

MORGAN LEHMAN

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The New York Times

Brooklyn's Visual Reboot

Photographs of the most populous borough reveal a new landscape being experienced by people new to the terrain, with little investment in Brooklyn's past.

By John Legend on November 15, 2018



Blizzard, 2016 Julienne Schaer

It's a little bit like the nation, Brooklyn. You have your grottoes of educated professionals, saturated in self-mythologizing media, and your more traditional "old" Brooklyn turf, often sentimentalized or ignored, where neighbors know each other's families and share a vision of a less turbulent time. In both climes people are struggling more than popular images let on.

Change is a mother.

Marla Hamburg Kennedy, who lives in Manhattan, set out to capture some of this 21st-century churn in a new book called "Brooklyn Photographs Now," shot throughout the city's most populous borough by both established and emerging photographers. Though Brooklyn has a storied photographic history, Ms. Hamburg Kennedy, 57, chose images from this century.



Hurricane Sandy, 2012 Anthony Lanzilote

What emerges is a portrait of supercharged expansion, sometimes jarring, with alien tribes being pushed against each other by the real estate market or pulled by the allure of Brooklyn's new global image. Some of the buildings in the photos already don't exist. The connecting thread in the images is newness — a new landscape being experienced by people new to the terrain, with little investment in Brooklyn's past.



Brooklyn Summit, 2014 Pascal Perich



Room, 2013 David S. Allee, via Morgan Lehman Gallery

“You don’t see much contemporary photography of Manhattan anymore,” said Ms. Hamburg Kennedy, who works as a curator and art adviser. “Photographers are not so interested to shoot the Woolworth Building or the Empire State Building. Manhattan is really the city of the 20th Century in photography. It’s been done. It’s like photographing the nude. It’s a used-up genre.”



Brooklyn Army Terminal Tracks, 2007 Nathan Kensinger

Of course, Brooklyn has its own clichés, and a new self-awareness that can make simple discovery seem quaint. These photos comment rather than reveal. The new Brooklyn, which never existed on old-fashioned film, comes with a sense of itself as image. It belongs to an era in which everyone carries a camera all the time, and an event doesn’t exist until it has been posted on Instagram.

The restaurants are good. The coffee, too. It used to be easier to park.

There’s Lena Dunham and, you know, “Girls,” plus all those writers named Jonathan.

“People used to say they lived in New York City,” Ms. Hamburg Kennedy said. “Now they say they live in Brooklyn.”

Ms. Hamburg Kennedy, who lives in a rental apartment on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, said she and her husband, a lawyer, often dream about buying a place in Brooklyn, maybe in Bed-Stuy. But alas, she said, they can’t afford it.



Swimming Pool, 2014 Matthew Schenning



No Swimming, Coney Island, 2010 Guillaume Gaudet



Untitled, August 2010 Douglas Ljungkvist



Hurricane Irene in Red Hook, August 28, 2011 Ramin Talaie



Jesus Statue, Painted Planter and Red Brick Building, Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2012 Meryl Meisler, via Steven Kasher Gallery



Fort Greene Park, 2006 Joel Meyerowitz, via Howard Greenberg Gallery



The Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge, Brooklyn, NY, October 31, 2012 Peter van Agtmael/Magnum Photos