

Spare Times



"Earth Celebrations"

EVENTS The annual "Procession to Save Our Gardens" is tomorrow.

15TH EARTH CELEBRATIONS' RITES OF SPRING: PROCESSION TO SAVE OUR GARDENS, an all-day parade and pageant tomorrow to preserve community gardens in New York. The eight-hour event begins at Forsyth Street, between Broome and Delancey Streets, at 10 a.m., with visits to more than 30 gardens in the East Village. The closing ceremony, at 6 p.m. on Eighth Street between Avenues C and D, will feature the release of 50 butterflies. Raindate, Sunday. Free. Information: (212) 777-7969.



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★KIDS **Earth Celebrations' Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens**

FREE Parade begins at Forsyth St between Broome and Delancey Sts (212-777-7969, www.earthcelebrations.com). Subway: J, Z to Bowers. 10am–6pm. Weaving its way through the East Village, Alphabet City and the Lower East Side, the daylong theatrical pageant—part parade, part performance art—will visit more than 50 neighborhood gardens, leaving dance, music and poetry in its colorful, costumed wake.

Spring roll On Saturday 21, East Village artists take to the streets in costumes even more radiant than usual, as part of the **Rites of Spring**, which celebrates the neighborhood's fertile network of community gardens. See **Around Town**, page 55.

Events

It's Not Easy Being Green: Gardeners Show Their True Colors

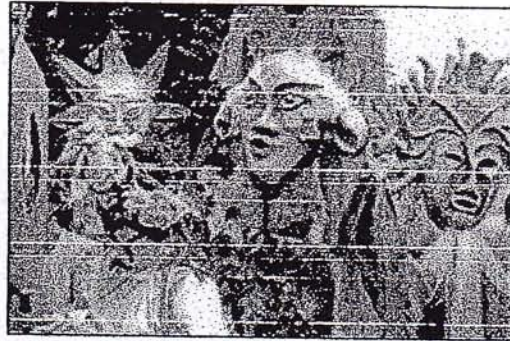
by Danial Adkison
May 17th, 2005 5:10 PM

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e-mail story

printer friendly

"Coming soon, luxury housing." This phrase, now as ubiquitous on East Village walls as graffiti once was, heralds a less obvious, though still pernicious, type of decay. Just as Dutch elm disease decimated New York City's tree population, the unmitigated spread of condo towers and high-rent megaplexes threatens the slivers of urban space that residents have been able to coax a little green out of. For certain trees, Dutch elm disease means certain death. But for community gardens, activism and high-visibility events like this parade have meant city-sponsored preservation from greedy developers. Nearly 5,000 performers and artists will take part in this year's procession, which organizers call New York City's longest parade. They'll wind through the Lower East Side and East Village for eight hours, stopping at gardens and adding revelers along the way. Come out to savor spring with the best of L.E.S. talent: marching bands, opera singers, poets, dancers, puppeteers, and actors, who will perform the saga of earth goddess Gaia. Or just join up to rage against the developocracy—either way, the gardens win.



Creatures comfort
photo: Dennis Sivack

Earth Celebrations' 15th Annual Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens
Saturday at 10 a.m.
Begins on Forsyth Street between Broome and Delancey streets
212.777.7969
earthcelebrations.com

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Events

by Sarah Ferguson

Earth Angels: Eight-Hour Pageant Fetes East Village Gardens

May 17th, 2004 6:30 PM



Ritual delight
(photo: Christopher Butt)

Earth Celebrations' 14th Annual Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens
Saturday, 10 to 6 (rain date: Sunday, May 23)
Gather at Forsyth Street between Broome and Delancey streets, volunteers welcome
212.777.7969
earthcelebrations.com

The parade kicks off at the Forsyth Garden, where elderly Chinese men air their hua mei (literally "beautiful eyebrow") songbirds in bamboo cages, then meanders through the East Village to tucked-away parks like Brisas del Caribe on East 3rd. If you get tired of the eight-hour route, hop over to one of the key performance spots, like the "Birth of Gaia" at La Plaza Cultural on East 9th, the flight of the "Butterfly Angel" at the 6th Street and Avenue B Garden, or the closing ceremony at Green Oasis on East 8th, where 50 live butterflies will be released.

In 1991, greening enthusiast Felicia Young conceived of a day-long pageant to weave together the Lower East Side's embattled community gardens, which were then threatened with extinction. The annual exercise in collective hoodoo worked (OK, a lawsuit helped too), and in 2002 Mayor Bloomberg signed off on a deal that preserved more gardens here than in any other neighborhood. But the parade marches on in celebration—and in memoriam for those gardens that were felled. Beyond the pomp—giant flower puppets, brightly costumed earth sprites, a samba band and Afro-Caribbean drummers, Indonesian dancers, plus the ever buoyant Hungry March Band—this is also one of the best ways to tour the area's 40-plus verdant sanctuaries. The

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**Rites of Spring:
Procession to Save our Gardens**

*Starts at Forsyth Street Garden, Forsyth St between Broome and Delancey Sts (212-777-7969; www.earthcelebrations.com). Subway: J, M, Z to Bowery; F to Delancey St. Sat 22 at 10am. Rain date Sun 23. Procession makes stops at La Plaza Cultural Garden (Ave C at 9th St, 12:15pm), the 6th & B Garden (Ave B at 6th St, 3:15pm), El Jardín Paraiso (E 4th St between Aves C and D, 4pm), and Green Oasis (E 8th St between Aves C and D, 6pm). **FREE*** See photo, page 67. Kids are needed in various roles during this annual East Village event. Those who want to chase the Trash Monster during the "birth, marriage and kidnapping of Gaea" should arrive at La Plaza Cultural Garden by 11:45am, adorned with recyclables (soda-can necklaces?). Volunteer butterflies are needed at El Jardín Paraiso by 4pm, wearing pastel clothing; they'll be fitted with wings and rehearsed for an enactment of the garden's storied rescue from evil developers. Children can also join the closing ceremony at Green Oasis (be there by 5:45pm), where they'll release butterflies. *All ages.*

Join in



Around Town

Green day Young New Yorkers can help stage one of the city's most spectacular events: Earth Celebrations' annual Rites of Spring Procession to Save Our Gardens. The daylong affair, on May 22, mixes art, environmentalism and street theater as it winds through the East Village, dramatizing Gaea's abduction by greedy developers—and her rescue.

During free art-and-ecology workshops starting in April, kids will learn about avian life and imagine, design and build wings and headdresses; come parade time, they'll be a flock of birds. Children who can't make the workshops can still join the procession as butterfly releasers or trash-monster chasers. Teens, meanwhile, get to help build the event's giant puppets and mobile sculptures.

For event information, see Around Town listings, May 17–23, call 212-777-7969, or visit www.earthcelebrations.com.

NEW YORK

A GUIDE TO THE CITY'S BEST
RESTAURANTS & ENTERTAINMENT

MAY 20, 2002

Happening Flower Power

They say New York is a concrete jungle, but tell that to the folks who tend the 650 community gardens around the city, adding blooming life around tenements and in abandoned lots. In honor of these horticultural cityscapes, the annual **Earth Celebrations' Rites of Spring Procession** gets under way for the twelfth year this Saturday morning. Weaving through some 40 gardens on the Lower East Side, this plantation pageant (pictured) includes giant puppets, world-music marching bands, costumed garden characters, belly dancers, and performances with a mythical theme through the day. Wear good walking shoes, advises parade founder Felicia Young. "This is not a parade that goes from point A to point B. Ours is eight hours long." Since the grassroots effort to save the gardens began in 1991, 150 of these ad hoc oases have been lost to real-estate development—the good news being that their plight has drawn some attention and got the gardens designated on city maps. The jury's still out on Bloomberg's floral feelings, so stop and smell the flowers while you can. (See "Children's Events.")



PHOTOGRAPH BY VINCE ENG.

S.A.

Time Out New York

May 16–23, 2002
Issue 346



Around Town

The fight to preserve community gardens has taken on epic proportions—or at least it does so once a year, at the annual **Earth Celebrations' Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens**. On Saturday 18, elaborately costumed actors visit more than 35 gardens on the Lower East Side, greeting gardeners and performing a modern allegory of Gaia, the Greek goddess of the earth. The story is told in increments, so you'll need to follow the performers through the day to catch every part—or just meet up with them at 6pm to see how it ends and to watch the release of 50 butterflies in the closing ceremony. **Around Town** starts on page 59.

★Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens

Starts at Forsyth Street Garden, Forsyth St between Broome and Delancey Sts (212-777-7969; for complete schedule, visit www.earthcelebrations.com). Subway: J, M

*to Bowery; Grand St S to Grand St. Starts at 10am. Procession makes stops at La Plaza Cultural Garden (9th St at Ave C, 12:15pm), the 6th & B Garden (6th St at Ave B, 3:15pm), El Jardín Paraiso (4th St between Aves C and D, 4pm) and Green Oasis (8th St between Aves C and D, 6–7pm). **FREE** Rain date Sun 19. Celebrate the various wilds of Manhattan by participating in this annual eight-hour parade, which visits 35 local gardens and features giant floral puppets, costumed garden characters, performance, dance, music, poetry and a release of live butterflies at the end of the day. See also Takeout.*

The New York Times

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2000

SPARE TIMES

FOR CHILDREN

EARTH CELEBRATIONS' RITES OF SPRING: PROCESSION TO SAVE OUR GARDENS is an all-day parade and pageant tomorrow to preserve community gardens in New York City. The eight-hour event begins at Forsythe Street, between Broome and Delan-

cey Streets, at 10 a.m., with visits to more than 35 gardens in the East Village. The closing ceremony, at 6 p.m. on Eighth Street between Avenues C and D, will feature the release of 50 butterflies. Free. Information: (212) 777-7969.



A daylong parade and pageant to celebrate and preserve community gardens is planned tomorrow in the East Village.

