



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

LONG ISLAND CITY QUEENS





The Historic Districts Council is New York’s citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six historic New York City neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC’s advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC’s preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City’s historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.



Council on the Arts



Support is provided in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and by the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Additional support is provided by City Council Members Ben Kallos, Rosie Mendez, Mark Levine, Inez Dickens, Vincent Gentile, Corey Johnson, Stephen Levin, Margaret Chin, Dan Garodnick, and Rafael Salamanca and New York State Assembly Members Deborah Glick, Richard Gottfried and Daniel O’Donnell.



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Funded in part by a grant from the NYC & Company Foundation in partnership with the Office of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer.



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LONG ISLAND CITY

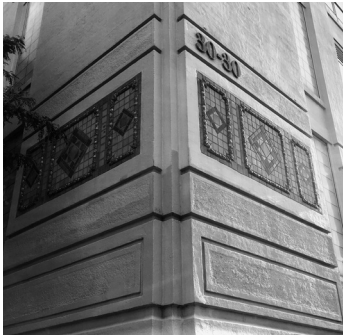
The westernmost portion of Queens remained predominantly rural and undeveloped until around 1870, when Long Island City was incorporated from the nascent industrial communities of Astoria, Blissville, Hunters Point and Ravenswood. The start of this area’s growth began when the Long Island Rail Road moved its main terminus from Downtown Brooklyn to the East River waterfront in Hunters Point in 1861. A decade later, the Steinway piano factory opened a new industrial complex and worker settlement in nearby Astoria, stimulating growth and establishment of infrastructure in the area. As Long Island City grew to become a regional transportation and population center, the Queens County seat was moved from Clowesville (in present-day Nassau County) west to Long Island City around 1874. In the last quarter of the 19th century, its waterfront became home to oil refineries, lumber yards, factories and chemical plants, while the city’s population tripled from 15,609 in 1875 to 48,272 in 1900.

After Queens was consolidated into Greater New York City in 1898, Long Island City’s connections to Manhattan were strengthened with the completion of the Queensboro Bridge in 1909. The elevated railway trains, trolleys, automobiles and pedestrians travelling across the bridge all converged at the new “Queensboro Bridge Plaza,” now known as Queens Plaza, which soon supplanted the rail yards of Hunters Point as the gateway to Queens. Transportation was further improved with the construction of the East River Tunnels and Sunnyside Yards in 1910, which provided Long Island Rail Road trains with a direct connection to Manhattan, as well as with the completion of new subway lines to Astoria and Corona by 1917. Banks and manufacturing firms soon gravitated towards this new central plaza, which became famous for the large electric signs that dotted the rooftops of its buildings, advertising products like Swingline Staplers, Chiclets and Pepsi Cola to travelers passing through. Hunters Point, on the other hand, saw its population peak in 1905 before starting a slow decline, becoming a primarily industrial area with the old brownstones and institutional buildings sitting in the shadow of the elevated trains rumbling past.

By the post-World War II era, shifts in transportation, industry and demographics spelled the end of Long Island City’s role as the center of Queens. Deindustrialization left many factories shuttered and the waterfront underutilized, while Queens’ population growth and commercial activity was primarily concentrated farther east in the borough’s more suburban neighborhoods. However, the empty warehouses, with open floor plans and ample lighting, prompted artists to move across the river as early as the 1960s, which led to the founding of institutions like the Noguchi Museum and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Centre to secure their legacy. By the 1990s, corporations, including Citibank and MetLife, were moving to Long Island City in search of affordable office space and good transit connections, converting industrial buildings or building new structures like One Court Square, the tallest building in New York outside of Manhattan. Residential development along the waterfront began with the 1997 completion of the 42-story Citylights building, the first of several luxury residential towers along the East River that now vie for the best views of the midtown skyline. Although the neighborhood is in the midst of a large-scale transformation as development spreads outward from the subway stations and the waterfront, remnants of Long Island City’s past anchor this dynamic place to its roots and serve to keep its history alive, making it an appealing place to both live and work.

