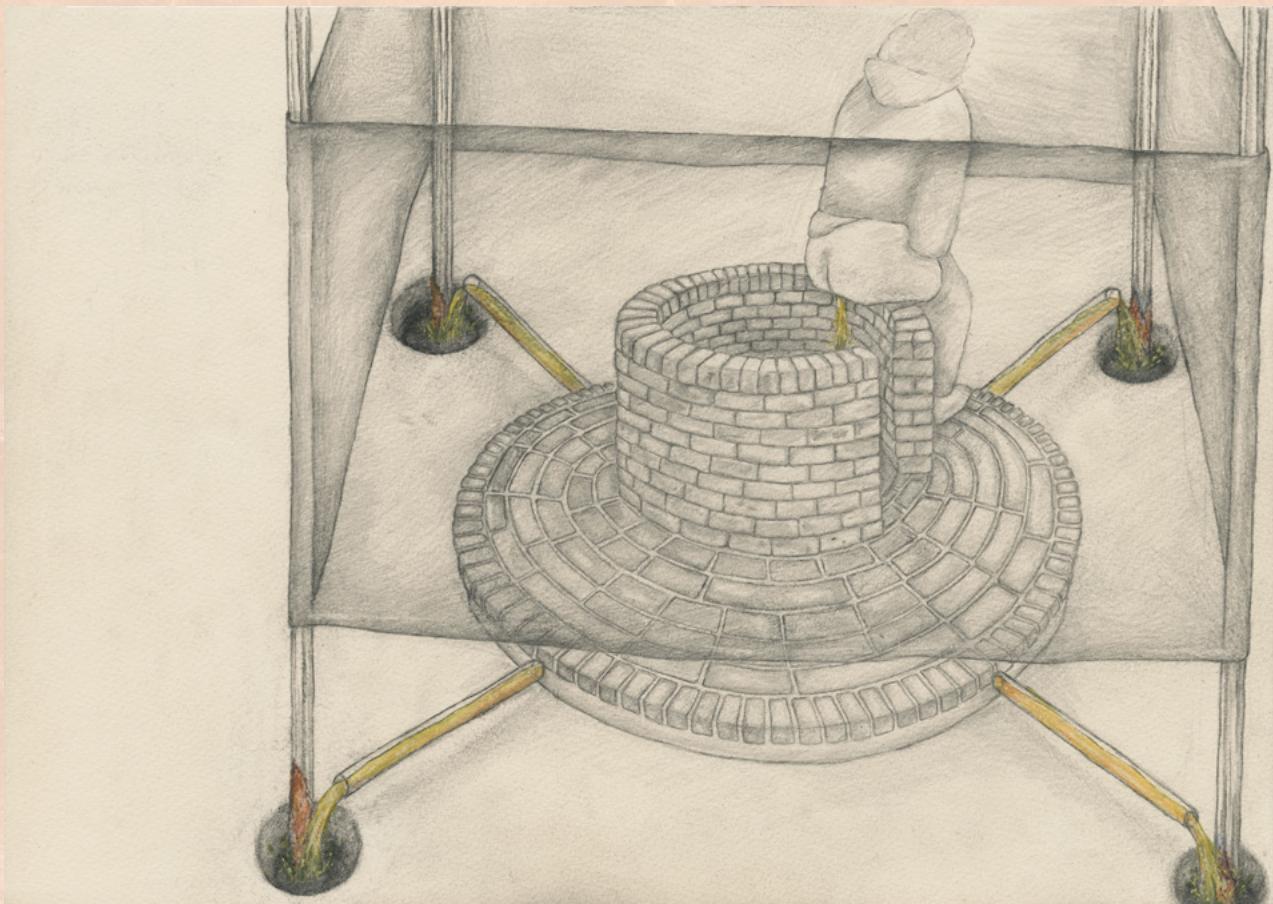
“Well, that day is here. And smog keeps getting progressively worse.”

Bounds’ smog-alert chamber is reached by a spiral staircase winding 20 feet into the ground in a well-like shaft.”¹

¹ — Charles Hillinger,
The Los Angeles Times,
Los Angeles, California.
October 27, 1971,
Page 33.

Have you ever seen the bottom of a lamp-post corroded by urine?

Bound's shelter will now be used as a space to collect and redistribute our piss as a method of gentle demolition.



IMAGE

Into the Wind, 2020
10" x 14"
Graphite, colored pencil, and watercolor on paper.

An imagined restroom. The user's urine is deposited onto the structure in which it is housed, which rusts away the scaffold and eventually makes it collapse.

Urine-Tanning

I set up a five-gallon food-grade bucket between my toilet and sink whose airtight lid I'd unscrew everytime I needed to micturate. I tanned grocery-store fish skins and began to question this impulse to put my 'waste' to work. Why was I giving my shit more shit to do?

Urine-Tanned Salmon Leather
(Material Samples #1, #2,
#3, #4, #5), 2020
Various dimensions
Salmon skin



Urine-tanning process shot,
2020,



Artist Info

ARTIST INFO

Christopher Lin is a New York based conceptual artist exploring themes of ecology and human systems. Combining elements of scientific experimentation and ritual practice, in his sculptures, installations, and conceptual projects explore materials that are familiar to the viewer but are presented in an unfamiliar way. Through careful arrangements of found objects and performative encounters, the everyday is twisted and made visceral. Play transforms into contemplation as he explores themes such as transience, the human condition, and environmental anxiety. Lin received a BA from Yale University and an MFA from Hunter College. He was awarded the C12 Emerging Artist Fellowship in 2016 and is currently a fellow for the Bronx Museum AIM Emerging Artist Fellowship.

