

# Swimming With Fishes: Red Hook Art Installation Commemorates 5th Anniversary of Sandy



From left: Deputy Borough President Diana Reyna, Fifth Avenue Committee's Karen Blondell, Councilmember Carlos Menchaca and Alexandros Washburn, founding director of the Center for Coastal Resilience at Urban Xcellence at Stevens Institute of Technology, take part in a roundtable discussion on rising sea levels and Red Hook's resiliency on Saturday.

Photo courtesy of Anita Glesta

By Scott Enman  
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Outside the Red Hook Library, residents are accustomed to seeing the usual sights: a Citi Bike station, "No Parking" signs and several trees.

On Thursday and Saturday, however, days before the fifth anniversary of Superstorm Sandy, schools of fish and a few sharks were seen swimming outside the building.

They were not real, of course, but rather part of Anita Glesta's WATERSHED, a large-scale public art project that transformed the sidewalk outside of the library into a virtual blue and red ocean with marine life swimming on the pavement.

With the fifth anniversary of Sandy on Sunday, and with Houston, Florida and Puerto Rico devastated by recent hurricanes, Glesta, a third-generation Brooklynite and a New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) affiliated artist, believed that it was an appropriate time to raise awareness about climate change.

"I've been wanting to do it in Red Hook for several years since I was well aware that Superstorm Sandy affected the area five years ago," Glesta told the *Brooklyn Eagle*. "Why I'm projecting fish onto the sidewalk is I really want to highlight the metaphor of being under water and swimming with the fishes."

"Largely, this is a healing and unifying project where I'm using art to be a very interactive vehicle for people to really feel what is happening."

WATERSHED appeared at the National Theater in London in 2015 and on Ellis Island in 2016 for an Al Gore climate change event.

On Saturday, a roundtable discussion with local politicians, scientists and urban planners was held to discuss rising sea levels and Red Hook's resiliency.

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City Councilmember Carlos Menchaca, Fifth Avenue Committee's Karen Blondell, NYFA board Chair Judith Brodsky and Michael Shaikh and Rachel Finkelstein from the Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resilience, among others, took part in the conversation.

Alexandros Washburn, founding director of the Center for Coastal Resilience and Urban Xcellence at Stevens Institute of Technology, led the forum.

WATERSHED and the discussion were held in conjunction with ArtW Global and the Fifth Avenue Committee's "Turning the Tide Environmental Justice Initiative," a community-based collaboration between New York City Housing Association residents in the Gowanus Houses and Red Hook Houses.

"The reason that I'm doing this in Red Hook — the combination of art with mediation — is because I know there are a lot of gaps in what was supposed to be put in place for resilient infrastructure to protect Red Hook, and as far as I know, much has fallen through," Glesta told the *Eagle*.

Glesta hopes her installation will encourage change, which will hopefully mitigate the effects of future storms in vulnerable communities like Red Hook.

She aspires to have WATERSHED appear in other national and international coastal cities to raise awareness.

Given the Trump administration's cutbacks to ecological organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency, Glesta believes that for residents to make a change, they must elect local officials that will bear their concerns and advocate for meaningful changes.

"I think that creating a structure that is both a healing, beautiful artwork that people can engage with, and then to have at the same time, an active round table ... where the community can actually have the people sitting there in front of them is an enormously important component of this project," Glesta told the *Eagle*.



WATERSHED by Anita Glesta

Photo by Amy Aronoff for NYFA