I

CHICLETS FACTORY
30-30 Thomson Avenue
(Ballinger & Perrot, 1910)



Now the headquarters of the New York City School Construction Authority, this six-story flat-slab concrete factory building was built by the American Chicle Company in 1919 as part of the Degnon Terminal industrial park. Raw chicle was unloaded onsite via a direct railway connection,

brought to the top floor for spraying to keep moist, then moved by gravity conveyors to each floor for chewing gum production. The building's façade is dominated by a two-story central tower, but was famous for its three large rooftop signs that once advertised "Dentyne," "Adams Black Jack," and "Chiclets" to passing commuters on the Long Island Rail Road. At the pedestrian level, the façade is enlivened at the second story of each pier by colorful tile work with designs featuring a raised floral motif surrounding a geometric diamond pattern. In 1976, an explosion that killed one worker marked the start of a decline that ultimately led the factory to close its doors and lay off 1,600 employees in 1981.

LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

National Historic Landmark:	NHL
National Register of Historic Places—District:	NR-D
National Register of Historic Places—Property:	NR-P
New York City Historic District:	NYC HD
New York City Individual Landmark:	NYC IL
New York City Interior Landmark:	NYC INL

2

43-22 QUEENS STREET
(Ballinger & Perrot, 1920)

Built for the Anchor Cap & Closure Corporation, this six-story concrete structure contained 3.1 acres of floor space in which rubber gaskets, lithographs, metal caps and bottle sealing machinery were manufactured. Following World War II, the building was incorporated into the Eagle Electric Manufacturing Company's network of warehouses in Long Island City as Plant #7. U-shaped in plan, the building embodies a typical factory typology with numerous windows punctuated by raised piers. The central bay of the factory's Queens Street façade features vertical linear elements that terminate at a turret rising two stories above the roofline. As of 2016, the site is undergoing a transformation in which around 80% of the former factory will be retained and incorporated into a 54-story luxury loft apartment tower.



Photo courtesy + Partners



3

ARRIS LOFTS
27-28 Thomson Avenue
(1923)

Standing at 27-28 Thomson Avenue, the triangular Arris Lofts was originally constructed as an industrial building. Typical for a factory building, the façade is unadorned but dominated by large windows that provided plenty of natural light for the interior workspace. This eight-story, poured concrete structure was one of six Eagle Electric warehouses in Long Island City, producing electrical switches and other equipment and gaining notoriety for its billboards proclaiming that "Perfection Is Not An Accident." Later, the building served as the MetLife printing plant before its conversion to luxury apartments in 2008. Architect Costas Kondylis was hired to transform this loft space into 237 luxury apartments while retaining the building's original industrial feel.

4

NEW YORK STATE SUPREME
COURT BUILDING
25-10 Court Square
(Peter M. Coco, 1904-1908)
– NYC IL



In the late 19th century, the county seat was relocated to Long Island City, which was emblematic of the area's increasing importance as an independent municipality that boasted its own public school system, regular police force and pure water supply. The new county seat was located in a two-story, French Second Empire building on Court Square, a prominent place in the growing city. Unfortunately, the structure was gutted by a fire in 1904, so a new building was commissioned from architect Peter Coco. A graduate of Cooper Union, Coco designed the building in the neo-English Renaissance style, incorporating many interesting details, such as the pairs of eagles set above cartouches around the third story. When the boroughs were consolidated in 1898, Long Island City lost its status as the county seat to Jamaica, yet the courthouse remained in use as the county courthouse until being taken over for use by the state's Supreme Court in 1932. This dignified four-story building has remained a focal point for judicial activity in Queens for over a century, serving as the site of many notable trials, including that of Ruth Brown Snyder and Henry Judd Gray, who were famously executed at Sing Sing Prison in 1928 after being convicted in the murder of Snyder's husband, Albert Snyder. The trial was widely publicized and large crowds gathered outside the courthouse for the verdict on May 9, 1927.

