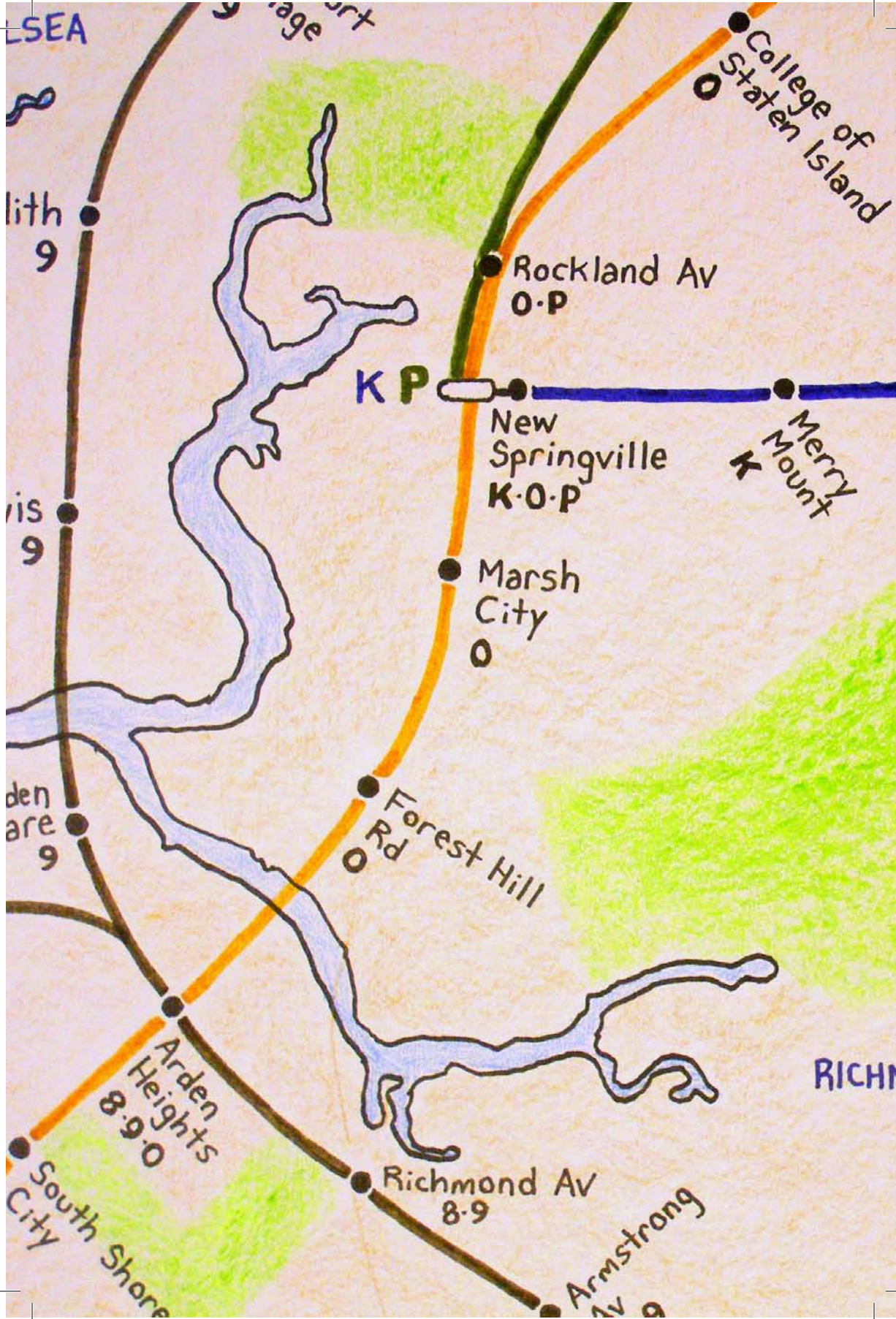


THE GREAT RICHMOND



CORWIN & GREENBERG

Staten Island Arts, St George



THE GREAT RICHMOND

find yourself a borough

Will Corwin & Neil Greenberg

essay by **Gregory Volk**

organized by **Monica Valenzuela**

This exhibit is an interactive, participatory collaboration between Will Corwin and Neil Greenberg, both of whom I met independently around the time of Culture Lounge's inception. Upon introducing Will and Neil in 2012, The Great Richmond (originally titled "Chasing Utopia") was born, and the research and planning begun. Though different in medium, Will's and Neil's respective work meets a social, community-centric definition of "art project" that I feel very connected to personally.

