



2016 LANDMARK

# LANDMARK

Socrates Sculpture Park's  
30th Anniversary  
Exhibition



SOCRATES

SOCRATES  
SCULPTURE  
PARK





**SOCRATES  
SCULPTURE  
PARK**



# LANDMARK

Abigail DeVille  
Brendan Fernandes  
Cary Leibowitz  
Jonathan Odom  
Jessica Segall  
Casey Tang  
Hank Willis Thomas  
ARTPORT\_making waves  
Meg Webster

Socrates Sculpture Park  
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[www.socratessculpturepark.org](http://www.socratessculpturepark.org)

Socrates Publishing 2016

# CONTENTS

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 06 | Introduction   |
| 12 | <i>Open Seating</i> , Jonathan Odom  |
| 16 | <i>Half Moon</i> , Abigail DeVille   |
| 24 | <i>Fugue in B flat</i> , Jessica Segall  |
| 30 | <i>Honk If U Love Socrates</i> , Cary Leibowitz  |
| 36 | <i>Concave Room for Bees</i> , Meg Webster   |
| 52 | <i>Urban Forest Lab</i> , Casey Tang   |
| 56 | <i>Cool Stories for When the Planet Gets Hot</i> , ARTPORT_making waves                                  |
| 62 | <i>Marked Space</i> , Brendan Fernandes  |
| 64 | <i>From Cain't See in the Morning Till Cain't See at Night (from Strange Fruit)</i> , Hank Willis Thomas |
| 68 | About  |
| 76 | Support & Thanks   |

# LANDMARK

**John Hatfield**  
**Executive Director**

There is no place like Socrates Sculpture Park when you consider the unique characteristics of Socrates' history, mission and evolution as a cultural organization and urban park. Landfill reclamation, artists making new commissioned works, New York City waterfront, working studio facilities, community partners, diversity of Queens, and the embedded nature of community programming accumulate to produce a very special place.

Founded in 1986 and celebrating thirty years, the park has evolved from a catalytic organization to an embedded artistic and social commons. The *LANDMARK* exhibition is an effort by artists through their work to claim the past, activate the present and foreshadow the future of the park. The artists and artworks for *LANDMARK* recall the origins of the park and amplify its current vibrancy as an artistic and communal space.





MARK



# INTRODUCTION

In celebration of its 30th anniversary, Socrates Sculpture Park presents *LANDMARK*, a series of eight artist projects that shape the land physically and symbolically. These works address the idea of place as intimately tied to social and ecological systems, maintenance and stewardship, as well as evolution. Each piece engages with the terrain of Socrates uniquely, whether through the site's physical topography, vibrant neighborhood, or social history. These artworks share an impulse to reclaim, rehabilitate, or rebuild, in alliance with the park's founding principles, which transformed an illegal dump site into a flourishing and beloved park.

Crucially, *LANDMARK* underscores how artists' deftly navigate through complex and sometimes fraught social and political environments. The artists presented here pave the way not only for formal and aesthetic invention but also create imaginative models for wider social transformation. Accordingly, the works in *LANDMARK* underscore that ecosystems do not function in isolation but are enmeshed with human, social, and political situations. *LANDMARK* reflects these artists' understanding that every interaction with our environment leaves a mark, however temporal or intangible. The exhibition reflects the dual meaning of the word 'landmark' as both outstanding event and conspicuous feature that marks location – marking both time and place.

**Jess Wilcox**  
**Director of Exhibitions**





**JONATHAN ODOM**

***Open Seating, 2016***

Chairs designed by Jonathan Odom

CNC cut plywood, ratchet strap

30 x 24 x 24 inches

The *Open Seating* project highlights Socrates Sculpture Park as a social space, site of making, and a place of relaxation and leisure. Designed by Jonathan Odom for open design DIY website Instructables, the chairs resonate with the culture of design and production embedded at Socrates.





The chairs, CNC cut and secured by the tension of a ratchet strap – a nod to the history of rigging large scale sculpture – make evident their design and construction. Scattered throughout the park, the chairs create a platform for visitor interaction and underscore the park as not only a public, but also a communal space. Over the course of the exhibition, the chairs migrated into different

arrangements – groups in circles, pairs in intimate proximity, and solitary views of the waterfront – an imprint of social interactions in public. Chairs were painted by volunteers, staff and youth participants in the park’s education programs. *Open Seating* emphasizes the underlying collaborative and social impulse of Socrates and highlights the park as a site of making.