5

HUNTERS POINT HISTORIC DISTRICT
– NYC HD, NR-D



The Landmarks Preservation Commission's (LPC) 1968 designation report describes the Hunters Point Historic District as "a notable residential area...which retains, on both sides of the street, a feeling of unity and repose, little changed since it was first built" that "serves as a microcosm of the domestic architecture of the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century." Roughly spanning the block of 45th Avenue between 21st and 23rd Streets, this small district contains examples of the Italianate, French Second Empire, Neo-Grec and other architectural styles common in the second half of the 19th century. Originally part of the Van Alst farm, the street was subdivided for residential development in the 1870s and its elegant stone houses came to be known as "White Collar Row." One of its most notable residents was "Battle Axe" Gleason, the mayor of Long Island City who famously chopped down a fence erected by the Long Island Rail Road that prevented pedestrians from crossing 2nd Street without a railroad ticket. The street changed as nearby commercial and industrial activity increased, as well as with the arrival of the elevated railway along 23rd Street in 1916. As the old families fled the noise from the trains, the houses were subdivided and began to attract theatrical performers who were drawn to the area for its easy subway access to the Broadway theaters in Manhattan. Luckily, though, the area managed to retain its character-defining features and continues to evoke the quiet tranquility that drew the first residents here in the 1870s.

6

MoMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Avenue
(1892; addition: Andrew
Berman Architect, 2011)



Photo courtesy +Partners

This Romanesque Revival structure, featuring variegated brick patterns and a plethora of arched windows, was built in 1892 as the First Ward School for the independent Long Island City. The bright red brick façade is enhanced by ornate terra cotta detailing, including floral motifs on the gables, which were supplied by the nearby New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company (see site #9). The school's original 35 classrooms could accommodate up to 1,000 students, and its southwest corner once boasted a grand tower holding a clock and bell. After the school closed its doors in the early 1960s, the Institute of Art and Urban Resources took over the building for use as a gallery and studio space. The Institute ultimately evolved into the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, which merged with the Museum of Modern Art in 2000 to become MoMA PS1. This affiliation has kept MoMA involved in contemporary developments in the art world, while providing this remarkable building with more visibility and responsible management. The success of the merger and the continuing vibrancy of the PS1 building are best represented by the cast concrete addition constructed in 2011 to serve as a new entrance and art display space for the growing museum.

Today considered to be one of the most dignified firehouses in New York City, this Dutch Renaissance Revival style structure commands a strong presence with its 4½ stories and 53-foot width along 47th Avenue. Its architect, Bradford Lee Gilbert, designed only this one firehouse over the course of his career. A pioneer in steel frame construction, Gilbert gained prominence across the country for the design of railroad structures and is known locally for his design of the Tower Building in Lower Manhattan, considered New York's first skyscraper with a steel skeleton, constructed in 1887-89 (demolished in 1913). As an important political and industrial center, Long Island City was the first part of Queens to have a professional fire department, enabled by an act of the state legislature in 1890. In 1898, after the consolidation of the boroughs, the Long Island City and Brooklyn departments merged with the Fire Department of the City of New York. Upon consolidation, officials planned an expanded fire department to accommodate a growing population and improve working conditions for firefighters. This building

7

FIRE ENGINE COMPANY No. 258
HOOK AND LADDER COMPANY No. 115
10-40 47th Avenue
(Bradford Lee Gilbert, 1902-04)
– NYC IL



Photo courtesy +Partners

was one of the more ambitious firehouse projects undertaken by the department due to its size and level of architectural detail, and was built for the same company that laid claim to being the borough's first professional fire department. Although its numbering system changed over time, the company's first name was Engine Company No. 1 and Hook & Ladder Company No. 1, which was established in 1891. The brick structure with granite and limestone trim is a rare example of the Dutch Renaissance Revival style, which was likely employed by Gilbert in homage to New York City's Dutch roots.