I am passionate about this project because it creates opportunities for community demonstration, conversation and revolution. Through this exhibit, Staten Island Arts hopes to enable opportunities to explore diverse (maybe even radical) visions of our borough and to embolden individuals as stakeholders in their own community, powerful drivers of positive change.

Monica Valenzuela

Deputy Director,
Staten Island Arts

September 25–November 30, 2014

Staten Island Arts Culture Lounge

St George Ferry Terminal
Staten Island, NY

LEFT: N. Greenberg, *Urban "What If" Map* (detail), crayon, ink and colored pencil on paper; 2013

COVER: W. Corwin, *Double Doors of the Horizon*, cast hydrocol and acrylic, 2014 (Photo courtesy David Riley)





Study model for *The Great Richmond* at Staten Island Ferry Terminal, St George (Photo courtesy David Riley)

Find Yourself a Borough: The Anatomy and Trajectory of a Staten Island Game

In August 2011, Will Corwin kicked off a remarkable sculptural adventure in his studio at the Clocktower Gallery in lower Manhattan, where he was artist in residence. After constructing upright wooden shelving units, he spent the next month obsessively devising and casting a great host of small plaster sculptures, which he installed each day on the shelves in different configurations. These cast objects were an assortment of miniature slabs, tablets, geometric blocks, polygons, and irregular shards, and Corwin arranged them into freestanding stacks and towers which sometimes lasted intact, but just as often toppled and shattered, with the resulting debris then becoming part of the mix. Corwin's in-process, ever-changing installation constituted an intense exploration of sculptural forms and relations, while it also fused regeneration and decay, order and entropy, elegance and unruliness, plan and accident. His myriad cast objects—apparent with his cast sculptures in the St George Ferry Terminal—are also marvelously suggestive. They connoted alluring consumer items on display in a store, rudimentary building materials like drywall, architecture under construction (or being demolished), archaeological artifacts in a museum, monuments, talismans, and urban rubble, along with occasional art historical references, for instance to Constantin Brancusi's famous *Endless Column* (1938) and Donald Judd's Minimalist containers.

Rather than presenting stable sculptures made in that way and no other, Corwin's protean installation



W. Corwin, *Clocktower Gallery Chess Match*, International Master Irina Krush vs. Grandmaster Robert Hess, Grandmaster Maurice Ashley commentator; August 11, 2011 (Photo courtesy Tommy Mintz)



N. Greenberg, *Freshwater Railway Regional Rail Map*, digital media, 2010–2013

expanded and collapsed (in parts), shifted and fissured, and always embraced fresh possibilities. At the end came a whopping surprise. Corwin fashioned some of his materials into an eccentric, giant-size chess set and board, with the chess figures (some as tall as 20 inches) basically resembling rickety towers made of snippets and pieces. Tethered to the high ceiling by billowing ribbons, these figures were moved about in an actual chess match by two experts, Robert Hess, a nineteen-year-old Grandmaster; and twenty-six-year-old International Master Irina Krush in a game narrated to the rapt audience by International Grandmaster (and noted ESPN commentator) Maurice Ashley. Suddenly, a very old game with its meticulous protocol was approached in very new and startling way, while its rules, strategy, maneuvering, and frank aggression were deflected from their usual context and ushered into art. As the contestants played, it was as if Corwin’s whole, sprawling installation, and perhaps parts of the weathered building itself, had sprung to life in the form of mobile, changeable sculptures conceived by the artist but activated by others.

At exactly the same time and unbeknownst to Corwin, Detroit-based Neil Greenberg was hard at work on his own eccentric, visionary projects, which are, in fact, ongoing. One is *Fake Omaha*, an elaborate, sprawling, hand-drawn mapping system for a fictional city. Greenberg’s invented city, intended to be an average, medium-size American city depicted on large maps, only slightly corresponds to the actual Omaha. Otherwise, absolutely everything is invented, right down to street names. As you contemplate this fake, but plausible city, you are inspired to imagine and question just how cities come to be as they are, and to understand that they are not simply a given, but instead a confluence of all sorts of factors: chance, history,