## ABIGAIL DEVILLE

### *Half Moon, 2016*

Reclaimed lumber, plastic tarps,  
accumulated debris

Built of reclaimed trash and discarded materials this sculpture envisions the wreckage of the Half Moon, the ship on which Henry Hudson first arrived in New York. The ship's sails consist of arched tree branches, echoing the shelters used by the Lenape people who lived in the area when the English explorer landed. DeVille also incorporates fur coats, records, burlap, mirrors and fruit cargo bags into the wreck, bridging colonial and contemporary times. A reminder of the park's historic role as ferry slip and landfill – the *Half Moon* is sited where boats would have docked – the work speaks to issues of migration, immigration and the haunting effect of history.

The sails seem to capture a stew of historical





moments and cultural references. DeVille includes costumes from a past performance, *The New Migration*, which addresses relocating to the South in response to gentrification in Northern cities. Garlands of glass bottles and keychains adorn the masts, reminiscent of the bottle tree tradition associated with communities of the African diaspora. Bottle trees, brought from the Congo into the Caribbean and United States, are thought to ward off evil spirits. The split structure reflects its dual nature – half memorial to buried histories, half talisman for the community. Like other of DeVille’s degraded monuments, *Half Moon* simultaneously bares witness to and confronts public neglect and marginalization – both material and symbolic.





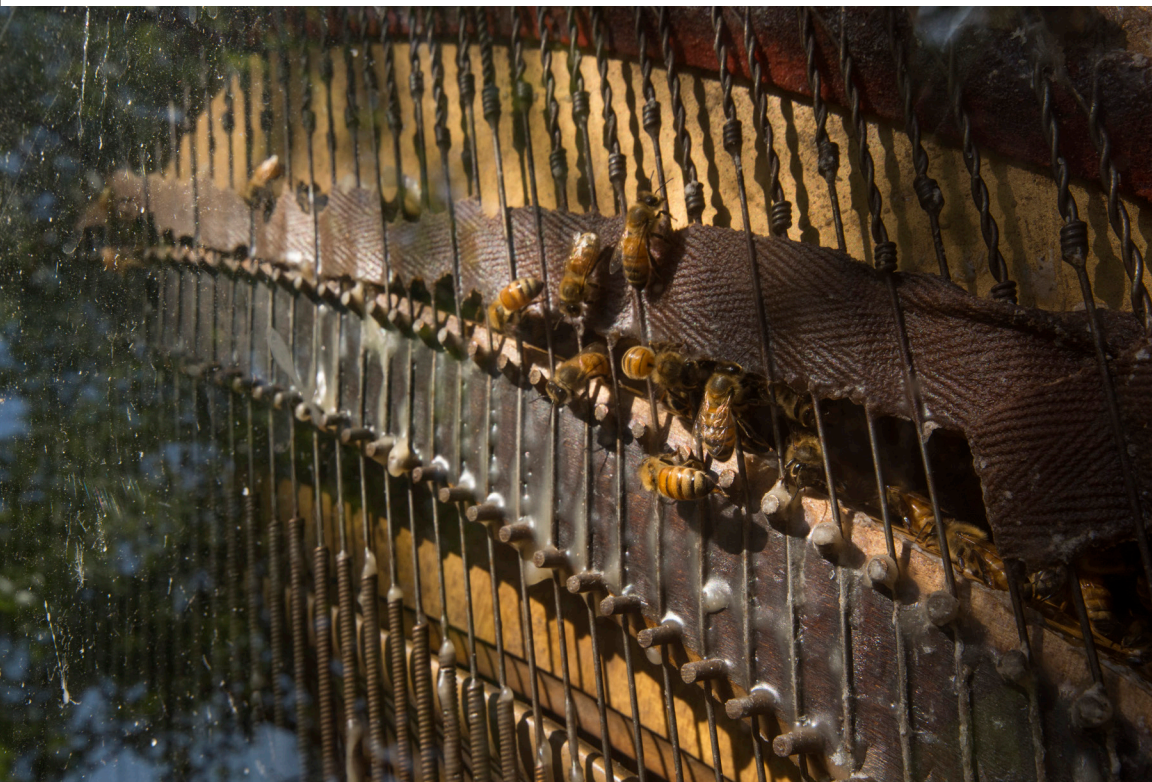
## JESSICA SEGALL

### *Fugue in B flat* , 2016

Piano, bees, sound  
67 x 56 x 12 inches

Jessica Segall's *Fugue in B flat* is an observation beehive and musical sculpture, made of the body of a baby grand piano with a plexiglass cover. A contact microphone amplifies sounds of honey bee activity – with buzzing and vibrating strings – as the hive builds comb, forages for nectar and pollen, raises new broods, and produces honey. As is often the case when viewing another species' behavior, the piece imagines another world order – where labor is music and its product is sweet.

