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OFFICIAL VISIT: North Brooklyn Development Corporation's Richard Mazur introduces Mayor Bloomberg at Greenpoint Town Meeting.

A Bloomberg Moment in Greenpoint

The Mayor Gets an Earful at Town Hall Meeting

BY DEBORA GILBERT

In a well orchestrated whirlwind, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and a group of city commissioners visited La Polonaise recently to meet the public and field questions from community leaders about some of our most pressing problems. An audience of 200 residents heard the Mayor discuss a variety of issues, including residential displacement, the dearth of cars on the G line, local zoning matters, and the stench emanating from the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant.

While the evening's format did not allow questions from the floor, moderator Richard Mazur of the North Brooklyn Development Corporation, one of the evening's sponsors, promised, "this is not a scripted meeting." Preselected community leaders posed questions to the mayor, while others who came to the meeting prepared to ask a question were disappointed. Since it was not widely publicized, there was no problem finding a seat, and the relaxed, gracious atmosphere felt a bit like being at a private club.

"I grew up in a neighborhood like this," noted the Medford, Massachusetts native, adding that he understood residents' need to sound off about local concerns. "You care about the things that are not going well," he said.

Annette Kupiec raised the issue of the treatment plant odor, saying it is driving tenants away

from rental properties much as fat rendering plants had done over a century ago. Kupiec, who has visited the plant, reported that a lot of older equipment is still in use there. She also complained about the new nature walk. "I was appalled by the project," she said, pointing out that "it is too far away for the public to get to, and it overlooks an asphalt plant and a car crushing business. For a project that has grown to \$7 billion, the neighborhood deserves more of an amenity. We need access to the East River waterfront."

"The plant is in a transitional phase," replied Department of Environmental Protection commissioner Emily Lloyd, who acknowledged that the odors seem worse than before. She said the city is seeking a solution during an interim phase before a second stage of construction is completed. Lloyd promised a December progress report and said she hoped cooler weather would alleviate some of the problem.

Ward Dennis, chair of Community Board #1's land use committee, made a case for contextual zoning, asking the mayor for help with "changes that are occurring at an unmanageable pace" and stating that the community has been "left out of the process." He asked for a larger community role in reviewing Requests for Proposals (RFPs), statements issued by the city to developers that are the earliest indication of future building ac-

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IN REMEMBRANCE

Bicyclist Killed on Union Avenue

On his way home from helping others

BY PHIL DEPAOLO

Craig Murphey, 26, was killed when he was struck by a gas truck the morning of October 18 at Union Avenue and Ten Eyck Street. Media accounts said he was riding on the wrong side of Union Avenue when he was hit. But that is disputed by Elizabeth Weinberg, a friend of Murphey's, who told Streetsblog that that didn't make sense: "We know for a fact that he was coming from Lorimer (at Broadway) at that time and heading to his place on South 3rd Street in Brooklyn, so he had to have been going NORTH on Union Avenue, not south like the police report said. There is no way Craig would be riding against traffic, and he had no reason to head back down in the opposite direction from home. He rode to work everyday in Harlem from Brooklyn."

Craig was returning from his volunteer work for Right Rides, a service that helps unescorted women get home safely, when this tragedy occurred. It's vital that anyone who witnessed the accident get in touch with the 90th police precinct! Or if you're



TRAGIC LOSS: Craig Murphey was on his way home from his volunteer shift with Right Rides, an organization that escorts women home safely from area clubs. At right: Ghost bike shrine at accident site.

not comfortable speaking to the police, please get in touch with me at info@thewgnews.com.

Teresa Toro, chair of Community Board #1's transportation committee and New York City coordinator at the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, had some strong words regarding this tragedy. "This latest cyclist death hit very close to home not just because it happened in Greenpoint-Williamsburg, where I live, but because our community is plagued by trucks

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STAFF PHOTO

ELECTIONS

The Future of Your Vote: Will it Count?

What every North Brooklyn resident should know about coming changes in the way we vote

BY DEBORA GILBERT

As school children, we are taught that our vote is sacred, and that we owe it to society to participate in our democracy—and to vote. And while it's up to every citizen to decide whether to vote or not—we are a free society—if we do not keep track of recent developments in our election processes and voice our opinion about them to our elected officials so that they know we are paying attention to their actions, whether we live in Williamsburg or Wyoming, our society may become less free.

Radical changes in the way we vote are coming soon. We will use the 40-year-old lever voting machines only one or two more years before each county in the state will choose new electronic voting machines. Whether they buy the right model will have

major implications for the future of democracy at the local and national level, the city's financial future (these systems are expensive beyond comprehension), and for how long we wait in line at the polls.