economic issues, environmental matters, and governmental decisions, all pertaining to the development and allocation of urban space. Greenberg, who until 2009 worked as a scheduler for the suburban Detroit transit system, is also the initiator of *Freshwater Railway*, a radical, DIY, and surprisingly sophisticated alternative plan for workable public transportation in Greater Detroit. Based on his own considerable knowledge and experience, Greenberg understands that politicians and bureaucrats often don't make the best decisions when it comes to something so essential as mass transit. Therefore, he and his colleagues have imagined a totally revamped bus and rail system that could, in theory, meet people's needs far more thoroughly than the current system. Moreover, Greenberg's snappy, very professional ads, posters, and maps for this transit system convinced many Greater Detroit residents that a wonderful and viable transit system had miraculously appeared against all odds, seemingly overnight, and during an economic crisis. With both Fake Omaha and Freshwater Railway, Greenberg, a visionary urbanist with a direct action streak, bypasses officialdom as he advances his astute proposals for and investigations of the allocation and function of shared urban space.

Now, at the St George Ferry Terminal in Staten Island, Corwin and Greenberg have collaborated on an unprecedented game/installation that combines their respective interests and talents, and responds at all points to Staten Island per se. As part of their research, Corwin and Greenberg delved deeply into Staten Island's history, and paid careful attention to its layout, neighborhoods, population, idiosyncrasies, and other defining characteristics.

A shelving system supports dozens of Corwin's fascinating sculptural concoctions, once again cast



W. Corwin, *Auroch's Library*, wood, plaster, rubble and found objects, installed at Clocktower Gallery, 2011 (Photo courtesy Tommy Mintz)



N. Greenberg, *Fake Omaha Street Atlas Handdrawn*, ink on paper, spiral-bound, 2010 (Photo courtesy Oran Viriyincy)

objects made from plaster, wood, and paint. Revisiting the quasi-assembly line (but actually decisively personal and hands-on) methodology of his Clocktower installation, Corwin created eight originals, separated into color groups corresponding to different areas of interest: Housing, Retail, Civic, History/Culture, Everyday Lifestyle, the Island Ideal, Infrastructure and Connectivity. He then used these originals to cast all of the other “pieces.” These sculptures contain eclectic Staten Island references, including local Catholic shrines commonly called bathtub Madonnas; busts of noted Transcendentalist (and author of *Walden*) Henry David Thoreau, who visited Staten Island many times; architectural quotes; old-time wagons, potatoes (a former staple of Staten Island farms); ducks; masonry; and a Buddha, referring to the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art on Lighthouse Hill, among many others. Each compact sculpture (and they are curiously mobile in time—a cross between bright, new works and crusty, unearthed relics) in the Ferry Terminal contains expansive references to the surrounding borough.

With their lush, monochromatic colors and compelling shapes, Corwin’s sculptures invite visitors to not only view them, but also to handle and move them, and to participate in a freewheeling game that has few rules to speak of, and also no winners or losers: a collective enterprise recreated each day by those who choose to participate as they arrive in or depart from Staten Island. Participants are instructed to move two pieces onto any of four color-coded tables representing the type of place Staten Island could become: Agrarian, Suburban, Urban or Seceded from New York City, while four of Greenberg’s large, hand-drawn and written maps reveal strikingly different versions of a future Staten Island, as Rural, Suburban, Urban or Seceded. As viewers/participants handle the pieces and move them onto the

tables, acknowledging and responding to other people's decisions and consulting the maps, they are encouraged to imagine Staten Island as they might want it to be: more "green" or more developed, more populated or less, a place with more parks or more housing developments, a borough more rural or more like Manhattan. Individual preferences are paramount; each participant offers her or his preferences, while the visual record of those preferences coheres into a collective, durational investigation of hypothetical public space. The project is playful, humorous, entertaining, and welcoming, while it also offers an exuberant rift in the routine (for many) of either departing or returning to Staten Island on the ferry. At the same time it is a serious and potent examination of urban space and life, and it empowers citizens to have significant input into how their urban environment is shaped, rather than to simply accept decisions from on high.

The St George Ferry Terminal is the perfect place for this game/changeable installation. Here is where Staten Island physically interfaces with the rest of New York, the exact site where a vast human tide constantly surges out and in. Corwin and Greenberg's work responds to that tide, and shifts about according to the movements and decisions of people passing through the Ferry Terminal as a matter of course. This installation, at once visually compelling and chockful of diverse ideas, embraces chaos and change, while inspiring thoughtfulness, curiosity, and sheer delight. As it does so, it offers both Staten Island residents and visitors the public opportunity to explore and investigate this island borough: what it is right now, how it is developing, and how it might best function in the future.