THIS WEEK

May 18 through 25

AROUND TOWN



Power plants Given the thousands of vacant lots available for housing, why has the city chosen to tear up gardens that have spruced up neighborhoods for decades? Because the city owns the lots where many community gardens grow. The answer lies behind the recent destruction of several Manhattan green spaces. The flowers-versus-housing battle is heating up: On April 24, the mayor's office issued a memo calling for the control of lots previously given Greenthumb grants. Gardeners plan to fight back with a citywide Dig In on May 30, as well with the annual Rites of Spring procession (see Sunday 24). Costumed paraders will pass by some 50 East Village gardens and former gardens, praying for survival and paying homage.

the village
VOICE

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Shortlist

May 22, 2001 - Vol. XLVI No. 20 - America's

OPEN CITY

'11TH ANNUAL RITES OF SPRING. PROCESSION TO SAVE OUR GARDENS Eco-arts protagonists Earth Celebrations present your biggest chance all year to revel in the Lower East Side's brambly collage: an eight-hour pageant and parade winding through over 40 Loissaida gardens. Beginning at 10 a.m., 15-foot-tall flower puppets, mud people, and everyone else assemble for an invocation ceremony at Forsyth Street between Delancey and Broome streets. At 12-15, catch "The Birth, Marriage, and Kidnapping of Gaia" at 9th Street and Avenue C. A giant butterfly takes off from a six-story building at 6th Street and Avenue B at 3-15. Herbie it out in "The Saving of Gaia" at 4, at 4th Street between avenues C and D. Fifty live butterflies hit the



SPRING FEEVUH: GREEN DIONYSIAN DECADENCE AT THE ANNUAL LOISSAIDA GARDEN PAGEANT AND PARADE (SEE OPEN CITY)

CHRISTIAN OTT

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES **METRO** SUNDAY, MAY 23, 1999

R E G I O N



Nancy Siesel/The New York Times

Back to Nature, in a City Setting

Gardeners who opposed the planned sale of 112 community gardens on city-owned property celebrated their victory in stopping development of the lots by marching yesterday to several of them, including one on East Second Street near the Bowery. Some revelers dressed as garden spirits.

DAILY NEWS

www.nydailynews.com

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

Saturday, May 20, 2000

WEEKEND IN NEW YORK



RITE OF SPRING

A costumed procession of giant butterflies, dancing tomatoes and masked "developers" protests the planned elimination of 35 lower East Side community gardens. Today, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., free. Meet at Forsyth Garden, Broome and Delancey Sts., via B,D,F to Grand St.; (212) 777-7969. Call for times and locations.



NEW YORK POST

LATE CITY FINAL

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 1993 / Partly cloudy, 70s today; cloudy, 60s tonight / Details, Page 22 ★★

NEW YORK'S HIPPEST ARTS & LEISURE SECTION

NEW YORK POST, FRIDAY, MAY 28, 1993 31

MOVIES • THEATER • MUSIC • ART • DINING

City Weekend



EDITED BY V.A. MUSETTO



Garden rites

THE third annual Rites of Spring; Procession to Save Our Gardens, will be held Sunday in a bid to save more than 50 neighborhood gardens in the Lower East Side. The parade begins at 11 a.m. on Forsyth Street between Rivington and Stanton streets and ends at the Green Oasis Garden on Eighth Street between Avenues C and D. Free, (212) 727-8283.

The New York Times

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MAY 22, 1998

\$1 beyond the greater New York metropolitan

FAMILY FARE

Laurel Graeber

Celebrating Flower Power

If you thought taxi drivers were angry, you haven't seen anything yet. On Sunday, the gardens of the Lower East Side will rise up (symbolically, at least) to protest concrete encroachment and Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's mandate, issued on April 24, to turn over 741 community gardens to the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development. So don't be surprised to see flowers, trees and grass walking the streets, performing their own passion play.

They will be part of the eighth annual "Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens," an eight-hour spectacle that is to begin with the "Garden Spirits Initiation" at 10 A.M. at the Forsyth Street Garden and Bird Sanctuary (between Broome and Delancey Streets).

There, 15-foot wildflower puppets will dance, and 20-foot grass puppets will spring forth. The cast will then perform a roving pageant in which Gaia, the earth goddess, is kidnapped by developers in gargoyle masks.

"They will drive Gaia around in a pickup truck," said Felicia Young, the pageant's founder and director, and taunt us at various sites."

The lavishly costumed actors, accompanied by musicians, will visit some 50 gardens. Dramatic highlights include the birth, marriage and abduction of Gaia at 1 P.M. at La Plaza Cultural, at Ninth Street and Avenue C, and the flight of the butterfly angel, a huge sculpture by Steve Jones, at 3:30 at the corner of Sixth Street and Avenue B. At 4 P.M., at the Parque de Tranquilidad, on Fourth Street between Avenues C and D, will be the "Waking of the Butterfly Children," featuring dozens of costumed youngsters. At 4:30, the floral good guys will stage a mock battle with the developers in the field across the street.

"People throw flour, so it looks like smoke and mayhem," Ms. Young said. "It's been compared to 'Braveheart.'" But it's far less violent: the developers will be turned into butterflies, and Gaia will be freed. So will some real creatures: at 6 P.M., in the Green Oasis Garden on Eighth Street between Avenues C and D, the cast will release 50 butterflies.

"Rites of Spring," Sunday from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. on the Lower East Side. Rain date: Monday. Free. Information: (212) 777-7969.



Christopher Butt

A pageant to save gardens: Don Balcazo as the Spirit of Spring.

Fun in Store

Children who have grown fond of R2-D2 and C-3PO, the "Star Wars" androids, can now embrace another steel robot with a heart of gold: RH34. He's the blue robot who introduces visitors to Macyland.

The 6,000-square-foot environment, which opens tomorrow at Macy's Herald Square, begins with a simulated train journey, followed by scenes of computer-controlled puppets representing everything from Beatrix Potter characters to ivy that sings "Tiptoe Through the Tulips With Me" to a huge orange cat.

"The idea is a little like 'Honey, I Shrunk the Kids,'" said Jean McFaddin, the store's senior vice president for public relations and events. "The cat is as big as we are."

Self-promotion underlies the fantasy: the animated scenes are all linked to celebrations the store sponsors annually, from the Flower Show to the Thanksgiving Day Parade. (Adults can press buttons to get the lowdown on each.) But from a child's viewpoint, the environment is pure fun. The highlights include a make-believe candy factory, a laser theater and a parade command center. One big attraction is the fireworks

station, where children can use a computer to create their own Fourth of July display, complete with sound. Or they can push buttons on huge rockets to get the same effect.

"I hope people not only learn something, but have a blast," Ms. McFaddin said. "Literally."

Macyland, through Sept. 7 at Macy's, Broadway and 34th Street, (212) 494-5247. Hours: Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 A.M. to 5 P.M.; Saturdays, 10 A.M. to 6 P.M.; Sundays, 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. Tickets: adults, \$2; children 2 to 12, \$1; under 2, free.

Give Them a Hand

Punch, of Punch and Judy fame, has never had much respect for his wife, or anyone else. And these days, he doesn't get much, either. In an era of life-size Muppets and mechanical dinosaurs, lowly hand puppets are often dismissed as preschool toys. But Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater is determined to bring them renewed esteem with its first annual Hand Puppet Festival.

"It's nice to remind people how usable hand puppetry is to make up stories," said Michael Romanyshyn, the theater's executive director.

Punch, who is English, and Kaspar, who is German, are among the international characters in the festival, which offers 75-minute children's matinees. This weekend and next, the matinee will include "Metropolis," by Great Small Works, in which Kaspar and his wife battle an extortionist who is trying to shut off the New York water supply.

"Little Red Riding Hood," a one-woman show by Liz Joyce, will be part of the same matinee this weekend. Next weekend will feature Bernice Silver's Puppet Theater in "Hootenanny," a sing-along.

The evening performances are for adults, although some are suitable for the whole family, like "Punch and Judy," by Amy Trompetter.

"It's a Russian-style staging," Mr. Romanyshyn said. "She wears two skirts, and one of them flips up to become the stage."

Hand Puppet Festival, through May 31 at the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk Street (between Rivington and Delancey), Lower East Side, (212) 260-4080, extension 14. Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 P.M.; matinees, Saturdays and Sundays at 3 P.M. Tickets: adults, \$10; children, \$6.

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES **METRO** TUESDAY, MAY 27, 1997