Comedian George Carlin told National Public Radio in October that he doesn't vote because he doesn't believe that the system works. "It gives the illusion that we live in a democracy. Candidates go into debt campaigning, and lobbyists come to town, they have lots of money, and they get what they want. We have been diverted with toys and gizmos ... like a cell phone that makes pancakes. The only real choices we have," he said, "are paper or plastic, regular or diet."

Everyone knows someone like Carlin, who has lost confidence in democracy. Many well

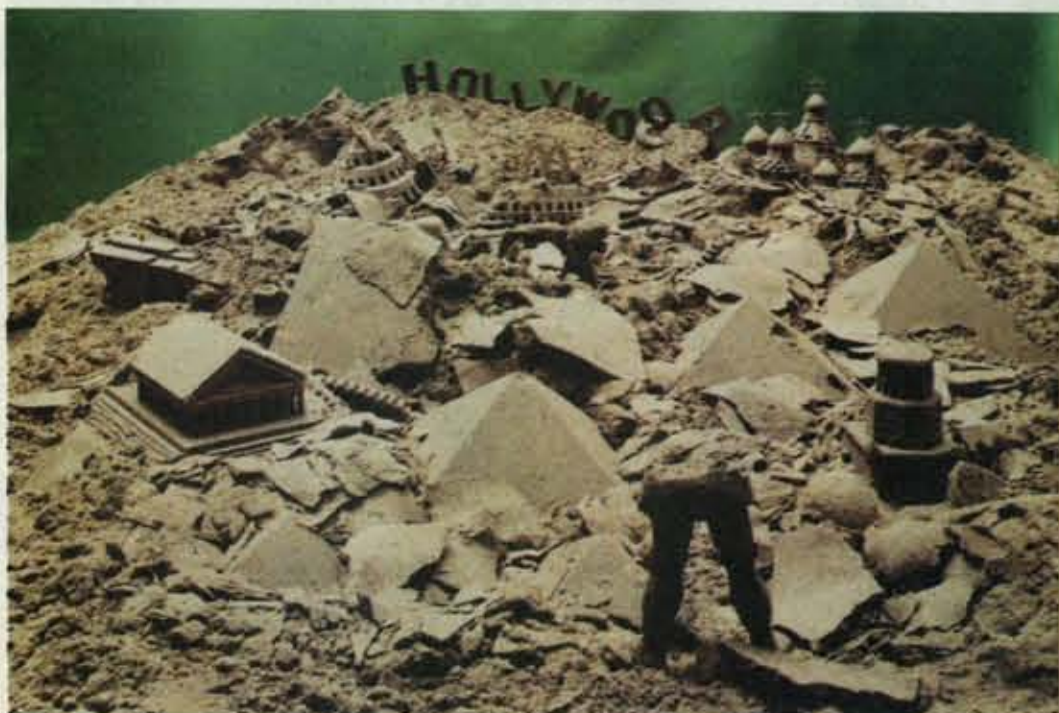
informed people here in Williamsburg and Greenpoint questioned the validity of the year 2000 presidential election, as well as the 2004 electoral contests in Sarasota, Florida, Ohio, and elsewhere. Since then there has been a storm of troubling reports about malfunctioning electronic voting equipment awarding votes to the wrong candidates and the ease with which new software can be introduced into a touch screen voting machine in less than ten minutes. New York City voting activist and computer professional Teresa Hommel has said that there is no way that election officials can know whether a machine they order can be tampered with by remote communications because there are so many technologies for this. Worse, no