Within the changing economic and industrial landscape of the Astoria, Queens neighborhood, the piano reads as an emblem of a waning era of production and manufacturing. A building that





once housed the Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory, now a condominium, overlooks the park, a reminder of the past vitality of manufacturing in the area. Considering that the vulnerability of bee populations to climate change parallels the precarity of the neighborhood's production and trade to global economic forces, *Fugue in B flat* could be understood as an elegy to another way of life or a call to restore and cultivate what is at risk in our ecology and economy.







Can I borrow Your ideas?  
**pretty please**



**I invented the internet!!  
 I invented earthworks!!**



i once thought I can achieve anything now i know I failed

~~meanies~~

**WTF are you doing??!!!**

~~theory~~

**just because!**

3rd place

best fluxus category



Tri-state try again 1981-7

**Honk if  
you  group shows**



**JERRY SALTZ!!**

**ROBERTA SMITH!!**



**sorry i said that already**

**VOTE FOR A MIRACLE**

## **CARY LEIBOWITZ**

### ***Honk If U Love Socrates Sculpture Park,* 2016**

Bumper stickers and Bobcat

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE-EXPORTS

For Cary Leibowitz's contribution to LANDMARK, *Honk If U Love Socrates Sculpture Park*, he designed ten bumper stickers to decorate the park's Bobcat loader. The piece both celebrates and pokes fun at the bumper sticker as a popular form of expression, undercutting the seriousness and intimidation associated with heavy machinery. Its slogans range from confrontations with the rarefied art world and to ambivalent appropriations of self-help rhetoric. In the inclusive, participatory, collaborative spirit of Socrates, visitors adorned the vehicle with stickers during the exhibition's



opening. In this season for political sloganeering, Liebowitz tames the strident and declarative nature of this form of public discourse with moments of vulnerability and uncertainty.





Meg Webster, Concave Room for Bees, 2016





**MEG WEBSTER**

***Concave Room for Bees, 2016***

6 x 70 x 70 feet

Courtesy of the Artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

The anchor of *LANDMARK* is a new earthwork by Meg Webster. Over 400 cubic yards of soil sculpted into a shallow bowl and home to some 1100 individual plants (from 35 species) make up *Concave Room for Bees*. A customized steel gridded retainer wall shapes and embraces this hefty mass of earth. With robust plantings of native flowers and herbs that





attract pollinators, *Concave Room for Bees* highlights the symbiotic relationship of plants and insects and the complex nature of ecosystems in general. Park visitors are encouraged to enter the work and be enveloped within a 360 degree botanical oasis. The variety of bloom colors, leaf texture, and growth pattern and height of plants makes for a painterly visual aesthetic. However, the work is also multisensory – a mix of botanical aromas, insect hums, sweet dewy air, and vibrantly colored flora.

The title suggests Webster's impetus for the piece– a habitat for bees, a creature crucial to food production and ecological diversity, and yet in decline. Honey bee populations dropped by about 40% in the 2015-16 season due to a variety of causes including climate change, chemical pesticides, and invasive mites. By combining the title's simple educational gesture and the aesthetic expressiveness of her botanical composition Webster's work conveys the urgency and emotion of environmental concerns.









Since the 1970s Webster has created both indoor and outdoor works often isolating single elements into elegant geometries. Typically creating minimal forms with an august presence, she nonetheless folds a profound understanding of environmental processes into her making. Distinct from some of her land art predecessors of the 1960s, earth is more than a material for Webster. Rather, it is a component of a dynamic ecological system that provides sustenance for the planet's inhabitants.

*Concave Room for Bees* can be considered a microcosm of Socrates. Its steel exterior makes clear that it is manmade, while organic energy transforms its interior over time, requiring stewardship and maintenance--two key functions of the park. The piece echoes the park's original rehabilitative efforts in that the tons of earth that comprise it will be dispersed throughout the park at the end its presentation, adding a much-needed layer of nutrient rich soil to this former landfill.