Frances Roberts for The New York Times

Celebrating the Delights of the Garden

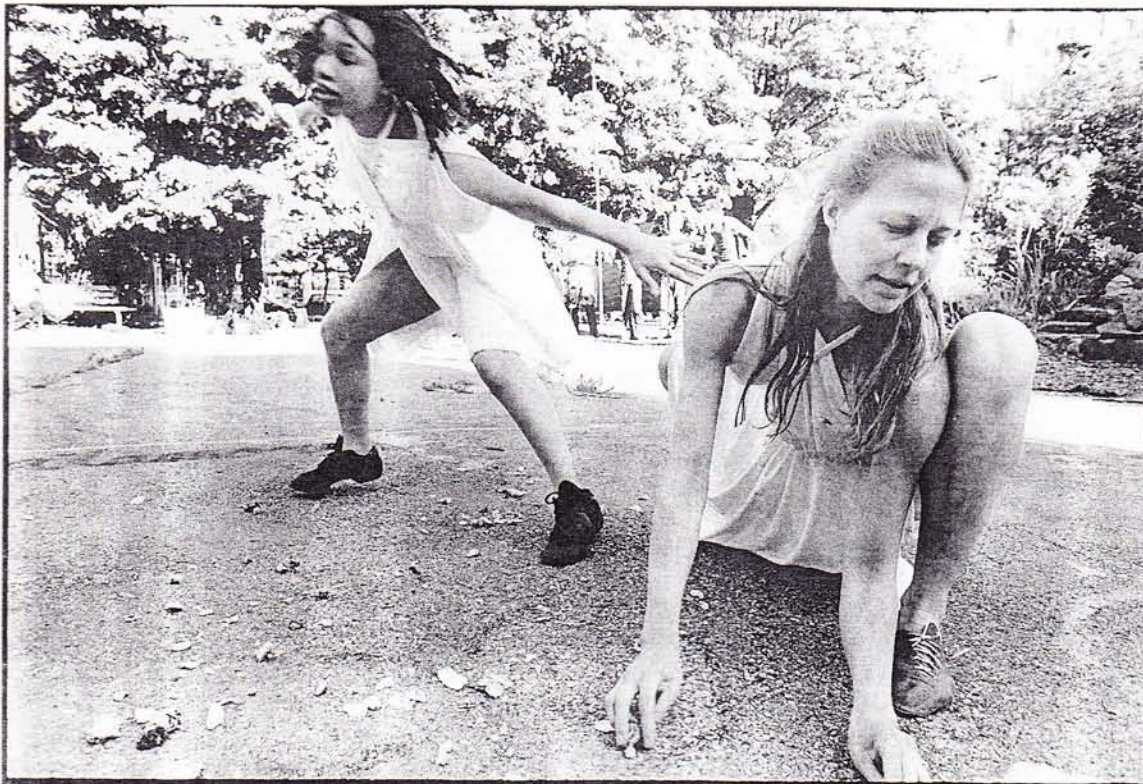
Elizabeth Perry, left, puts makeup on Chris West for yesterday's pageant, "Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens." Sponsored by Earth Celebra-

tions, a nonprofit organization dedicated to environmental issues, the all-day pageant featured visits to more than 25 gardens in Manhattan.

UNMAKING MYTHS

the village VOICE FREE

IN THE EAST VILLAGE, SPACE FOR PUBLIC ART FALLS TO DEVELOPERS



Persephone (Safiya Martinez) and Demeter (Felicia Norton) dance at La Plaza Cultural garden on Avenue C.

By Robin Shulman

From Tamar Rogoff's balcony, you can chart the gardens of Loaisaida, low and green.

You might see figures pressed against a garden fence, egging on or trying to stop a kidnapping. Rogoff's new site-specific performance, *Demeter's Daughter*, remakes the Greek myth of the seasons, in which Hades, god of the underworld, abducts the goddess Demeter's child, Persephone. As Demeter mourns, the world goes cold. She tries to rescue her daughter, but Persephone has eaten Hades's pomegranate seed, so must remain with him part of each year. When Demeter reunites with Persephone, the earth warms and plants grow; winter comes when the girl returns to Hades.

In Rogoff's version, Demeter's a professional dancer whose summer paradise is two community gardens, and Persephone's a Loaisaida kid forced to wife Hades in his tenement-roof "underworld." Local elders tell the story, herding audiences of 150 through four East 9th Street locations, from the willow trees of La Plaza Cultural to the vast flower garden across the street, to a basketball court, to the steps of Charas/El Bohio, an 18-year-old arts center. After years of protest, all of these city-owned community spaces are threatened with sale; this could be their last summer to harbor art.

Myth, public performance, and contests over the imminent sale of land are almost routine on the Lower East Side, but new changes threaten the community. Since the 1840s Loaisaida has been an entry point for poor immigrant families; now middle-class migrants are displacing them. For 20 years empty lots sprouted gardens and vacant buildings became cultural centers; now market-rate housing replaces them. Rogoff says her piece is about "rebirth and rebuilding. Seasons. Things coming into their own at different times." Her *Demeter* celebrates compromise, but in real life a joint-custody arrangement with your daughter's kidnapper can hurt.

A long-standing cross-subsidy plan to split the Lower East Side's 500 foreclosed properties between low-income and market-rate housing development recently entered its market-rate phase; as well, Giuliani instituted a policy of selling city-owned land. The city is auctioning arts centers and gardens indiscriminately, says Felicia Young, who directs Earth Celebrations, a

local arts-and-environment group. Residents are considering a class-action suit to stop the sales, she adds.

Public space in the East Village was hewed by residents from the abandonment of the '70s. Arson left vacant lots gaping like missing teeth in the tenement blocks. The lots were replete with "illegal dumping, dead bodies, prostitutes," says Young. Ignored by the city, residents organized. "Poor people just said, Look, we're sick of living in a dump; we're gonna plant our trees, our gardens," Young recalls. Ironically, self-improvement may have sown the seeds of community destruction, attracting outsiders whose capacity to pay higher rents priced out low-income residents. According to Rogoff, "People want uplift but they don't want to lose their own homes or sense of community. They don't want their culture to be overrun." Longtime residents are now losing not only their homes, but the areas where community history resides.

JUNKIES, ACTIVISTS, LATINO FAMILIES, elderly East Europeans, young whites, squatters, the homeless, and artists have jumbled on the streets over the years, drawn by music and dance, coffee, beer and drugs, dominoes and gossip and romance. Many refer to the street scene as theater in itself. East Village housing is mostly high-density tenements, Young notes, so "it's not about enclosing yourself in your apartment. People are really dependent on each other; because they don't have money, they barter things." More-affluent residents attract businesses that displace loiterers and trade the an-

archic tenor of the streets for a consumer pace.

Performance artist Penny Arcade, who recently composed a *Lament for the Lower East Side*, says the "tremendous wilderness of creativity" has been increasingly tamed as Giuliani's police exert tighter control. But Esther García-Cartagena, executive director of the 15-year-old community group Loaisaida, Inc., recalls "a lot of abuses in the past. Everybody came to the Lower East Side to do petty crimes and to shoot drugs. I don't think that was a good thing."

Stephen Shapiro, who teaches a class on art and gentrification at the New School, believes "we could recognize public performance as constituent in keeping the city safe."

Rogoff, who's lived 21 years on Avenue C, did not push politics in *Demeter*. As her daughter left for college, she wanted to tell the story of a mother's relationship with a child coming of age, and "to fill my life in the next years with this piece, this community, with many, many Persephones." Her production dances straight into contested space: La Plaza Cultural, founded in 1976, has battled for preservation since the mid '80s. Both the members of the Girls' Club that plans to build on the site and Carolyn Ratcliffe, a tireless garden advocate who'd like the club established elsewhere, are part of Rogoff's cast of 46. "There's something powerful here and it must be respected," says Rogoff. She wanted the voices of the neighborhood to be heard, and hopes "people will listen who wouldn't ordinarily be listening."

IN THE MIDDLE OF A DEMETER rehearsal, Felicia Young's Rites of Spring procession careens down 9th Street: drummers, five-foot puppets, and mud people. This pageant, too, retells myth through Greek spirits and Plaza Cultural kidnappings. The evil developer, Uncle Sam decorated with dollar bills, abducts the earth goddess Gaia. Since 1991, celebrants have paraded from garden to garden, enacting the struggle for her retrieval. The issues have become increasingly critical; Young learned that the gardens were in the land review process in 1994. "It goes beyond art for art's sake," says Young, who sees the pageant as "joyous resistance. It was an experiment: can you be politically effective not only non-aggressively but positively. . . . People who shy away from politics wanted to be involved in the fun. When we needed to mobilize for direct political action, all it took was a phone call."

Young's annual Rites of Spring coincides with Loaisaida Day, organized by García-Cartagena as a Latino festival of community pride. It has taken place for the past 12 years on Avenue C, once the central artery of the shrinking Puerto Rican neighborhood. A singer repeating "Yo soy puertorriqueño" attracts a cheering audience, but the biggest draws are bodybuilders and wrestlers. Until 1995 the avenue hosted Sunday street peddlers, but the Giuliani administration shut them down.

Restrictions on such community assemblies represent "the loss of a right to the city," Shapiro says. "Cultural production takes place in smaller and smaller spaces, more and more tightly controlled. To do something you need cash up front. That wasn't true when we had the [Tompkins Square Park] bandshell." Following police riots in the park sparked by protesters of curfews and gentrification, and an increasingly unruly homeless encampment, the city destroyed the bandshell and began park superpolicing that continues to date.

The Lower East Side has told its history in its bandshell, its gardens, its cultural centers. But now vital community centers are giving way to the housing and shopping needs of newcomers. City policies disarm a neighborhood still organized around its own myths. **V**

Free performances of *Demeter's Daughter* take place Thursday through Saturday until June 28, beginning at 6 p.m. For information call 718-387-4195.

Time Out

New York

The complete weekly guide

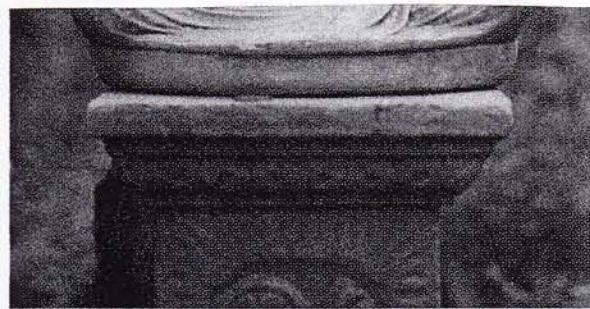
May 22-29, 1996
Issue 35



Alphabet pretty

East Village gardens bloom in the annual Rites of Spring parade **By Robert Kolker**

Sprout, sprout, let it all out: clockwise from left, the 6th Street and Avenue B Garden, El Sol Brillante on 12th Street, Green Oasis Community Gardens on 8th Street and the 9th Street Community Garden.



Turtle ponds. Weeping willows. Zen rock gardens. Grape arbors. Miniature native woodland forests. These are a few of our favorite things—but only when we don't need a train to get to them.

Some of New York's prettiest and most accessible warm-weather oases can actually be found in the East Village, where about 50 abandoned lots and alleys have benefited from urban decay in the most unusual way. Over the past two decades, neighbors have secured temporary leases from the city, cleared out rubble and crack vials and created exquisitely landscaped gardens. They sell memberships, collect dues and cultivate plots; artists paint murals and donate sculptures; children come to play and theater groups perform. Some smaller gardens serve as *casitas*, Dominican and Puerto Rican miniature houses for lounging in. The larger gardens have trees that tower over nearby tenements.