– Gregory Volk
New York, 2013



The Great Richmond prototype, installed at Out to See Festival, South Street Seaport, Manhattan, March 1–2, 2014 (Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *Juggernaut or Rath Yatra*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2013
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *Bathtub Madonna*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2013
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *Dawn of the Dead*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2014
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *Herm*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2013
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *Ouroboros*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2014
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *The Polar Sea*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2013
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



W. Corwin, *H.D.T.*, cast hydrocal and acrylic, 2014
(Photo courtesy David Riley)



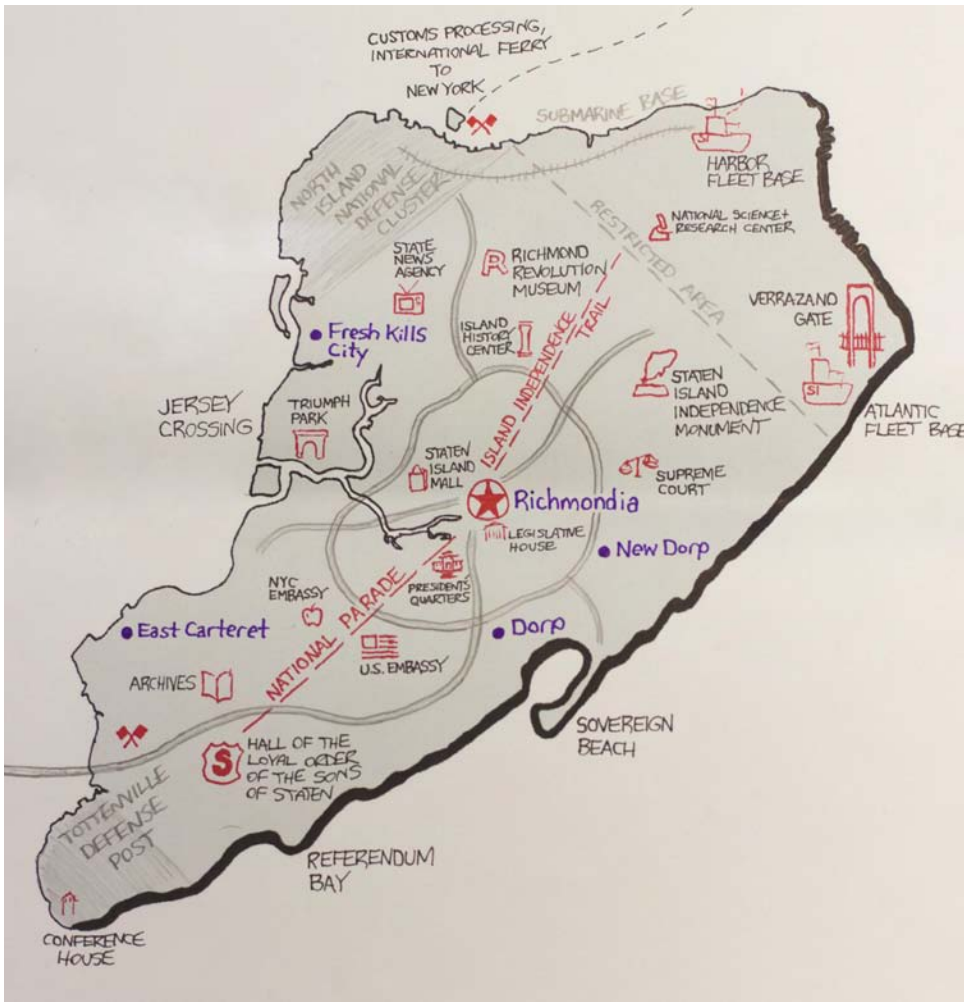
N. Greenberg, *Suburban "What If" Map*,
crayon and ink on paper, 2013



N. Greenberg, *Agrarian "What If" Map*,
crayon and colored pencil on paper, 2013



N. Greenberg, *Urban “What If” Map*,
crayon, ink and colored pencil on paper, 2013



N. Greenberg, *Secede! "What If" Map Sketch*, pencil and ink on paper, 2014 (Photo courtesy Oran Viriyincy)

THE GREAT RICHMOND – a guide for activation



CHOOSE TWO PIECES that appeal to you, considering your aspirations and what you'd like to see more of—either on Staten Island or in the larger world around you.