## CASEY TANG

### *Urban Forest Lab, 2014 – ongoing*

Flowers, grasses, soil

8 x 45 feet

An agricultural experiment, Tang's project leaves a lasting mark deep in the soil of Socrates Sculpture Park. In the fall of 2014, the artist began the process of creating a self-sustaining ecosystem on this small barren plot in the Northeast area of the park. In preparation for the future urban forest, Tang's first task was to restore the park's degraded soil by planting cover crops which inject nitrogen into the soil



and aerate compacted earth. Once matured, this urban forest, in contrast to a garden, will provide produce without constant maintenance. At once pedagogical and rehabilitative, *Urban Forest Lab*, has a concealed, but profound effect, visible to those who observe the piece as it evolves and takes shape over the years. Repeat visits are crucial to envision the sculptural form of *Urban Forest Lab*, making the neighborhood the ideal audience. For Tang, the undulating organic form of the layered forest canopy offers a plane for contemplation, meditation and imaginative projection and in a similar manner to a Zen garden.







## **ARTPORT\_making waves**

### ***Cool Stories for When the Planet Gets Hot I-IV, 2007-2014***

Selections from editions I-IV

Video, Running time: 30 minutes

*LANDMARK* includes *Cool Stories For When The Planet Gets Hot I-IV*, selections from a biennial competition for art videos that explore climate change. The series, commissioned by ARTPORT\_making waves, has been shown at festivals, art fairs, and UN climate conferences worldwide.

ARTPORT\_making waves is an international curatorial platform that raises awareness about climate change through exhibitions, performances, residencies, and educational programs, linking the arts, science, and politics. It was founded in 2006 by Corinne Erni and Anne-Marie Meister. These images and stories link the discrete plot of land that is Socrates Sculpture Park to a larger global dialogue about climate change, rehabilitation, and sustainability.







A photograph of a city skyline across a body of water, with a yellow banner reading "UNTIL WE FEAR" in the foreground. The scene is bright and sunny, with a clear blue sky and a few wispy clouds. The water is a deep blue with whitecaps. The city skyline is composed of various buildings, including several tall skyscrapers. In the foreground, there are lush green plants with large, serrated leaves. A black metal railing is visible behind the plants. The yellow banner is a solid, bright yellow color with the text in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**UNTIL WE FEAR**

A composite image featuring a city skyline across a body of water, a yellow banner with text, and a foreground of green plants. The city skyline is visible in the background, with various skyscrapers and buildings. The water is in the middle ground, and the green plants are in the foreground, partially obscuring the water. A yellow banner with black text is positioned horizontally across the middle of the image.

**WIRELESS** און אונטער. און אונטער. און אונטער.

# UNTIL WE FEARLESS

**BRENDAN FERNANDES**

***Marked Space, 2016***

Caution tape

Dimensions variable

*Marked Space*, a customized caution tape by Brendan Fernandes, is displayed throughout the park. “Until we fearless,” it reads, the syntax suggesting the voice of a non-native English speaker. A pattern of dashes and dots, reminiscent of Morse code, alternates with this ambiguous phrase. The cryptic markings are an artist-designed font based on aforementioned code. The piece is open to dual interpretation; as a call for courage (fearlessness), and/or a call to alleviate the culture of anxiety and suspicion (fear less). *Marked Space* confounds the park’s administrative mechanism and the language of authority, provoking questions about borders and movement in public space.