The Rites of Spring street pageant, the neighborhood's annual tribute to the gardens (scheduled for Sunday, May 26), doubles as a protest against the city's plans to turn over some of the lots for housing. Dressed as Garden Spirits, Mud People and other faux-mythological characters, marchers visit 25 gardens during a ten-hour pilgrimage; Brazilian, African and Dominican bands accompany them. Some members of the pageant act out the saga of Gaia, a white-garbed spirit representing the earth, who is kidnapped by "developer" figures wearing gargoyle masks, toting cellular phones and gripping wads of cash. The symbolism may be heavy-handed, but after six years, the parade's message has taken root. "Instead of art as entertainment," says organizer Felicia Young, "it's art as experience and sacrifice and duty to the cause."

Whether or not the protesters win the struggle, one thing is for sure: The parade is the one day of the year on which the gardeners won't pray for rain. Here's a peek at what some 5,000 East Villagers are marching about—with tips on how to visit these gardens all summer long.

The sixth annual Rites of Spring Pageant starts at 10am on Sunday, May 26. See Around Town for details.

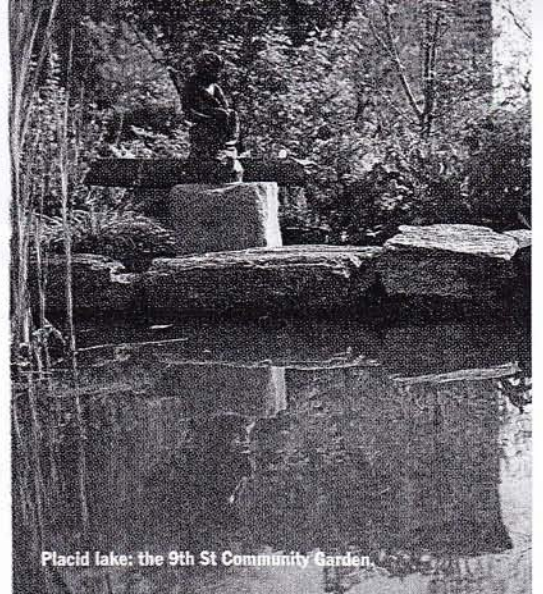
The 6th Street and Avenue B Garden 6th St at Ave B. Wed 6–8pm, Sat 2–4pm. "I wanted to do a Zen thing there," says Karen Kuehn, who placed a stone Buddha in her 4-by-8-foot section of the 6th and B Garden. "Now I see people praying in front of it. People always leave money in it and take pictures." The contributions go to artist Eddie Boros, who buys batteries for a booming radio that sits at the top of the garden's towering, 20-foot junk sculpture. The structure lends an urbane, industrial touch to the 14-year-old floral preserve, which has 100 members. During the summer months, the garden hosts nearly 100 neighborhood events, from children's activities to fund-raisers for nonprofit groups.

The 6BC Botanical Garden 6th St between Aves B and C. Wed 6pm–dusk, Sun 1–4pm. The city may own the land, but it took a team of Alphabet City neighbors to transform it into a botanical garden, complete with legal nonprofit status and ornate landscaping. 6BC has three ponds, curved pathways beneath a hanging grape arbor, a solar-powered waterfall, a rock garden and even six tiny trees, the beginnings of a native woodland forest. The 45 charter members have taken the native theme to heart, keeping out any signs of modern life. "We're trying to make it pre-European," says organizer Diana Signe Kline. "It's a beautiful sanctuary." The latest planned addition is a gazebo made from hand-cut wood.

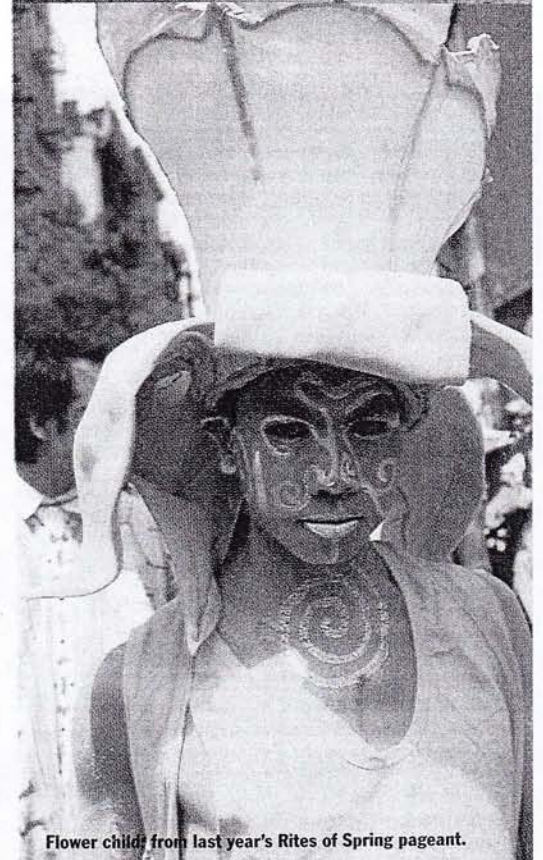
The 9th Street Community Garden 9th St at Ave C. Sat, Sun 10am–5pm. One of the nabe's larger, more established gardens is also one of its most well-used—thanks to an old-fashioned veranda suitable for midday siestas. "It's ten degrees cooler here under the trees in the summertime," says gardener Ninette Kiddon. "There's more color in our garden because of the lushness of the plants. It startles visitors and thrills them." Due to its size, the lot is an obvious target for development. "Of course the city is entitled to do what it needs to do, and there are priorities," she admits. "But there are intangible reasons to have a garden."

El Sol Brillante 12th St between Aves A and B. Hours vary. Roses planted in the '70s still bloom each June in this lot, which used to contain nothing but burnt-out buildings. "We still uncover lots of bricks," says gardener Karen Burdick. "I think there's an iron object in my flowerbed." Today, El Sol Brillante is immune from development because the gardeners bought the 4,000-square-foot property from the city in 1980. They paid just \$6,500 (with help from the nonprofit Trust for Public Land), but they have to maintain it as open space. The garden is the site of quite a bit of cultural cross-pollination. "You have people from Puerto Rico who are growing tulips for the first time," Burdick says, "and people from Wisconsin who are growing cilantro."

Green Oasis Community Gardens 8th St between Aves C and D. Hours vary. Each year at the close of the Rites of Spring pageant, local children release 50 live butterflies at Green Oasis; the gardeners grow butterfly-friendly flowers to ensure they'll stick around. The rest of the year, neighbors use the 15-year-old garden's amphitheater for performances, weddings and anniversaries. "We have marble pathways throughout the garden, so it's handicapped-accessible," says Seur Rodney Seur, self-appointed garden archivist. The recent cancellation of one garden activity should make the place even more welcoming. "We had beehives for a while, for honey," Seur recalls, "but the queen died or escaped, so we don't do the bee thing anymore." ■



Placid lake: the 9th St Community Garden



Flower child: from last year's Rites of Spring pageant.



Field day: a Green Oasis moment.

January 30, 1996 ♦ Vol. XLI No. 5 ♦

SPACES

Ice Jam



RACHEL ELKIND

See this Water spirit turn to Ice.

The delights of winter and the coming light of spring would be reason enough to join in the Winter Candle Lantern Pageant, a luminous bacchanal celebrating the community gardens of the Lower East Side. But this year's pageant has an added agenda: to raise support for six gardens now slated to be razed for market-rate housing—part of a long-

standing development plan devised by the city and Community Board 3 that threatens virtually all of the neighborhood's 40-odd gardens.

A major land battle is brewing, and the gardeners are mustering the forces of nature on their side. Over 40 glittering snowflake sprites, giant puppeteers, a Uruguayan candombe band, costumed lantern-bearers and torch-throwers, and a dancing bell chorus will cavort around Tompkins Square Park. The procession winds its way to the 6th Street and Avenue B Garden for a bonfire spectacle featuring soundscapes by Karthik Swaminathan, a swinging trapeze artist, and an illuminated "winter angel" that will descend into the crowd bearing apples to seed support for these imperiled oases of green.

The event is B.Y.O.B—bring your own bells—and volunteers are welcome.

—SARAH FERGUSON
"LET THE GARDENS LIVE!"

Winter Pageant, Saturday at 7 p.m., 638 East 6th Street. Call Earth Celebrations at 777-7969 to participate.

PARABOLA

MYTH. TRADITION. AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING



Rites of Spring participant

The Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens

Since 1991, Earth Celebrations has been working with the people of New York City's Lower East Side to celebrate and preserve a network of over fifty magnificent community gardens, created out of rubble-strewn vacant lots. On May 26, their sixth annual Rites of Spring pageant will take place. The pageant is as much process as a theatrical participatory performance—an innovative forum for artists to communicate beyond museums and galleries, creating art that brings together the culturally diverse community of the Lower East Side.

The pageant itself is a ten-hour pilgrimage throughout the community gardens, during which a drama centering around the Earth spirit Gaia is enacted. Participants include people of all ages and backgrounds, artists, musicians and gardeners. They create their own costumes, becoming nature spirits, mudpeople, or evil developers. At the culmination of the pageant, sixty live butterflies are released at the Green Oasis Garden.

'Earth Celebrations Pageant'

Lower East Side Gardens

Various Locations

Manhattan

(212) 727-8283

Recommended for all ages

Sunday

Residents of the Lower East Side and the East Village have reason to boast: they have tilled 50 community gardens in their neighborhood, each with its own "I am who I am" personality. Every spring, the people who transformed these formerly garbage-strewn lots hold a procession from garden to garden, with dance, poetry, theater and music rivaling the showiness of the flowers and trees. This year, the gardeners are also protesting plans by the city to develop some of these sites.