8

PEPSI-COLA SIGN
Gantry Plaza State Park
(1936)
– NYC IL

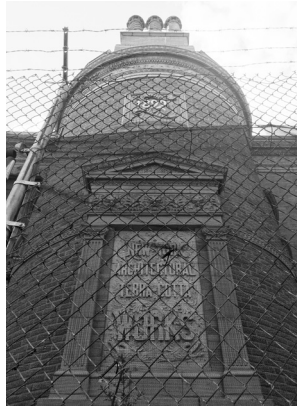


The Pepsi-Cola Sign has illuminated the East River waterfront since 1936, and has become iconic for its vintage lettering and for offering a glimpse of the past in a fast-growing section of Long Island City. Built by Artkraft Signs, the display is made up of steel and porcelain enamel channel letters and a Pepsi-Cola bottle, all illuminated by neon. The sign was originally perched atop the Pepsi bottling plant, which was located in what is now the northern section of Gantry Plaza State Park. When the plant was demolished after the company ceased operations in 1999, the sign was preserved as a nod to the departed industry that was once a dominant presence in Long Island City. In 2009, the Pepsi-Cola sign was given pride of place in the park, where it remains today. In 21st century New York, vestiges like this remind us of the city's vibrant past as an industrial powerhouse. The sign was designated an Individual Landmark by the LPC in 2016 as part of the agency's effort to manage its backlog of considered, but not designated properties. The sign garnered much attention during the proceedings for the "Backlog95" initiative due to its unconventionality, but also its widespread popularity.



9
**NEW YORK ARCHITECTURAL TERRA
 COTTA WORKS BUILDING**
 42-16 Vernon Boulevard
(Francis H. Kimball, 1892)
 – NYC IL

Tucked under the bridge on Vernon Boulevard is the last remnant of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Works, a once thriving company that produced the terra cotta for buildings such as Carnegie Hall and the Ansonia Hotel. Terra cotta became popular as a building material in the United States beginning in the 1870s and enjoyed a long tenure due to its flexibility, versatility and durability. Established in 1886, the company was the only major architectural terra cotta manufacturer in New York City and, when completed, its facilities were the largest in the country for architectural terra cotta. The company set up its manufacturing operations on the Long Island City waterfront in 1886 and initially kept an office at 38 Park Row in Manhattan. Six years later, its office headquarters were moved to this remarkable building, whose design served to advertise the company’s considerable range and skill. According to the building’s designation report, it is “the only one of its kind known to survive in the United States.” The company went bankrupt in 1928-29, but from 1931 to the mid-1940s, the company’s last president, Richard Dalton, used the facilities for his successor company, the Eastern Terra Cotta Company, and then conducted business for a later construction company venture in the headquarters building until his death in 1968. The Dalton family sold the building that year and the rest of the complex, which included a six-story manufacturing building and the mansion of an estate previously located on the property, was unfortunately demolished in the 1970s. The office headquarters has long been neglected. Despite its owner’s claims to be restoring the building, evidence of such is not forthcoming.



10
QUEENSBORO BRIDGE
(now Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge)
 11th Street and Bridge Plaza North
 and Bridge Plaza South
(Henry Hornbostel, 1901-08)
 – NYC IL, NR-P



Plans for a bridge across the East River at Blackwell’s Island (now Roosevelt Island) were submitted to the City in 1877, but it would take another thirty years for the bridge to come to fruition. The Queensboro Bridge was the third bridge to span the East River, preceded by the Brooklyn Bridge (completed in 1883) and the Williamsburg Bridge (completed in 1903), and followed closely by the Manhattan Bridge (completed in 1909). Architect Henry Hornbostel studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, and was influenced by Jean Resal’s design for the Pont Mirabeau in Paris, which was completed in 1895 while Hornbostel was a student there. The steel superstructure for this roughly 7,000-foot-long bridge was furnished by the Pennsylvania Steel Company. Originally, the bridge contained four elevated railroad tracks for the Second Avenue “El” on the upper level and four trolley tracks and a roadway on the lower level. On the Manhattan side, the bridge is famous for its arcade of tile vaulting designed by Spanish architect Rafael Guastavino. The bridge’s rough-faced masonry piers included elevators and stairs to accommodate pedestrians on the Manhattan and Queens sides, as well as at Roosevelt Island. The construction of the bridge transformed this part of Long Island City and led to the widening of streets to accommodate traffic from the bridge. Queensboro Bridge Plaza, now Queens Plaza, was created in what was formerly known as the hamlet of Dutch Kills. The plaza became – and remains – an important transit and commercial hub in Queens.

