A Tree for Anable Basin springs from the desire to investigate and celebrate an enigmatic landscape through art. This site-specific proposal highlights the developmental tensions that have shaped and continue to shape the Basin’s character.

As a natural object crafted from recognizable industrial materials, the floating sculpture created by artist Chico MacMurtrie evokes the Basin’s historical interplay between industrial and ecological activity. It enhances the existing habitat for migratory water birds, which reclaimed this former loading area for oil tankers approximately a century after its excavation from coastal wetland. The tree subtly raises questions about community access and land use by inviting public spectacles at a traditionally restricted site.

The ongoing tension between permanence and transition in the local environment informs the design of a sculpture that reacts to winds and tides, moves aside for passing vessels, serves migrant animal and human populations, and changes over time. The installation favors views from Long Island City, inverting a long tradition of local commercial installations, such as the Pepsi-Cola and Silvercup signs, that beg attention from Manhattan viewers.

As an older generation of industrial structures gives way to high-rise condos, manicured parks, and potentially an Olympic Village, the scrap-metal tree sparks new conversations about the neighborhood’s fluctuating built and ecological environments.
petrification, urban island, formal transformation

SITE DATA

Access / restriction juxtaposition - tidal threshold

Petrification, urban island, formal transformation

Approach

As the site of this proposal, the base way to approach the site is via the parking lot at the end of 43rd Street. Approach is via the end of the site at 43rd Street, which is a parking lot on the northeast side of the basin, although this site can also be reached indirectly. Finally, visitors may enter the site perhaps the most characteristic - by boat. When the site is framed off, the East River's fully accessed and proposed as part of the Queens West complex for entry to model to the massive river.
DOCK CONSTRUCTION

The dock will be constructed of primarily hemlock planks, 55 gallon plastic barrels, and a number of galvanized bolts and lags. Fifteen separate portable sections will be constructed then assembled on site into the final 24 foot by 20 foot floating base.

Constructing the top deck of the structure after its assembly in the water will reduce the weight of each section for easier handling out of water and increase its overall strength. The decking will tie together all the sections making a seamless surface for the landscaping materials. It will also allow easier access for the bolting of each section to each other. For simplicity, these drawings illustrate only three sections bolted together.

The dock will be anchored to the river bed by two large granite or concrete moorings. The moorings will be chained to two bolts on the side of the dock and can easily be unatched to allow repositioning of the structure. When not attached to the dock, the chains will be held up by buoys.

The second stage of construction will anchor Chico MacMurtrie’s scrap metal tree into the dock surface. Like its base, the sculpture will also be assembled from transportable parts on site. A layer of gravel topped with a thin porous layer of landscaping cloth, and soil will provide an adequate base for the grasses, reeds, and vines that will grow around and up the tree. After completion of the second stage, the dock will be launched into the water and anchored into place at the mouth of the cove.

The final design and construction of the tree itself will be completed largely by Brooklyn-based artist Chico MacMurtrie of Amorphic Robot Works. His work, which includes a series of synthitic trees and permanent outdoor sculpture, has been exhibited around the world. His experience in interactive and kinetic sculpture helps inspire the moving component of the Anable tree. Long interested in public art and in Long Island City’s history, he joined the team as lead sculptor and agreed to build the piece within the budget.

http://amorphicrobotworks.org
COMMUNITY

Although Anable Basin is currently difficult to reach, a variety of Hunter’s Point community groups and members have shown accelerating interest in seeing this site become an accessible attration for the neighborhood. A Tree for Anable Basin converges with these efforts to use the basin as a cultural and ecological resource.

A number of community initiatives are underway to increase access and visibility at the site. For example, the Hunter’s Point Community Coalition has proposed a specific design for the area between Anable Basin and Anable Cove. According to the New York Long Island City City Planning, the HPCO’s plan is aimed at restoring the natural landscape and creating a wildlife viewing walkway. Meanwhile, the Department of City Planning has an ambitious design for a Greenway along the Hunter’s Point waterfront that runs from the Queensboro bridge to Anable Basin.

Another community group is working hard at creating the LIC Community Boat House. The group proposes creating a “raft-of-rafts” off the southern end of the basin, where the northern end of Hunter’s Point State Park will extend in the future. The group would like to “get Western Queens residents onto the water.”

While neither of the plans have been approved or fully developed, we believe that their existence reflects the community’s desire to participate in defining the identity of the basin.

In addition to these smaller community-based plans, a second stage of Anable Basin will increase interest and access to Anable Basin by creating green space along its waterfront and building residential units that overlook the basin.

The installation of A Tree for Anable Basin will attract even more attention to the site and stimulate public awareness of the issues. The steel arch and industrial-looking surface, comprising non-toxic oil Barbara pieces and other surplus metal, will reference the basin’s former use as an oil slick while the tree itself will illustrate the basin’s future role as a restored landscape and haven for migratory birds. A limited number of wind-responsive tree branches swaying in the East River breeze will remind viewers of the ever-changing landscape of which they are part.

The installation of A Tree for Anable Basin has been designed to become an accessible attraction for the neighborhood. The team is confident in its ability to refine and reduce the construction budget through further materials research.

BUDGET

1. Lumber
   - Size: 2 x 4 x 8
   - Quantity: 150
   - Price: $6.93
   - Total: $1,039.50
2. Chain
   - Quantity: 1000
   - Price: $200.00
3. Sandbags
   - Quantity: 25
   - Price: $20.00
4. Concrete anchors
   - Quantity: 10
   - Price: $100.00
5. Transportation of materials to site:
   - Truck: $200.00
   - Labor: $400.00

Total maximum construction cost: $7,968

Note: The team is confident in its ability to refine and reduce the construction budget through further materials research.

PROCESS

The team immensely enjoyed exploring and experiencing Long Island City during the research and design processes for the project. An early fascination with the Pennsylvania Railroad Power House gave way to a vision of LIC translate posts mounted at scattered sites. After pursuing community image banks generated by public Landscapes and community images, we began selecting local habitats on Anable Basin and found ourselves seduced more broadly by the basin’s rich history of industrial and ecological development.

The neighborhood’s infinite opportunity for collaborative photography and investigation led to one accidental confrontation with police and several spontaneous interviews. As we became better acquainted with the site we drove deeper into design and construction details, it became increasingly evident that Anable Basin and its environment are on the cusp of massive structural and functional reorganization.

The time is ripe to provoke discussion through design at this site. We therefore look forward to this installation of Tras as the next stage of an ongoing project that will explore a pre-existing dialogue between landscape and inhabitants.

NEW YORK WILD BIRDS

In the last two years, wild migratory species recorded in New York City area include:

- Canada Goose
- Warbling Vireo
- Carolina Wren
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Cedar Waxwing
- Tuffed Titmouse
- Wood Thrush

TEAM

Our team benefits from the talents of an experienced sculptor, an advanced student of urban bird ecology, and an amateur expert in marine construction.

alphabetical list of members

Vanessa Carr
Eve Hadley
Michael Lain
Chloe MacMurtie
Joe Nelson
Gideon Fink Shapiro

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