It all begins at 10 A.M. at the Forsyth Street Garden Club (between Broome and Delancey Streets) and wends its way slowly to the end by 6 P.M., at the Green Oasis Garden (Eighth Street between Avenues C and D). There, 50 live painted-lady butterflies will be released.

"RITES OF SPRING: PROCESSION TO SAVE OUR GARDENS." An eight-hour event through the streets of the Lower East Side, past more than 50 neighborhood gardens, with music, dance, puppets and poetry.

Begins at 10 A.M. at the Garden of Eden memorial, Forsyth and Delancey Streets. Sponsored by Earth Day Celebrations. Information: (212) 727-8283.

Some of the pageant highlights for children include a make-believe giant iridescent butterfly soaring from a six-story building, across the street from the Tree of Life Garden at Sixth Street and Avenue B (at about 3 P.M.); and, at about 4 P.M., a battle between a dragon (developers) and a butterfly (the gardens) at El Jardin Paraiso on Fourth Street between Avenues C and D.

If you just want to see the gardens on your own, you can obtain a list by calling the number above; or travel the blocks from Forsyth Street, between Stanton and Rivington Streets, north to 12th Street.

The Tree of Life Garden has a tot-size carousel and a three-story sculpture made of junk, an unforgettable sight. The Ninth Street Garden, at Avenue C, is roomy, with a gazebo, an arbor and a willow tree. At the Green Oasis Garden, birch trees hang over a recently rebuilt turtle pond.

Precarious Jewels Among the Ruins

The Community Gardens of the Lower East Side

By Elizabeth Kemler

The myriad community gardens of the Lower East Side are not merely pleasant to look at — offering inhalations-worth of floral scents for passersby — they are the evolving expressions of a community committed to the restoration of natural beauty and cultural integrity to the neighborhood. Once garbage-strewn empty lots, they are now treasure troves of weeping willows, flowers, vegetable gardens and artwork. From within the tender folds of this fractious, disconsolate society have emerged such collaborative creations as the masterfully-crafted, sky-high community garbage sculpture shadowing the sidewalk in front of the 6th and B garden.

The average city resident lives in relative complacency, having long been subjected to the proliferation of the hard-drug culture making its presence known on the corners and in the crevices of nearly every local block. This necessitates the sort of large-scale changes the gardens address using a variety of cultural and arts programs, performances, art exhibitions, educational workshops, video documentaries, and community assistance projects.

Proponents of the effort towards social and environmental change, Earth Celebrations was founded in 1990 as a non-profit organization devoted to the education of communities on issues of environmental and social relevance. Earth Celebrations is one of many forces inspiring the evolution of gardens. The efforts of founder, festival artist, and community organizer Felicia Young have gone a long way toward increasing local awareness of urban ecology, and designating community members to further essential progress and preservation. Some of her projects include Ecofest in 1989; the Festival to Save McCarren Pool in Greenpoint, Brooklyn in 1990; and most recently,

the creation of The Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens — four years old this May. Young is the voice of a community rife with artistic ingenuity, enmeshed in a diverse cultural history, and it is with her organizational ability and artistic inspiration, along with the help of numerous volunteer organizers and assistants, that that voice has come to be heard. In a recent interview she said: "The gardens are a place where people who would otherwise have no reason to, now come together to create an ecotopia. An urban improvisation that could be used as a model for urban planning in the future."

Art that serves ecology, community and social awareness, is the intent, and has been the function of such projects as Earth Celebrations' annual Rites of Spring pageant. The pageant is filled with giant puppets, mobile structures and costumed characters, spread throughout the sixty local gardens over the course of twelve hours — with theater, ceremonies, and mythic dramas offered at each.

Much to the dismay of community members, however, the Rites of Spring celebration has taken on greater implications as the threat to the life of the gardens grows. Since its inception in 1991 the festival has attracted wide media coverage, eventually encouraging the support of Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messenger. She announced at last year's festival her investment for the permanent preservation of the El Jardin Paradiso garden on East Fourth Street with funds for the Trust for Public Land.

In an effort to raise money for the production of the festival and raise awareness of the gardens' plight, Earth Celebrations sponsored a benefit dance party in a loft space donated by the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting. As would be expected at such an affair, the mood was festive, with music and

costumed dancers filling with room. The attendance was as impressive as it was diverse, bringing in an unprecedented six thousand dollars for the cause. When asked what drew him to the event, one village resident offered: "We are surrounded by harshness in this city, the gardens are a vital means of relief which must be preserved."

(That sentiment will take on cinematic proportions this summer with the Green Oasis project, a documentary film depicting the role the gardens have played in the community, with specific attention given to the Rites of Spring festival and the debate over use of public lands.)

Though the work of Earth Celebrations and local members has inspired these efforts on behalf of the gardens, the fact remains that the city is able to revoke the leases of any one of the gardens — for subsequent development — with no more than thirty days notice. As the leases are renewed on a yearly basis, the gardens exist under the persistent threat of destruction.

These local oases serve as necessary respites from an often oppressive urban environment. They have the potential to divert children away from the consistent temptation and influence of drugs and crime, improve the quality of life for local citizens, and perhaps eventually bring about by example a city-wide movement towards rehabilitation. These larger ideals, however, do not seem as great a concern as does the potential profit to be made by the sales of city-owned land. Such was the case when the garden that once embellished a decrepit Forsyth Street was demolished in favor of a 180-unit housing project.

As I amble past the flowers reaching their blooming heads towards the fence around Avenue D's "Green

Oasis" — one of many gardens which could soon become jewels of the past — I wonder whether we will ever close the chasm in our society's consciousness through which such beauty has been allowed to slip.

If you would like to become involved in one of Earth Celebrations' projects, or would just like more information on garden activities, Felicia Young encourages people to contact her. Her number is (212) 727-8283. Elizabeth Kemler is Assistant Producer of *On the Line* on WNYC radio and an environmental activist. ■

Ingrid's Flight, continued from page 7

speaking out for the animals because I knew there were many other kind and caring people out there like the ones I had recently met. There was hope for change and I knew I had to reach out to them for the animals.

Long ago, a flyer such as the one I give out now changed my respect for the animals. Now I think often that it could happen again and change another person's life for the better. We owe it to the animals to be their voice and stop the victimization that goes on every day, no matter if it's called a cat, or a dog, or bird. I believe most people are ready for that change and can live an unselfish, non-violent lifestyle. If we can begin to do that, we'll realize how desperately the animals need us and how desperately we need them to live peaceful and harmonious lives. As long as we have hope and believe in the power of prayer, then miracles, as I found out, will happen. ■

MANHATTAN
SPORTS FINAL

New York Newsday

EDITION

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 1993 • MANHATTAN • 35 CENTS

W E E K E N D

rites of Spring: PROCESSION TO SAVE OUR GARDENS. More than 500 artists and gardeners celebrate the network of 60 gardens on the Lower East Side with an eight-hour pageant on Sunday, Garden of Eden memorial commemoration, 11 a.m., Forsyth Street between Rivington and Stanton Streets, The Taming of the Trash Monster and the Birth of Gaia, 1:30 p.m., La Plaza Cultural, southwest corner of Ninth Street and Avenue C, Garden Party Dream, 2 p.m., northeast corner of Ninth Street and Avenue C garden, Tree of Life ceremony, 3 p.m., southwest corner of Sixth Street and Avenue B garden, Pastoral Dream Play, 4 p.m., Parque de Tranquilidad, south side Fourth Street between Avenue C and D, Maypole Dance and Enchanted Garden Play, 6 p.m., Green Oasis Garden, south side Eighth Street between C and D Avenues, Earth Celebrations, free admission, (212) 727-8283.

CHEAP THRILLS

THE WEEK'S EVENTS
FROM FREE TO \$2.50

the village VOICE

May 26, 1992



VINCE ENG

Rites of Spring: Garden Party (see Sunday)

SUNDAY 24

● **'Procession To Save Our Gardens':**
2nd annual Rites of Spring Fest fea over 200 artists, gardeners & local community members in ritual pageant to celeb network of over 50 gardens on Lower East Side, throughout the day, a parade of giant puppets, accompanied by the Loisaída Samba Band, will visit 30 garden sites along the route + perfs, multimedia spectacles, & ceremonial rituals celeb the histories of gardens, participants for parade needed. Parade starts at 9th St & Av C Garden, northeast corner, call for times, locations, & performances: 431-0241, 1:30-6 p.m., free.



Gardens of earthly delights and more coming to the Lower East Side on Sunday, May 30.

ART

Garden Party

GARDENERS AND ARTISTS share a creative kinship, and on Sunday, May 30 the two groups will join forces in Earth Celebration's third annual *Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens*, directed by festival artist Felicia Young.

It will not be your usual garden party.

The participants' creative splendor will be unveiled in the form of a procession of giant puppets, costumed garden spirits and mudpeople accompanied by a mobile-multi-cultural musical collage of conch shells, homemade instruments, and Brazilian and African drums. Community gardeners will offer flowers to Gaia/earth goddesses

along the route in exchange for a lily bulb.

Over 500 local community members will participate in the eight-hour event, geared to celebrate the 60 gardens in the Lower East Side. Many of the gardens in the area are tucked between city buildings and were once garbage-strewn lots.