Umico Niwa's practice explores the way Western notions of personhood subsume human life into constructs of sexuality and gender, overlooking the various other modes of unbridled existence: plant, microbial, fungal, animal, celestial bodies. Her speculative medical papers propose novel forms of body modification to combat gender dysphoria as well as playfully explore the possible efficacy of including fecal matter transplants as part of hormone replacement therapy for transgender individuals.

Johann Diedrick is an artist, engineer, and musician that makes installations, performances and sculptures for exploring the world through our ears. He surfaces vibratory histories of past interactions inscribed in material and embedded in space, peeling back sonic layers to reveal hidden memories and untold stories. He shares his tools and techniques through listening tours, workshops and open-source hardware/software. He is currently a 2020 Technology Artist-in-Residence at Pioneer Works and a recipient of a 2020 Brooklyn Arts Fund grant from the Brooklyn Arts Council. His work has been featured in Wire Magazine, Musicworks Magazine, and presented at MoMA PS1 (in collaboration with Jonathan González), Somerset House (London, UK), Social Kitchen (Kyoto, Japan), Common Ground (Berlin, Germany), Recess (Brooklyn, NY), Knockdown Center (Queens, NY), and Pioneer Works (Brooklyn, NY).

Karen Kuo is an artist living in LA. Her projects explore the ephemera of light and color in architectural and imagined space to replicate moments of heightened emotion. Kuo's daily observations of natural phenomena map the passage of time materially in the form of drawings, paintings, and sculptures. She earned her BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2015.

Laura Kung is a multidisciplinary artist and designer who uses textile making as an introspective tool. She explores ideas of identity and belonging and her methods draw from a place of contemplation, using slow conscious processes such as natural dyeing, tapestry weaving, floor loom weaving and patch-working to unveil complex perspectives as a first generation Chinese-Taiwanese American. Color, texture & light are used as mediums to create perceptual landscapes.

Ten Izu's sculptures draw upon personal experiences with co-dependencies and hierarchies of power: from deconstructing their rebellions against a Catholic upbringing, to the realization that the artist's cat depends on them for all aspects of survival. Many questions permeate Ten Izu's practice: What motivates a pet goldfish to leap from its fishbowl to a certain death? Or, how do imbalanced systems of wealth and power produce constant economic precarity for some while not for others? Izu's childhood introduction to Medieval representations of Hell and human mortality inspire their hybridized visual language that blends tropes of religious iconography with playful commentary on interpersonal relationships.

Sophie Friedman-Pappas was born in 1995 in New York, NY. She lives and works in New York, NY. Friedman-Pappas has exhibited at Alyssa Davis Gallery, New York, NY, organized by Octagon (2021); in lieu, Los Angeles, CA (2019); Resort Gallery, Baltimore, MD (2018); King's Leap, Brooklyn, NY (2018); and ADDS DONNA, Chicago, IL (2017). In 2020, she completed a year-long residency with the Freshkills Park Alliance, New York, NY. Friedman-Pappas received her BFA in 2017 from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and will begin her MFA in September 2021 at the University of California Los Angeles.

TJ Shin is an interdisciplinary artist working at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and speciesism. Inspired by decentralized ecologies and queer sociality, they create living installations to decolonize the neoliberal status of the “Human” and imagine an ever-expanding self that exists beyond the boundaries of one’s skin. Shin is a 2020 New York Community Trust Van Lier Fellow and 2020 Visiting Artist Fellow at UrbanGlass in Brooklyn. Shin has exhibited internationally at Doosan Gallery, Klaus Von Nichtssagend Gallery, Cuchifritos Gallery, AC Institute, Abrons Arts Center, all in New York, NY; Knockdown Center, Queens, NY; and Cody Dock, London, England, among others. Shin was an artist-in-residence at Recess, Brooklyn; Wave Hill, the Bronx; Artist Alliance Inc., New York; Coalesce Artist Residency at University at Buffalo, New York; and Col(LAB) Visiting Artist at Princeton University, New Jersey.

Acknowledgements

shit! is a multi-media exhibition and publication that brings together artists whose work directly explores shit—fecal matter, poop, stool, excrement—and its charged forms of bodily engagements. Together, the artists digest the political economy of garbage, microbial ecologies, infrastructure of health and sanitation, and abject toilet humor.

shit! opens from September 10 to November 20, 2021 and is organized by TJ Shin, a former artist-in-residence of the LES Studio Program. Exhibiting artists include Christopher Lin, Johann Diedrick, Karen Kuo, Laura Kung, Sophie-Friedman Pappas, Ten Izu, TJ Shin, and Umico Niwa.

shit! is supported by Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space, New York, which provides exhibition opportunities to hundreds of independent curators and emerging underrepresented artists. Its location inside the Essex Street Market creates a distinct opportunity to directly engage with the local community about contemporary art.

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