PLACE EACH PIECE on a table. Remember, each piece represents something—so place your pieces on tables that present your ideal framework. Or, just pick and place your favorite colors!

After you set down your own two pieces, you can **MOVE AN ALREADY-PLACED PIECE** somewhere else—to a different table, or a different spot on the same table.

first – THE PIECES



“H.D.T.”

History and Culture on the Island



“Bathtub Madonna”

Housing stock



“Juggernaut or Rath Yatra”

Agrarian aspirations



“Ouroboros”

Contemporary culture and entertainment



“The Polar Sea”

Connectivity, as symbolized by the Staten Island Ferry



“Dawn of the Dead”

Commercial architecture, as symbolized by Staten Island Mall



“Herm”

Institutions of Government and Authority



“Double Doors of the Horizon”

Infrastructure, as symbolized by the Verrazano Narrows Bridge

second – THE TABLES



“Green”

A more agricultural Island, harkening back to the early days.



“Brown”

A more suburban island, with freeways, malls and subdivisions of single-family homes.



“Blue”

A more urban island, with expanded rapid transit service and higher densities for residential and commercial development.



“Red”

You guessed it—a Staten Island that has seceded from New York City. With total municipal sovereignty, anything is possible!



About the Artists

WILL CORWIN

Will Corwin is a sculptor based in New York City. He has exhibited at the Clocktower Gallery, chashama, Aferro Gallery, and LaMama in the New York area; internationally he has exhibited at the George and Jørgen Gallery in London, FRISE Künstlerhaus in Hamburg and Red Gate Gallery in Beijing. His work has been seen and written about in *Sculpture Magazine*, *Rooms Magazine*, *Art Monthly*, *The New York Times*, *Time Out Beijing*, *The Vogue Blog*, *Art 21 Blog* and *The Brooklyn Rail*. He has a radio show on Clocktower Radio and his first book, *Broken Rooms*, a collaboration with poet and author Ellis Avery, was published this year by Crumpled Press.

The artists extend a special thank-you to these friends of the project:

George Lionel Barker
Stuart Cohn
Walter Corwin
Ingrid Flexer
Anna, Ellen, Lynne & Paul Gelderd
Fran & Marty Greenberg
Alanna Heiss
Jenny & Ronnie Landfield
Tommy Mintz
Richard Patterson
Ellen Phelan
Carin & David Riley
Joanna Spanos & Daniel Hildreth
Pat White

NEIL GREENBERG

Neil Greenberg is active at the intersection of metropolitan planning, information design and public transit operations. Originally from Detroit—and sometimes still found there—he moves around often to engage maximally with his projects. Neil uses maps, timetables, and other technical tools to fuel community-centric efforts that are provocative yet practical; such endeavors include CSG airBus, Summer in the City, Freshwater Railway and Fake Omaha. His work has been featured at Storefront for Art and Architecture, on WDET radio, and in *ESOPUS Magazine*, *Print Magazine*, *ID Magazine*, *Triple Canopy* as well as multiple transit industry publications.

RIGHT: N. Greenberg, *Suburban "What If"*
Map (detail), crayon and ink on paper; 2013

278

RICHMOND RD

HYLAN BL

Great Kills Exwy



**Staten Island Arts
Culture Lounge**

St George Ferry Terminal
10 Ferry Terminal Drive
Staten Island, NY 10301
718.447.3329

statenilandarts.org

Culture Lounge Hours:

Monday–Friday: 11am–7pm
Tuesday nights until 10pm

Saturday–Sunday: 12pm–5pm



**Lily Auchincloss
Foundation, Inc.**

*Funding for printing and production
of this catalog has come from:*

Zachary Kress Turner

*In addition to the organizations and corporate
partners listed, the following individuals have
helped to make The Great Richmond possible:*

Francis J. Greenburger

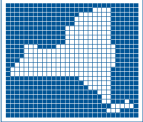
Jennie Lamensdorf

Councilwoman Debi Rose

Robin Vouden

Dr. Rose-Carol Washton-Long

State of the Arts



NYSCA