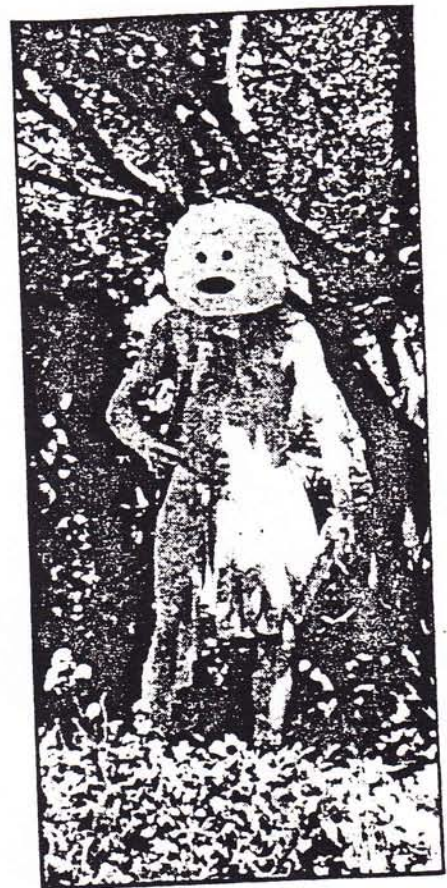
Earth Celebrations is a non-profit organization set up to help communities address environmental issues through the production of festivals and various events. The kick-off event, **The Garden of Eden Memorial**, will begin at 11 a.m. on Forsyth St. between Rivington and Stanton. Call Young at 727-8283 for more information.

The Villager

Serving Greenwich Village, Soho, Tribeca and Lower Manhattan

The Villager Event

Nearly a hundred people paraded through more than 25 gardens in the East Village and the Lower East Side last Sunday in the third annual "Rites of Spring Procession to Save our Gardens." Marchers blessed gardens and performed pageants as they went. One marcher, top left, smiled through sunglasses as the parade passed through El Sol Brillante. Creative Little Garden and many more gardens. Another face in the crowd, top right, beamed from atop a costume towering above the crowd. Magdalena Licata, at right, helped carry a statue of Gaia, the goddess of the earth. Scott Duffy, lower left, looked on at the Garden of Eden Memorial Ceremony at Forsyth St. between Stanton and Rivington Sts. where Felicia Young left a purple footprint behind in a ceremony paying tribute to Adam Purple's now gone garden. At the Liz Christy Garden, Larry Elman, bottom right, head of the Green Guerrillas, stood with the mask he donned for the procession. The event ended with a maypole dance at the Green Oasis Garden.



Photos by Brad Rickerby





Village Voice
5/15/93

Villager photo by Brad Rickerby

HISTORY LESSON; Fairs and festivals turn streets turn into a stage for some, a gallery for others. On East Tenth St. recently, one young man helped paint a history of the Lower East Side's gardens. The panels were later bound together in book form.

E.C. - FOST. 5/15/93

FROM YOUR GARDEN'S HISTORY

The
Villager



Since 1933

By Holly Gates

JOINT EFFORTS

Young and old are finding common ground sowing seeds—and goodwill—on once-vacant lots.

Americans are getting their hands dirty like never before as they join together to work on community gardens across the country. Besides being great places to meet other families and grow a mean zucchini, these patches of green teach our children, reconnect torn neighborhoods and repair broken lives. Below, a closer look at five exceptional gardening programs in different regions of the United States.

FOLLOW THE GREEN PARADE

Once a year on the streets of New York's Lower East Side, a goddess is born. With a crash of drums and a ripple of pink streamers, Gaia the Earth Goddess is ritualistically brought to life to bless the gardens—there are as many as 60—in this urban community.

It's all part of the annual Rites of Spring parade, created in 1991 by festival artist Felicia

Young in an effort to knit the neighborhood together and point up the importance of its green spaces. "As the East Village became a prime building location," she explains, "lots went up for sale, and I saw the gardens becoming endangered. The city's housing people were pitted against the garden people,

"The parade gets people involved who usually stay on the sidelines," says founder Felicia Young.

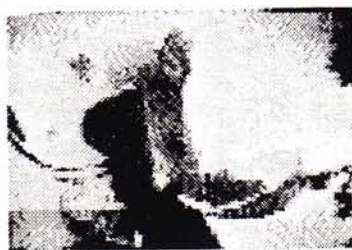
when they all should have been working together."

Young responded by dreaming up a fantastical procession, now held on Memorial Day weekend along with a local fair. The parade—focused around the statue of Gaia, borne on a bier—winds through the streets and stops off at every garden plot. In a symbolic ceremony, the gardeners remove tulip bulbs from Gaia's womb and offer her fresh flowers in return. "It's a spiritual transference," says Young.

Larry Elman of the Green Guerrillas, an association that has sponsored many New York City gardens, has been a participant in the parade, which includes giant puppets, several bands and costumed revelers. Elman's role to date: mud person. "I wore a huge paper mask, sneakers and a loin-cloth. Then I

slathered on clay and ran through the streets," he says. But this year he plans to keep his clothes on and man a Green Guerrilla information booth, instead. Young, who hopes eventually to expand the parade into a city-wide garden festival, will march in front, as usual, wearing a flowing white dress and carrying a clipboard.

*Earth Celebrations, 101 West 12th St., #15F, New York, NY 10011
212-727-8283*



SOME ST. LOUIS GARDENERS (TOP LEFT) PROUDLY DISPLAY THEIR GREENS. AS MANY AS 50 LOCAL ARTISTS DESIGN PUPPETS (RIGHT), GARDEN PLACARDS (BOTTOM), COSTUMES AND MORE FOR NEW YORK'S ANNUAL "RITES OF SPRING" PARADE. EVEN THE CITY'S GRIME CAN'T DIM THE BRILLIANCE OF A DAFFODIL (CENTER).

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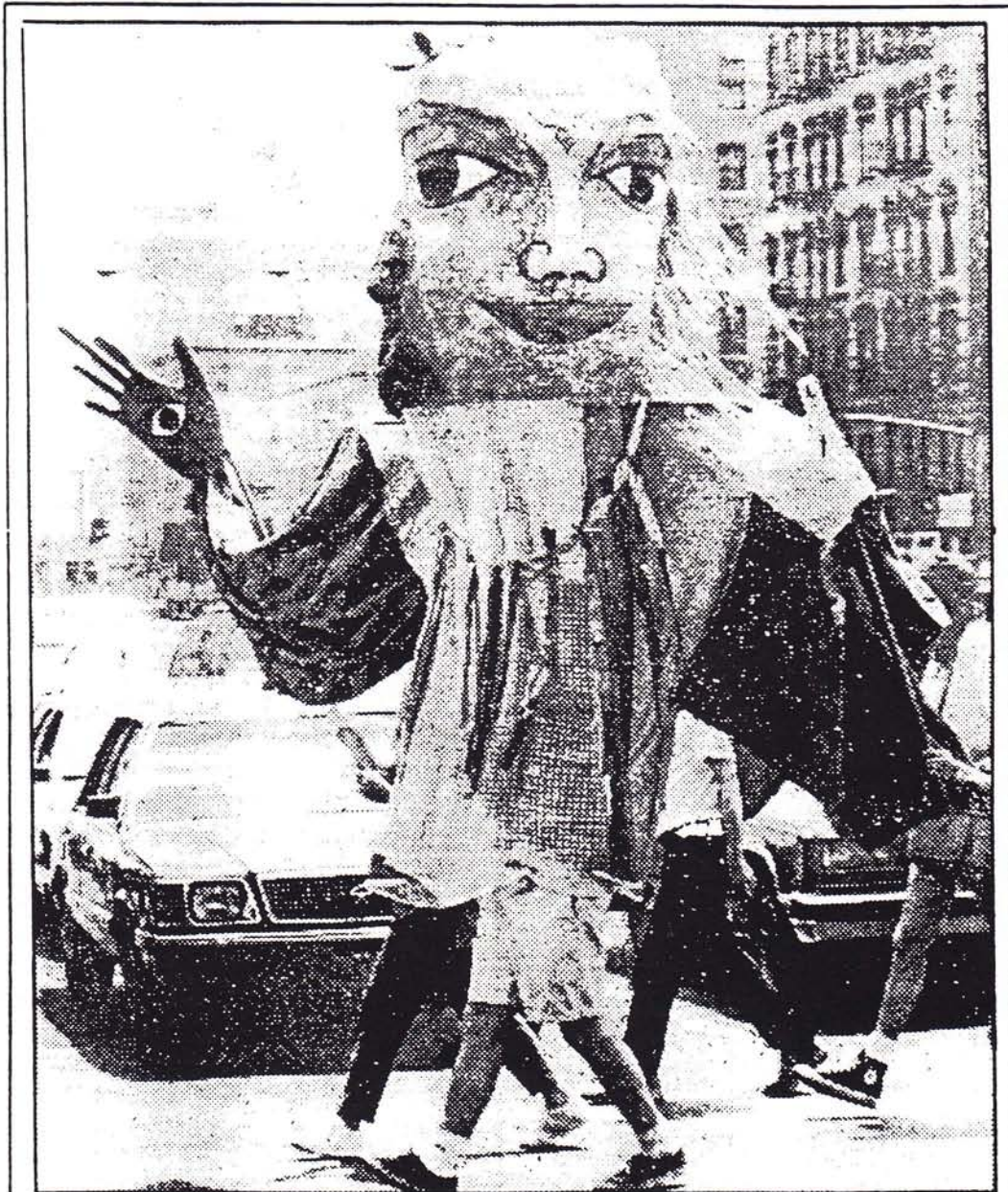
NEW YORK POST

LATE CITY FINAL

MONDAY, MAY 25, 1992

Clouds high in the mid 50s today; cloudy, low near 50 tonight ★★. Details Page 2

40¢ in New York City 50¢ elsewhere



New York Post: Charles Wenzelberg

SEEDY CHARACTER: It's not your garden-variety parade as one of many giant puppets crosses Delancey Street in a "Procession to Save Our Gardens" yesterday. Some 200 Lower East Siders collaborated to celebrate their network of 50 gardens and help protect them from development.