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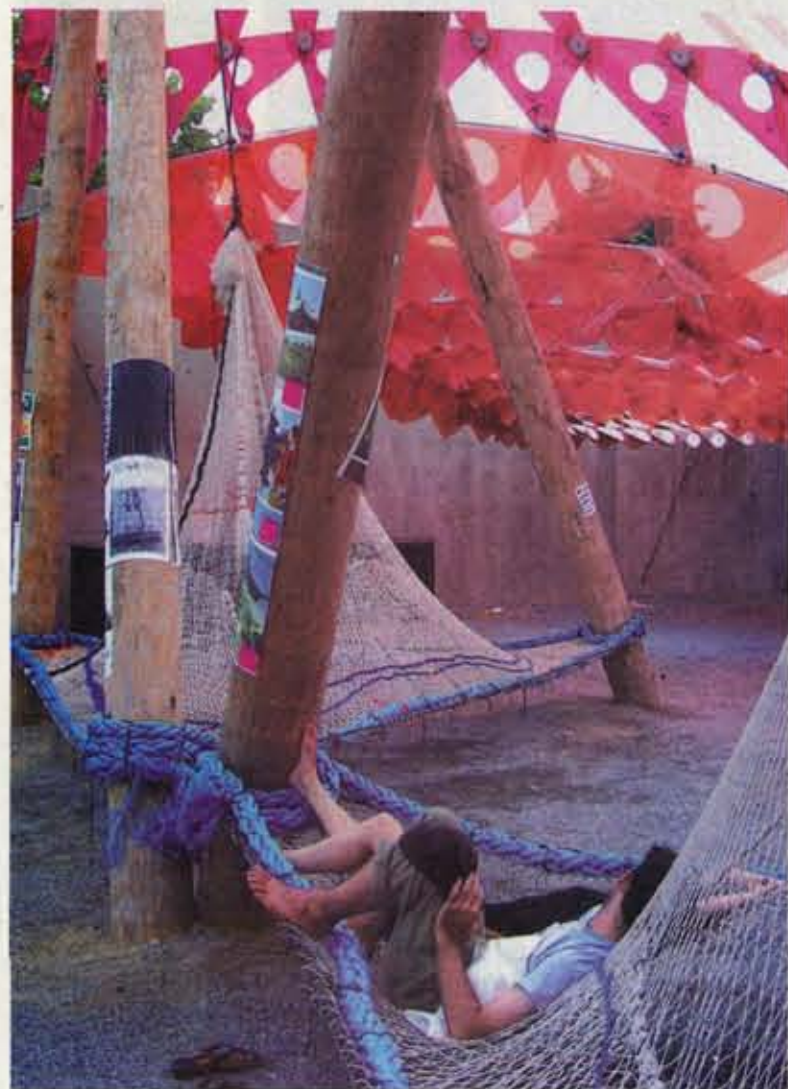
YOUR NEWS IS OUR NEWS

FALLS RICH CULTURAL OFFERINGS EVOKE EARTH, AIR AND WATER: Liset Castillo's post-apocalyptic photo installation/sandscape, and monumental rainbow sculpture at Black & White/Chelsea; Ball-Nogues' Liquid Sky Winner at MOMA/PS1's prestigious Young Architects Project competition, STORIES ON PAGE FIVE



WCG Arts

“Liquid Sky” Showcases PS1’s Young Architects Project



Thousands come each summer to Warm Up parties at PS1 to relax, see art, and listen to music against the backdrop of a cutting edge design that transforms the museum's barren angular courtyard into an exotic world of patterned light, mist, water, and sand. This year alone 30 design groups competed for the coveted opportunity to create on the international stage of the art center.

Los Angeles architects Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, and their firm Ball-Nogues (this past summer's design team), first heard from PS1 last November when they were asked to compete in MoMA and PS1's eighth annual Young Architects Program. After the portfolios were reviewed by a panel of experts, including Glenn Lowry and Alanna Heiss, directors of MoMA and PS1, and MoMA curators Barry Bergdoll, Klaus Biesenbach, and Peter Reed, five finalists were chosen to develop proposals. In mid-December, when Ball and Nogues received notification, they started to work in earnest on a proposal that would build on and amplify an idea for a “stress shaped relaxed membrane surface” or tent structure they had developed on a com-

Mylar petals provide shade and a Matisse-like dynamism.

mission completed the previous year for LAMOCA's annual fashion and architecture event.

On March 20th they arrived at PS1 with their scale model of their project, “Liquid Sky,” and presented it to the YAP committee. They learned they had been awarded the project the following day.

Construction began last June, with a crew of local volunteers. “It's not enough time to do a project, but we had to do it,” said Ball. The project involved huge tripods, their bases buried several feet in the earth, supporting a translucent multicolored Mylar overhead shade screen. “You have to be tough—and its tough on PS1 too—we have to be very, very firm about what we need from them, otherwise the project can get set back. We would like to be out there in complete silence and not have to bother



Shade, pattern and movement in PS1's main courtyard.

anyone at PS1, but it's a collaboration with the institution.”

Over the course of the installation, Ball and Nogues would work in concert with structural engineers, a water designer, graphic artists from around the country, a score of local artists and architects, and PS1's staff, finally achieving completion in August, over a month after PS1's June 21 opening party for

the project.