This massive 400,000-square-foot red brick building was built in 1910 to serve as the factory for Brewster & Company, an automobile manufacturer, which was based in Times Square. Six stories tall, the building features a simple design typical of industrial structures at the time. The building once featured a central “constructivist” clock tower embellished with tracery that asserted its presence over the landscaped expanse of Queens Plaza. In its four decades as the home of Brewster, the factory-produced horse drawn carriages, Rolls-Royce luxury automobiles and the Brewster Buffalo, a carrier-based fighter plane that served in World War II. After the war, Brewster & Company closed and the building saw a variety of uses, including garment manufacturing, until it was bought by Brause Realty and converted to office space in 2001.

11
BREWSTER BUILDING
 27-01 Queens Plaza North
(Stephenson & Wheeler, 1910)



I2

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENTS
OF EDUCATION AND
TRANSPORTATION BUILDING
28-11 Queens Plaza North
(1921)



This nine-story Italianate building flanking Queens Plaza houses the New York City Department of Education and the New York City Department of Transportation, including the Bureau of Traffic Operations and its Traffic Management Center, which controls all of the city's traffic lights. The building's façade consists of a four-story limestone base topped by five floors of unadorned brown brick, enlivened by arched windows on the central seven bays at the eighth story and crowned by a dentilled cornice with brick corbelling. The empty steel framework sitting on the rooftop survives as a reminder of the large neon signs that once crowned this building.

I3

29-28 41ST AVENUE
(1929)



29-28 41st Avenue is an eleven-story Art Deco commercial building, built in 1929 and converted to open-plan apartments in 2013. Mimicking the contemporary skyscrapers being built across the East River in Midtown Manhattan, this office building possesses a strong sense of symmetry and verticality, culminating in a crowning central "tower." Enhancing the otherwise austere applied brick façade are stylized floral motifs on the belt course above the second story and at the tops of the piers. Originally known as the Chatham & Phenix Building, named after the now-defunct bank based in New York City, the tower was touted as the largest office building in Queens upon its completion. In addition to the bank, tenants included law firms and real estate companies, as well as the local branch of the World War II Rationing Board. At the time of its completion, 29-28 41st Avenue was one of many financial buildings that opened in Queens Plaza, which capitalized on the area's excellent transit connections and the borough's explosive growth.

I4

BANK OF THE MANHATTAN
COMPANY BUILDING
29-27 Queens Plaza North
(Morrell Smith, 1925-27)
— NYC IL



Photo courtesy of Partners

Colloquially known as the "Long Island City Clock Tower," this neo-Gothic style building was designated as a New York City Individual Landmark in 2015, but it is a landmark in every sense of the word. Standing at 14 stories tall, the structure was Queens' tallest until the construction of the Citigroup building at One Court Square in 1990. Its location in one of the borough's busiest transportation hubs has made the building a prominent fixture. Queensboro Bridge Plaza (now Queens Plaza) became an important commercial center after the 1909 completion of the Queensboro Bridge and the construction of numerous elevated transit lines that converged here. The Manhattan Company, founded by Aaron Burr in 1799 and a precursor to J. P. Morgan Chase & Co., merged with the Bank of Long Island in 1920, and established 40 branches in Queens over the next decade. This building, located in the heart of the borough, would be a showpiece for the company. Its grand, 14-foot diameter, four-faced clock has provided subway riders with a time check on their commute to work for roughly 90 years. The clock tower itself occupies the top three stories of the building. When it opened in 1927, the Bank of the Manhattan Company occupied the basement, ground floor and mezzanine, and the rest of the building was rented as office space. The banking hall's interior, finished in marble with brass hardware throughout, remains largely intact, though covered in gypsum wallboard. The exterior is clad in buff brick with limestone trim, and its verticality is emphasized by bands of contrasting brick that draw the eye to the highly ornate clock tower. In addition to the clock faces, this section features reliefs of the god Oceanus, a symbol of the bank, and monograms of the bank's initials, as well as a crenellated roofline.