New York Newsday

EDITION

MONDAY, MAY 25, 1992 • 35 CENTS

10
NY



Earthly Delights

Puppets, processions and pageantry were the order of the day yesterday at the second annual Rites of Spring festival at some 20 garden sites clustered around Tompkins Square Park on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. At left, Julianne Swartz makes last-minute adjustments to her giant sculpture of Gaia, Earth goddess. Below, a number of participants in the parade congregate on Forsyth Street. After the colorful parade got under way, Shook Fen Huang (7, above) looked on in wonderment. The procession to save our gardens is a collaboration of more than 200 artists, gardeners and local community members dedicated to preserving urban oases they created on the sites of garbage-strewn vacant lots.



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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98 ★ ★ ★

EASTERN EDITION

MONDAY, MAY 20, 1991

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Love a Parade? Group in New York Plans a Strange One

* * *

Earth Goddess, Mud People Prepare to Honor Gardens On the Lower East Side

By LOURDES Lee VALERIANO

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK—Even by New York City's free-wheeling standards, a parade next weekend may rank among the more exotic of the 800 street spectacles that clog its streets annually.

Promoters have organized a seven-hour procession on Sunday, led by a towering Earth Goddess puppet prancing to the beat of a samba band, to celebrate more than 30 community gardens in Manhattan's Lower East Side, or Loissaida in "Spanglish."

The gardens are often green patches nurtured by residents out of rubble-strewn, city-owned lots in this poor, predominantly Hispanic community in southeastern Manhattan that's also a bohemian enclave. Three of the gardens, one more than 10 years old, may be sold to developers as the city strives to create housing.

Parade organizer Felicia Young, who calls herself "a festival artist," previously designed a procession for the Alternative Museum to celebrate the Mexican Day of the Dead. It featured a giant dancing skeleton and a 50-foot-long fabric that contained poetry from AIDS patients. While her plans for the Lower East Side parade aren't as macabre, they are no less bizarre. The 16-foot-tall Earth Goddess will be operated by three puppeteers, says

Marcia Altieri, who's making the puppet out of branches, vines and fabric. The goddess will walk ahead of a floral tower, which will be carried by eight bearers.

In keeping with the ecological theme, Ms. Young has enlisted the Mud People, a group with a predilection for wearing mud, loin cloths, vines and "urban trash" such as hubcaps and oven grills. Ms. Young says the Mud People eschew the term "performance art" but do what they do to get back to their primal roots.

The parade will visit 25 of the gardens, weaving past burned-out buildings, sidewalk cafes and art galleries to the beat of the Empire Loissaida Samba School. In "a ritual of exchange" made to the blare of the Conch Chorus, another Lower East Side group, Ms. Young says the Earth Goddess will swap a lily bulb for a flower clipping from every garden.

In a meeting of the fantastic with the prosaic, the procession also will join up with the Loissaida Carnival parade, a more traditional parade of local Girl Scouts, Little League softball teams and other youth groups. The meeting will occur on a garbage-strewn lot where director Steven Spielberg built and demolished a tenement four summers ago for a movie called "Batteries Not Included."

Ms. Young is scornful of such famous New York spectacles as the St. Patrick's Day parade on Fifth Avenue. "There's an alienating feel to it. People watch it as they watch television," she says.

But Joseph Sciorra, a folklorist who studies the city's parades, says the two spectacles have a lot more in common than Ms. Young thinks. The Lower East Side parade is "very much in keeping with city processions. It's a way to stake a claim on a certain geographic area," he says. "The St. Patrick's Day parade started out as a way a marginalized religious minority claimed space that was off limits to them."



THE NEW YORKER

WILD LIFE



Felicia Young, a festival artist who believes that gardens should be anything but secret, is organizing a pageant, called "Rites of Spring," to celebrate forty-one gardens that have been cultivated on vacant lots by residents of the Lower East Side. These gardens have been blossoming for years, most recently under the aegis of the city, but now they're threatened by various building plans. The pageant will include such works by neighborhood artists as "Esmerelda" (a fifteen-foot-tall water spirit wearing Mylar and blue tulle); and appearances by the Empire Loisaida Samba School ("Loisaida" is a local pronunciation of Lower East Side) and by people decorated with sprouts.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

The pageant will move among the gardens, which are located between 14th Street and Houston, from the Bowery to Avenue D, all day May 26 (starting at 11 A.M. at Houston and the Bowery). Along the way, paraders will stop for readings, a dramatization of the death of a Bureaucrat Beast, and tea. Several people clad in mud and little else will beat sticks and perhaps experience something primordial. Conch players will provide accompaniment—something like the sound of an irritable elephant. The event is likely to please everyone who, like Ms. Young, is inspired by the pageantry of the French Revolution, and everyone who wished Earth Day would never end. Ms. Young and her troops have strong feelings in favor of participatory art and against art as a commodity. (Ms. Young talks about her former job at Christie's in the way that other people discuss their memories of war.) Not surprisingly, her festival art, which she developed in Italy and India, and perfected in Brooklyn, has always been on the earnest side of good causes. But, Ms. Young said, to add a purely comic note to the festival "some of the performers will wear prom dresses." All those who wish to make banners, carry things, or act as a garden spirit (don some twigs, say, or donate cash) shouldn't hesitate to call her at 431-1399.



MAY 27, 1991

The New York Times

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NEW YORK, THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 1993

75 cents beyond 75 miles from New York

By ANNE RAVER

IT'S bizarre, when you think about it. That here we are on Earth, and there's hardly any earth left to garden on.

"I had to buy soil to put down here," Peter Nieves said last Sunday, standing on a piece of land as hard as concrete on the east side of Avenue C, between 9th and 10th streets, in the East Village.

He stared down at the little green shoots coming up. "I planted about 15 varieties of flowers," he said. "When they're big enough, I'll give them to people to put in their plots."

The earth didn't look like much, to tell the truth. It was hardly more than dust. But Mr. Nieves had placed red and yellow bricks around the space, in the shape of a heart.

And the lushness of the original garden that fronts Avenue C — full of trees and vegetables and roses — was testimony to his faith that one day this dusty little heart would burst into

bloom.

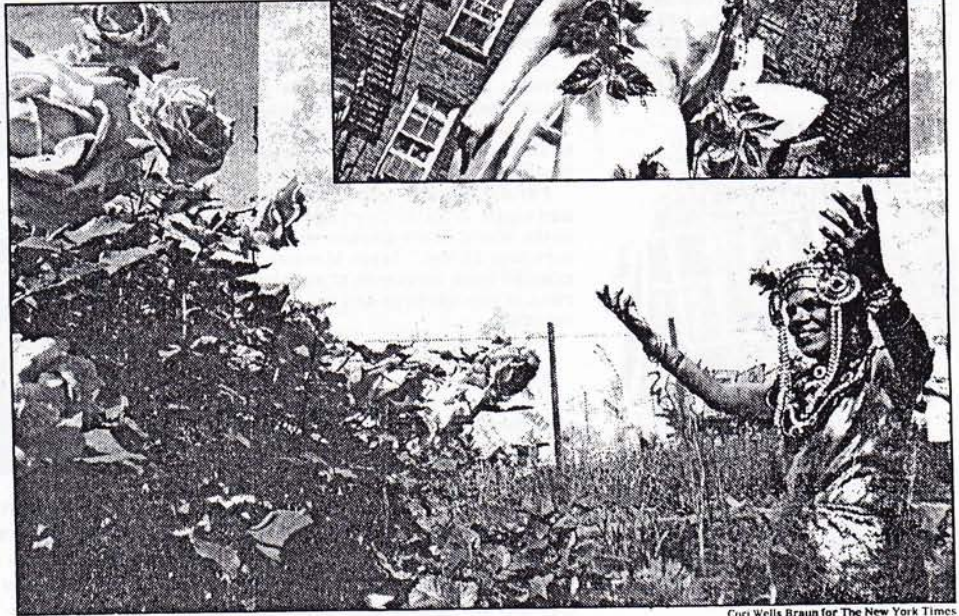
"We started that garden about 20 years ago when an old bar fell down," Mr. Nieves said with a dry little laugh. The ears of his straw donkey hat waved in the breeze as women in gauzy dresses with sequins on their faces drank peppermint tea (from leaves grown in the garden) under exotic parasols.

It was the third annual Rites of Spring Celebration: Procession to Save Our Gardens organized by Felicia Young, 27, a festival artist. For three years now, this parade of giant puppets and music and poetry has snaked its way through the 50 or so gardens of the Lower East Side and East Village, blessing the spirit of these scraps of earth and those who tend them, and vowing to keep them from being turned into housing.

The Mud People (who cover their nearly naked bodies with mud and their heads with round mud-caked masks that have nothing but dark

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The Nature Spirits Amid the Concrete



Curry Wells Braun for The New York Times

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holes for eyes) stared into the windows of abandoned buildings. They were like ghosts looking for something long forgotten. Their silence (they never speak) was deafening.

"I was out on the street when this building exploded," Mr. Nieves said, as the Trash Monster, a giant puppet head covered with tin cans, was being rolled by an old wheelchair. "But nobody was inside, nobody got killed," he added, waving his hands around the vast crater of space.

This too, could be a garden, he said. With about 20 truckloads of dirt. If the city doesn't decide to turn it into housing.

The African drums beat on. People blew into conchs, making a sound as old as Odysseus. Maidens dressed in white carried Gaia, the earth goddess, a gauzy creature with flower bulbs in her womb, on down Avenue C. The heady smell of incense wafted from a giant tube decorated with old tuna cans. It was held aloft by a man dressed in white sheets who chatted companionably with a young woman wearing a headdress laden with carrots.

This wasn't just a celebration of spring. It was a march of support for all the people who have to choose between two necessities — green space and shelter — when they should have a right to both. Most of these gardens, transformed from plots of rubble, are leased from the city from year to year — and the leases can be canceled on 30 days' notice. Some of the gardens are being considered for preservation, but the community boards will have to agree to give up a certain amount of low-income housing. What a choice.

"The machines ran right over the garden when they came through to demolish the building in back of us," said Lisa, a young artist. She wouldn't give her last name because she lives on the top floor of Umbrella House, the name she and fellow squatters have given the home they have made out of an abandoned building on Avenue C, between 2d and 3d streets.