“We had to do a lot of things to accommodate engineering necessities,” said Ball. “We had to leave the high parts of this project open for air to flow through them, and we needed to really, really reinforce the connections in the project between the Mylar petals to accommodate the wind, which I'm glad we did, because as you

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Two Artists Ask: What Next?

BY TRENT MORSE
This fall, two Williamsburg artists brought their post-apocalyptic visions to Manhattan. Jon Elliott's “Cont-inental Drift,” featuring paintings of cast-off technology floating in a postindustrial wasteland, graced 31 Grand's new Lower East Side space while Liset Castillo's “Pain is Universal but so is Hope,” a show of large scale photographs of cast sand architectural icons, was presented at Black and White's Chelsea space.

Elliott's gleaming black resin panels etched with precise lines, dotted with atmospheric specks of light and color, convey a stark view of our consumerist society. Iceberg-like piles of outdated television sets, computer towers, monitors, and keyboards, protrude from the gridded currents of a dark mirror-like sea. His skies with their

brooding clouds and neon sunbursts, simultaneously evoke thoughts of Turner-esque twilight and nuclear winter.

Although abandoned, Elliott's monitors still display images, in dazzling Day-Glo, as shiny and addictive as new plasma TV screens, signs of life in a seemingly dead environment. They glow with appropriated stills from internet media clips, evidence of our disposable culture, and violent history that hint at the causes of whatever disaster led to these eerie unpopulated landscapes: the military industrial war machine, “American Idol,” mushroom clouds, patriotic exhibitionism. One small work, “Broken Monitor,” reveals what might be read as a glimmer of hope. In it, a tree sprouts through a shattered computer screen, and copper wires

transform into blades of grass. Nature may survive, but will society? “Drift” is Elliott's third solo show, his second at 31 Grand.

Three years ago, Castillo, a native of Cuba, came to New York on a Guggenheim. Since then, she has exhibited in numerous shows in New York, Miami and Austin, including the current Brooklyn Museum's show, “Infinite Island,” of Caribbean artists.

In her second solo exhibition at Black & White, Castillo presents images of iconic architectural monuments from across the globe (and history)—the Tower of Babel, the Hollywood sign, an Egyptian pyramid, Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer statue, the Guggenheim Museum, the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings, the Vatican, Macdonald's golden arches—all crammed side by side into

one chaotic cityscape.

Castillo uses the engaging imagery of sandcastles, evocative of childhood, to create a megalopolis of sand, which she photographs to document her impermanent sculpted environment in different configurations and phases of deterioration and rebirth. Her scenes of cataclysm seem to proffer both a warning about the fragility of civilization, vulnerable to gravity, time, progress, war, and the artist's hand, and the possibility of renewal.

As in Elliott's “Broken Monitor,” nature perseveres in spite of man's follies. These artists seem to view the apocalypse, not as Earth's grand finale, but as a catalyst for a new beginning.

Jon Elliott's “Broken Monitor,” resin and mixed media.



Williamsburg Artists Set Own Foreign Policy

BY DEBORA GILBERT

We're hearing more and more from local artists about their journeys to Africa, Europe, India, Australia, and elsewhere. They travel to find inspiration for their art, to work on a global stage, and, in many cases, to mix business with altruism.

Musician Jesse Selengut, founder and co-director of the Williamsburg Jazz Festival, went to East Africa with his jazz band Noir, accompanied by drummer Kyle Struve, bassist Chris Tarry, and keyboard artist Daniel Kelly, to perform in jazz clubs in Nairobi, Kenya and at a benefit performance to raise money for a Kenyan orphanage. While there, the band was able to travel into the Ngong Hills, camp with Masai warriors, witness the migration of thousands of wildebeasts, and observe zebras, impalas, gazelles, and lions in their natural habitat.

The trip was facilitated by corporate sponsors and a charitable organization, Musicians for World Harmony, who invited Noir to perform for the benefit of the Shangilia Orphanage. Selengut's link to Nairobi was his Cornell University roommate, Jon Wagner, who had grown up in Africa and returned there after college.

The musicians developed immediate rapport with Nairobi audiences when they played their own version of the Kenyan national anthem, as well as “Malaika,” a beloved 1940's Swahili bal-



lad. The band was at times accompanied by young musicians and dancers from the orphanage, and other local artists.

“The concerts attracted 95 percent of the city's jazz heads,” said Selengut, who described the audience response—marathon applause and encores—as a rarity in Nairobi. During off hours they introduced hacky sack and frisbee to local children and, while on safari, to their Masai guides.

