

My fascination with my daily terrain is ancient. For years I noticed spaces and situations of light that posed questions about history and social practice. My urge to domesticate my environment was overwhelming. I talked to merchants, smiled at vendors, found familiar faces in postal windows. I got gum, credit and acknowledgement which felt like belonging, in return.

Tribeca felt unbridled in the 1970's. We looked across the street into law office windows and smiled at secretaries who watched us renovate our lofts and bear children. I inhaled the views down the street to the two rivers across rooftops like an elixir. When tens of thousands of air conditioners went off in the same few days in October, the silence was profound.

In the 1980's my sunset view across the Hudson was blocked by the College of Insurance. My street was rerouted around the school for these neophyte guarantors of the status quo. Precious sky space was filled with the stepped set-backs of bank headquarters, the sun blocked by the sleek darkened glass of new trade towers.

I proposed to engrave a series of prints around the neighborhood that railed against the extravagant development. I wanted the images to scream and to show how awful it had

become, this place I desired to know like the back of my hand :
how unfair, how inhospitable.

In the fall of 1988 I sat on a traffic triangle where Park Row intersects Broadway and began to engrave “St. Paul’s Belittled by the World Trade Center”. Then I tackled the wall of skyscrapers that cut off the historic ships of the Seaport, the darkened caverns of Cedar Street where stray sunbeams occasionally grazed Jean DuBuffet’s ironic totem. I wanted to portray my own street so abruptly blocked by capitalist zeal.

But as I proofed my efforts I discovered that I had found views to see that I loved. The mixed-use juxtapositions of old/new, living/working, rich/poor, vertical/horizontal, religious/secular, that formed the character of my neighborhood had educated me. These were pictures of history and democracy. I had peeled away the edifices and found an essential American experience.

I met other people who were also magnetized by the area and many who were galvanized by the blinding speed at which it was changing. A mixed-use community rose from the dust of the 1960’s urban renewal. We meet to discuss our latest strategies for historic district designation or to occupy a vacant lot to procure play space, to plant a park or decide what art belongs in what traffic triangle. We meet in our synthetic space, our

community hall, via radio telephone, where we can be together as we pursue our relentless lives.

My domestic conquest is ongoing. Just keeping abreast of local gossip in a community board that symbolically encompasses the world with committees called the Financial District, the Civic Center, the South Street Seaport, the Battery with its new Park and City, is an undertaking of considerable scale. However, even in the density of this environment I find my daily paths, from shelter to shore (with stops for gathering and tending) seem as sure and well-worn as I can imagine them being anywhere humans collect on the face of the earth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Hammit". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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