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ALBUM

Finding Beauty in the Sludge



Slide Show | Finding Beauty in the Gowanus Canal Steven Hirsch started taking photographs of the gurgling bubbles in the Gowanus Canal and soon had a series of electric abstracts that present an ethereal netherworld of wonder.

By KIA GREGORY

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Despite the beckoning townhouses and the waterfront arrival of Whole Foods, the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn remains a haunting place. At any given moment, iridescent bubbles ominously float along its murky green waters, past discarded trash and scattershot debris. Gas plants, tanneries, chemical plants and other industry once lined its banks, and their remnants trouble the water like ghosts. Lurking contaminants include heavy metals, PCBs and coal tar. And for decades, untreated sewage was carried into the canal by city drains.

The canal is now recognized as one of the most contaminated water bodies in the country. In 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency branded it a [Superfund](#) site, and the cleanup could take up to a decade.

“It seems to be the absolute beginning of the total redevelopment of the area, which I don’t get, because the whole area stinks,” said Steven Hirsch, a photographer who is often attracted to documenting the fringe. “Why would you want a townhouse on the top of a polluted canal?”

A few years ago, Mr. Hirsch started focusing on some of the gurgling bubbles. The result is a series of electric abstracts that present an ethereal netherworld.

Mr. Hirsch captured bright, saturated swirls of blues, yellows, reds and oranges. One photograph morphs the toxic sludge into what looks like a tropical fish.

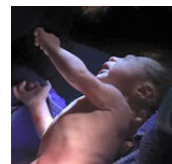
“It was my intention to use it as a starting point,” Mr. Hirsch, 65, said of the canal. The resulting images became “something that did look beautiful, almost like ’60s psychedelic art.”

Mr. Hirsch, a self-described child of that era, grew up in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and lives in the East Village. He says his work tends to capture “a contrast to reality.” Like turning punks in threadbare hand-me-downs into approximations of high-fashion models. Or his remarkable [Courthouse Confessions](#) blog, which featured voices rarely heard. Or turning the Gowanus into something beautiful.

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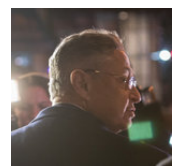
Healthy Newborn Found Abandoned in Nativity Scene at a Queens Church

The police said they were searching for a woman who was seen on video arriving with the boy wrapped in a towel.



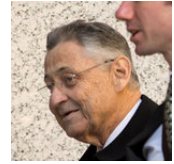
Two Hours Into Deliberations, a Juror in the Sheldon Silver Trial Wants Out

In a highly unusual move, a juror sent a note to the judge pleading to be excused less than two hours after the jury convened to decide whether Assemblyman Silver was guilty of fraud.



What to Expect in Week 4 of Sheldon Silver's Trial

The week will begin with closing arguments, and the jury could receive the case and start deliberations before the court closes for Thanksgiving.



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