## HANK WILLIS THOMAS

### ***From Cain't See in the Mornin' Till Cain't See at Night (from Strange Fruit), 2011***

11 x 28 feet

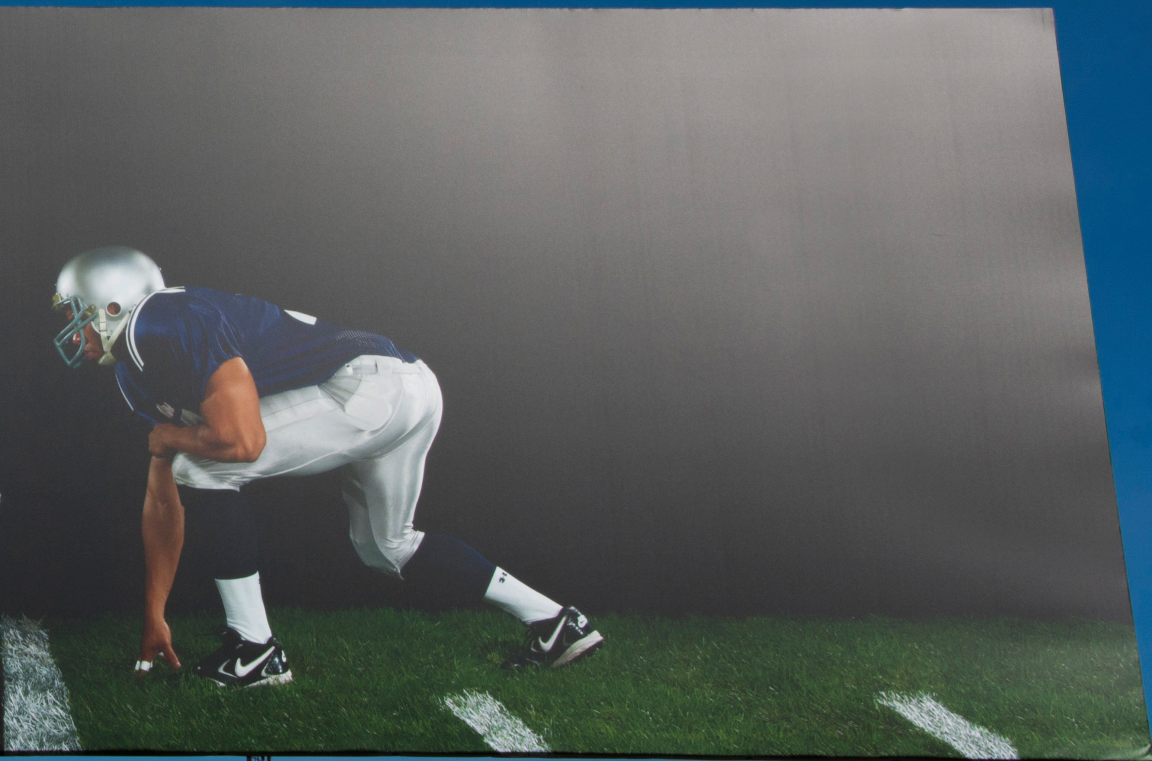
Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York

*LANDMARK* features Thomas's striking image *From Cain't See in the Morning till Cain't See at Night* at the park's gate as part of its Broadway Billboard series. It depicts two black men facing each other; a football player in a three-point stance and a laborer crouching among cotton plants, their faces obscured by helmet and straw hat. Park visitors are left to consider the image's ambiguous implications about the relationship between land, labor, race, and American history and culture. One may imagine that history is the line that divides the ground on which they stand, as cotton field becomes playing field.

The presentation of the image in billboard format

complements the artist's broader dialogue surrounding depictions of the black male body in mass media, and glossy advertising in particular, and their social and political ramifications. Sited at the threshold to the park, this work reminds park visitors that the art within challenges dominate assumptions and provokes dialogue about complex social issues. The title borrows phrases to describe the grueling schedule of a sharecropper's work hours, from before sunrise until after sunset, but in this context suggests society's blindness towards the history of racism in America.





# ABOUT

## **SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK**

Socrates Sculpture Park is located on the East River waterfront of an industrial area of Queens, New York – the most culturally diverse county in the United States. The park is surrounded by three of the nation's largest public housing complexes (Astoria, Ravenswood, and Queensbridge Houses), and our local community has been a park stakeholder since its creation: Socrates was once an abandoned landfill and illegal dump-site until 1986 when a group of artists and community members, under the leadership of visionary sculptor Mark di Suvero, transformed its 4.7 acres into an open studio and exhibition space for artists, and a neighborhood park for local residents.

The park was created by the community for the community – a founding principle that continues as we strive to welcome the broadest spectrum

of the public possible: Socrates is open from morning till dusk, 365 days per year. There is no admission, and every program is free.

From its inception, Socrates has been committed to giving promising and talented artists opportunities to create large-scale artworks and to have their work experienced by diverse audiences, local to international. Since most exhibiting artists create their work in our open studio facilities on park grounds, both the creative process and finished artworks are accessible to visitors – a transparency that differentiates Socrates from many other arts organizations, and shapes our public programming, philosophy, and goals.





Above: Site excavation with Bobcat for Meg Webster's *Concave Room for Bees*  
Below: Installation of *Marked Space* by Brendan Fernandes



Jessica Segall feeds the bees sugar-water at her *Fugue in B flat*



Detail of *Fugue in B flat*



Above: Detail of *Half Moon* by Abigail DeVille

Below: Assembly of steel grid for *Concave Room for Bees*

# SUPPORT & THANKS

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**Council on  
the Arts**

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## **Photography**

Images are provided by the park's photographer, Nate Dorr, the artists, and Socrates Sculpture Park.

LANDMARK Catalog prepared by  
Laura Blaszczak.

Open daily from 9 am until sunset  
Free Admission



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