“Being connected with Musicians for World Harmony was such an honor,” Selengut reflected recently over lunch at

Ella Café. “To be made useful in this way, to raise money for the Shangilia Orphanage, it brings everything we did musically to a new level of hope, help, and purpose.”

Last February, seven local artists, Paul Campbell, Raimundo Rubio, Hisham Bharoocha Radhika Chalasani, Jesse Bercowetz, Giles Lyon, and Guillermo Creus traveled to India to participate in Pro/Con, a ten day residential art program for Indian and American artists. The purpose of the project, according to Rubio, “was to promote an exchange of

ideas about art processes and concepts across two cultures.” Artists worked side by side in resort conference rooms and lobbies transformed into studios. Rooms, food, drink, and art materials were provided by the sponsor, ochre/India, and at the end of the exercise the artists were each asked to donate two works of art to the project.

“I'd love to do it again,” said Campbell, who employs automated toys to draw the compositions of his conceptualist paintings. Rubio also has a conceptual bent to his work: throwing egg shells filled with



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

“It brings everything to a new level of hope and purpose.”

—JESSE SELENGUT

AT LEFT: William Basinski has traveled to Europe and L.A. since the summer to perform with analog tape and computerized recordings. AT RIGHT: In Africa, Jesse Selengut and his band Noir won the hearts and minds of Nairobi audiences.

paint onto the canvas and working with the resulting marks. While in India he transformed his imagery in numerous ways, adding lines of perspective and hidden figurative elements to his abstractions, which deal with man's place in an inscrutable universe. Both artists agreed that the environment was conducive to productivity. Rubio commented on the light in India, which he said “softened and transformed” his and the other American's paintings.

We spotted local conceptual artist and musician William Basinski wearing a tee shirt that said “Today Electric,” the title of one of the many avant-garde music festivals he had played at during a whirlwind tour of Europe this summer. He was breakfasting around noon on the terrace at Kasia's, trying to recover from jet-lag.

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Rendering of winning plan for East River Park.

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF WILLIAMSBURG WATERFRONT

PARKS

Our New Waterfront Parks

First steps toward a continuous esplanade

BY GENIA GOULD

Two new parks have opened in our midst. The Newtown Creek Nature Walk, and the East River State Park. They represent a vision shared by local leaders, elected officials, and residents alike about what is best for the community and the city as a whole. The mayor's plan to extend parks up and down the city's waterfront is nothing short of visionary. Visitors to the East River Park in Williamsburg and the Newtown Creek Nature Walk can get a taste of the future today. While it will take years and plenty of funding to realize the vision, these two parks represent a solid beginning.

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY

The Newtown Creek Nature Walk, designed by acclaimed environmental sculptor George Trakas, communicates a long view of history extending back to the prehistory of geologic formation, and forward into the future. Words and shapes, symbols, materials, and structure evoke Native American settlements at this location and a time before the creek's banks became sheathed in cement, as well as later shipping and industry. The futuristic domes of the Wastewater Treatment Plant remind us of where we are headed. Throughout, clean curvilinear rhythm and a relaxed geometry surround us with a visual poetry that is both invigorating and relaxing. A corridor reminiscent of a ship's hull outfitted with stainless steel portholes on one side, and opposed by identically shaped lights on the other, drop dead views of Manhattan, close visual encounters with active industry, and artfully placed gardens along the way, all work to make this long narrow walk a pleasure

to navigate and contemplate. Open from dawn to dusk, the park was funded by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Percent for Art program in conjunction with Department of Environmental Protection's ongoing upgrade of the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant.

WINNING PLAN FOR EAST RIVER PARK

Neighbors Allied for Good Growth (NAG), the local activist organization that formerly fought the use of the area as the city's favorite venue for waste transfer stations back when NAG stood for "Neighbors Against Garbage," should celebrate its progress. Establishment of the State's East River Park on the waterfront at a location where a massive waste transfer station once stood indicates that NAG really has begun to "integrate the waterfront back into the neighborhood,"—its new mission. Since 1994, the group has campaigned against numerous threats to the neighborhood, including the plan for a huge waterfront power plant proposed by Keyspan for the Northside.

The group helped found Friends of the Williamsburg Waterfront Park to coordinate community participation in designing it, and cosponsored a contest for local designers. Toward that end it helped found Friends of the Williamsburg Waterfront which sponsored the contest, "Add Your Mark to the Waterfront," in collaboration with the Brooklyn Architects Collective.