I5

FISHER LANDAU CENTER
FOR ART
38-27 30th Street
(c. 1951; conversion: Max
Gordon, 1991)



Originally a parachute harness factory, the home of the Fisher Landau Center for Art is an unassuming three-story concrete building. The austere white façade features minimalistic ornamentation, including geometric crosses at the top of each pier and a stylized pediment over the entrance. Emily Fisher Landau, a Manhattan native who married into a prominent real estate family, began purchasing art in the 1960s, accumulating a collection of over 1,500 paintings, photographs and sculptures. Needing a large space to house her collection, Landau purchased the 25,000-square-foot factory in 1989 and opened it to the public two years later as the Fisher Landau Center for Art. Although architect Max Gordon transformed the industrial space into museum galleries and a library, the open plan and flared concrete columns remain as a testament to the building's past.



I6

33-00 NORTHERN BOULEVARD

(Albert Kahn, c. 1914;
expansion: John Graham, c. 1914)

Now known as the Center Building, 33-00 Northern Boulevard was completed in 1914 as the

Ford Assembly and Service Center of Long Island City. This section of Queens was nicknamed Detroit East in the early 20th century due to its concentration of automobile concerns, including Brewster, Ford and Standard Motor Products. The original section of the building, designed by Albert Kahn, primarily fronts Honeywell Avenue and only stretches along Northern Boulevard for three bays. An expansion designed by John Graham increased the factory's capacity by 400%, but the building was sold in 1921 and saw a variety of tenants including Goodyear Tires, the Durant Motor Company and Roto-Broil, an electric kitchen appliance that debuted in the 1950s. The dark red brick building, enhanced by white terra cotta ornamentation throughout the façade, features a series of iconic balconies that serve as a "fire tower" and means of egress in case of emergency.

I7

STANDARD MOTOR PRODUCTS
BUILDING

37-18 Northern Boulevard
(1921)



When this building was completed in 1921, S. Karpen & Brothers, a Chicago-based upholstered furniture manufacturing company claimed that it was "the finest structure devoted exclusively to furniture making in this country" with over 150,000 square feet of floor space distributed over six stories. The factory's unadorned concrete façade, consisting of 21 bays punctured by raised piers, is complemented by the decorative brickwork found at the cornice line and top story. In addition to its sheer size, the building stands out for the way it angles to conform to the curve of Northern Boulevard. Out of all of the factory's occupants, Standard Motor Products had the longest history at this site, moving into the building in 1936 and manufacturing automobile engine parts here until 2008. Converted to small-scale commercial use between 2010 and 2014, the structure hosts a number of tenants, including the headquarters of Standard Motor Products, the Jim Henson Company's New York office and a one-acre organic farm on its rooftop.

I8

NOGUCHI MUSEUM

9-01 33rd Road
(c. 1920s; addition: Isamu
Noguchi, 1985)



The Noguchi Museum is set within a converted photo-engraving plant dating to the 1920s, and connected to an additional building and interior garden designed by Isamu Noguchi himself. Noguchi, a renowned Japanese-American sculptor known for fusing Modernism with Japanese influences, envisioned the museum as not only a permanent home for his work, but as a work of art in itself. Moving to a small brick building across from his future museum in 1961, Noguchi was one of the pioneering artists that helped to establish Long Island City's cultural community. The two-story industrial building, with its cement floors and exposed ceiling beams, contrasts with the artist's stone, metal and wood sculptures. Originally housed in two separate buildings, the museum underwent a massive renovation in 2001-04 that connected the historic red brick building to its modern concrete block neighbor to create a more unified space for the 2,383-piece collection.



I9

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK

31-42 Vernon Boulevard
(1986)



Despite the area's picturesque views of Hell Gate, the site of Socrates Sculpture Park remained an abandoned riverside landfill until artist Mark di Suvero led the effort to convert the space into an outdoor sculpture garden. The coalition named the sculpture garden after the famous Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 B.C.), paying homage to the large

Greek community living in nearby Astoria. The park's tenuous existence depended on a short-term lease from the city until a proposed luxury apartment and marina complex prompted Mayor Giuliani to declare it a permanent park site in 1998. Founded as a unique space for artists to design and display large-scale sculpture and multimedia installations that engage with the public, the park has hosted the work of over one thousand artists. A large billboard presiding over the entrance features one or two new installations each year that reference the other exhibits inside the park.