Last month the groups held a press conference/celebration at the Brooklyn Brewery to announce the winners of the contest: Gareth Mahon; 3Sap; Stephanie Saulmon, Alison

Duncan, Petra Mager, Fabrica 718, Torres Moskovitz, and Sarah Ludington.

The project still has a long way to go. Fundraising, budget projections, and construction planning are all off in the future. The design is still in its visionary stage and, is a David and Goliath situation in which a local group has dared to offer up ideas to a huge bureaucracy. But the winning proposal is brimming over with ingenuity and optimism, anticipating the day when parkland will stretch up and down the waterfront as far as the eye can see.

The design contest was inspired, in part, by practical considerations, said Cathleen Breen, a Williamsburg resident and watershed scientist who pointed out that trees in the current park design were not growing well atop a brownfield area (with industrial pollution buried underground) and that there is a storm drainage problem exists in the park. The design contest was an attempt to call attention to and present solutions for these and other problems. NAG's leader, Peter Gillespie, also promised that a solution is being sought for the much commented on problem with the state park: the sign on the front gate that says "No Dogs." The winning plan, in keeping with the group's optimism, includes a dog run.



FUTURE NATURALIST: Tommy Youngfleisch photographs marine life in the Newtown Creek as his father, Tom, Sr., stands by.

PHOTO BY GENIA GOULD

Part of the mayor's visionary plan to provide public access to the waterfront.

"Liquid Sky" at PS1

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know there was a tornado in Brooklyn (last summer). We always knew the wind was going to be tough. We over engineered because projects had been damaged by the wind in the past."

A network of cables running from support columns to the courtyard's cement walls and connecting the tripods to buried anchors added additional protection against the wind as well as a striking visual motif. Com-modious seating created from hammock netting at the base of the tripods added an el-

ement of luxury and hospitality. Cut Mylar petals fluttered in the breeze overhead providing shade and a Matisse-like dynamism.

Barry Bergdoll, Chief Curator of Architecture and Design praised the project, "Liquid Sky," for combining "the zest of a joyful event with rigorous research into new materials, digital fabrication, and techniques gleaned from the sailing industry," and offering "a rich palette of atmospheric effects and brilliant color with an undertone of the ephemeral circus spectacle."

Travelling Artists

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

"It's exhausting, but wonderful," he said, gratified by the tremendous response he had received from audiences in Rome, London, The Hague, and Zagreb.

Basinski had been invited by the German artist and music promoter Carsten Nicolai, founder of the experimental label Short Wave and publisher of his CD's, to perform in Rome in the walled garden of the German Academy, Villa Massimo. Appearances at the Filosofia Festival in Northern Italy and Today's Art Festival in The Hague followed. Basinski creates his music by mixing loops of sound recorded on analog tape, which is transformed by the passage of time as the tape ages and deteriorates. He records it digitally and later modifies the material by repeating and amplifying the mix at the time of performance with the help of computer programs. This November, Basinski will appear at issueprojectroom on the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn, and at the Hammer Museum in L.A. before returning to Europe for concerts in Turin, Naples, and Venice.

Artist Stephen Bennett paints, teaches, exhibits, and sells his works abroad, returning to his Greenpoint studio between trips. His chosen subject, the portraiture of indigenous people, puts him in direct contact with the residents of the countries he visits. "I go and live with them, become their friend and paint them. I document their faces with photography and video," said Bennett. In the course of 15 years on the road, he has visited over twenty countries, including Namibia, Australia, Mexico, French Polynesia, the Seychelles, Tanzania, Borneo, New Guinea, and Malaysia. This fall, he has been working in Morocco, where he vis-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
Stephen Bennett met and painted celeb Nixau in Botswana on one of his many painting expeditions.

ited the Berber and Tuareg people, before traveling to New Orleans to work with young survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

Visiting troubled and out of the way places can have a downside. Bennett described getting some teeth knocked out during a beating by street bandits wielding bush knives in Papua New Guinea. "It's like the Wild West in the 1800's out there," he said. "There are no police, missionaries, or peace corps. It's violent, but interesting; they have 800 different languages and distinct cultures. Only about 10 per cent of the island has been explored." The artist discovered his passion for faces on his first trip abroad—to Japan—after finishing art school.

This fall the Williamsburg restaurant and art space Planet Thailand displayed a selection of Bennett's gigantic, larger than life-size portraits, including a painting of the Botswana celebrity Nixau, now deceased, who starred in the 1981 film, "The Gods Must Be Crazy." In August Bennett also exhibited at "Indigenous Forum" at the United Nations (watch for a larger one man exhibit there in 2008).

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