Last summer, when the city demolished the building next door, the squatters planted a garden. This spring, it got crushed in the wake of more demolition. "So we started again a few weeks ago," Lisa said. Already, a little basil, a few marigolds, are growing. And someone has poured a little wading pool out of concrete and given it an old beach umbrella for shade. Lisa offered her

guests some ginger tea with the natural grace of the truly elegant.

These gardens are testimony to how tied people are to the earth. Even if they have to dig through rubble to get to it. Even if it gets covered up again and again. But walking through these streets, you see how little there is left. And how tenuous it is.

"At first the city told us we could have it for about five years, but now they want to do test borings for housing," said Sheree Kaslinkowski, who was tending her tomatoes at the ABC Jardín on 8th Street. At the beginning of last year, the site was just trash and the remains of a collapsed building. Then, Greenthumb, the city's garden agency, gave the gardeners a lease and sent soil and wheelbarrows.

"I was one of the three who came out and picked up the first cans," Ms. Kaslinkowski said. "And I made salsa from my tomatoes at the end of the summer." She told how a gardener from Haiti showed her how basil leaves could heal a sore.

As the plants grow, so does a com-

munity of many types of people. But it knits itself together, knowing it can be unraveled at any time.

"We sell old clothes to make money to buy plants," Carmen Maldonado said. She stood in the Jardín de los Amigos on 3d Street, between avenues B and C. Roses lead up to a casita decorated with a poster of Puerto Rico and window boxes filled with petunias. There are goldfish in a concrete pond and ivy growing up the headboard of an old wooden bedstead.

"We've tried to get a lease for about four years, but it's not easy," Mrs. Maldonado said. "We keep waiting for them to say, 'Get out!'"

Earlier in the day, the procession had wended its way down Forsyth Street and across the front of the 180-unit housing project that had buried Adam Purple's garden in 1986. Adam Purple, a squatter who liked to say he was from another planet, turned five garbage-filled lots into a garden of concentric circles that had everything from blackberries and 45 fruit trees to corn and a rare Chinese

empress tree. He had a vision of a garden large enough that travelers seeing it from outer space would think that planet Earth was a pretty nice place.

"I had a garden on the roof of my building a block below the Mayor's mansion," said Fred Baer, a poet in a long purple gown. "For 25 years, I brought up soil, one bag at a time, carefully and secretly. Until I had half an acre of flowers and trees and vegetables, bees and birds. People would come to their windows every morning to see what was blooming."

Then, he said, the building went co-op, and "they came up with 5,000 regulations, one of which was you couldn't even put a toothpick on the new roof."

Mr. Baer walked on, to the beat of the African drums. His purple robe flapped in the winds of spring. He hasn't started another garden. He couldn't stand going through the loss twice. But his laughter — thrown in the face of the shrinking earth — floated down Houston Street.

Participants in the Rites of Spring Celebration blessed the garden spirits that flourish in vacant lots and other patches of ground carved out of the East Village and Lower East Side.

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CITY

LOWER EAST SIDE JOURNAL

A Blessing for Gardens Where Green Is So Rare

By IAN FISHER

THE Spirit of Fire shook his staff at Joe Overstreet, who in turn smiled nervously in the small garden that he and friends had planted in a lot once overrun with bricks, garbage and drug dealers.

The ritual yesterday called for Mr. Overstreet, a 59-year-old painter, to hand over a rose, the first in bloom at his makeshift garden on the Lower East Side. But he had trouble concentrating amid the elaborate procession: a troupe of more than 30 artists

den yesterday — blessing each one with a tulip bulb, a handful of corn (tossed by the Spirit of Earth) and a call to protect these vulnerable gardens, all of them tended to by private citizens on city-owned land.

"I was amazed how people took lots with drugs and trash everywhere and transformed them," said Felicia Young, a 27-year-old graduate student who organized the procession. "I said, 'this is what needs to be celebrated.'"

Ms. Young calls herself a festival artist — and that in fact best describes her work, though it does not quite sum up her interests: ritual, the environment and producing art that breathes outside of stuffy galleries.

For the last three years she has had a part in Earth Day celebrations at the World Trade Center, which featured her 35-foot "Trash Monster," created from thousands of aluminum cans. It eats garbage and encourages recycling.

And the monster's head made an appearance yesterday in keeping with the theme of looking out for the environment — even on the Lower East Side, where there are few signs that an environment ever existed.

There were few signs of ecological life in 1979, when Mr. Overstreet and Corrine Jennings, a 49-year-old City University professor, began work on their garden on East Second Street between Avenues B and C. The vacant lot had long been a spot for drugs, abandoned cars and stoves.

"What moved us to do it was we found a young girl in the back here who had died, OD'd on drugs," Mr. Overstreet remembered. "We had to do something about the drug trafficking. So we put up a gate and started the garden."

Yesterday, the traveling festival began about 11 A.M. on Forsyth Street, just south of Delancey as



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

A procession yesterday honored more than 60 gardens that have blossomed amid vacant lots on the Lower East Side. The "Rites of Spring: Procession to Save our Gardens" consisted of a troupe of artists dressed as the four elements, an Earth Goddess, a pair of Mudpeople and two gatesmen bearing totem poles made of bleach bottles.

members of the processional readied themselves for the long march.

The group's first stop was at the former site of the Garden of Eden, the plot on Eldridge Street that was tended to for 10 years by a squatter named Adam Purple.

The main event took place at a vacant lot at East Ninth Street, and it included a dance with the Trash Monster

But the most elegant moment

came at the Ninth and C Community Garden, when one of the park's founders, 71-year-old Olean For, rose from her chair to give a speech she had prepared earlier. Then she decided against it.

"I just want to tell you the story," she said. "This is Earth Day to me. We all should all learn gardening because it's green, it's healthy, it's fresh air. When you come into a garden it feels like the spirit is here."

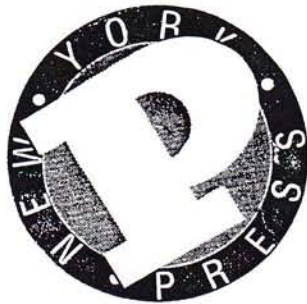


was on hand. There were people dressed as Earth, Air, Water and Fire, as well as an Earth Goddess, a pair of Mudpeople and two gatesmen bearing totem-like towers of recyclable bleach bottles.

"Bless our garden," he said. He added with a grin: "This is insane."

Maybe so, but the daylong procession was also serious: It honored the more than 60 gardens that have blossomed, like flowers through a cracked sidewalk, amid the vacant lots and crumbling buildings on the Lower East Side.

In a snaking, chanting, rhythmic march, the second annual "Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens" visited more than 30 of the gar-



By MARK ROSE

Secret Gardens. On Sunday, May 26, at 12:30 p.m., in a huge vacant lot between E. 8th and 9th Sts., between Aves. C and D, a symbolic pact will be struck among the local Hispanic community, other ethnic groups of Loisaida (14th St. to Houston, Ave. A to the river), and dozens of artists.

May 26 is the day Sister Mary Elizabeth Kelleher, a founder and organizer for Loisaida, has picked for the annual Loisaida Carnival festival on Ave. C. It is also the day that Felicia Young, an obsessive pageanteer with the Art & Ecology Group, has organized an art spectacle to wend its way through the extensive network of community gardens in the Lower East Side performing "pageantic rituals."

The convergence of the cultures, and a joining of common purpose, will be held on propitious turf, the vacant lot where Steven Spielberg built a mock building for the movie *Batteries Not Included*. After filming was completed Spielberg blew up the set. The lot is now a convenient dumping ground and the site of several homeless shelters.

The Loisaida Carnival will be on 9th St., including cheerleaders from the local school and a Little League team. On the 8th St. side will be The Procession To Save Our Gardens, featuring a giant Earth goddess, a 15-ft. floral tower, mudmen, flags, conch choruses and samba players.

After a mythological battle and victory performance—wherein the Bureaucrat Beast will be conquered by the community and the gardens—representatives from both processions will meet in the middle of the vacant lot and then continue together through the Loisaida Carnival.

This convergence will be the centerpiece of the day in which the Procession, starting at the Liz Christie Garden on Bowery and Houston at 11 a.m., will perform rituals, tell garden legends, and offer seeds and flowers at Lower East Side gardens, some of which are in danger of being lost to development.

One of these endangered gardens, at 9th St. and Ave. C, will host a Garden Party Dream, coordinated by Marie Claire Charba. The Dream, starting at 1:30 p.m., will be helped along by sun hats, peppermint tea, white tuxedos, pastel gowns and the recordings of chirping birds.

The Procession will end at 5 p.m., at the Green Oasis on 8th St. between Aves. C and D, with a community play, *The Enchanted Garden*.

Green Oasis is magnificent testimony to the reclaiming of abused, vacant land by the residents of Loisaida. Left open and unattended after several burned out tenements were torn down, this 165 x 98-ft. lot was used as a dumping ground and shooting gallery until it was rescued by Norman Vallee and Reinaldo Reina.

Through Operation Green Thumb, help from the city's volunteer corps and the tireless labor of Vallee, Reina (who died three years ago), and many local school children and adults, Green Oasis

has blossomed into one of the most beautiful, multi-purpose gardens in the neighborhood, an earth-bound alternative to the concrete blight of Loisaida; with trees, flowers, shrubs, lush plots of grass, a gazebo, Teatro Reina (a theater that has attracted up to 500 spectators), a fish pond with goldfish and a turtle, a sculpture garden, vegetable plots, a playground, space for the physically challenged to garden, workshops in theater production and other arts.

Kitty Sheppard has lived in Loisaida since 1962 and she has been with the 9th St. and Ave. C garden since 1980. She has scoured the neighborhood for bricks from dismantled tenements, carted them to the garden and helped construct a system of walkways throughout the space.

This garden is split into about 40 individual 12 x 12-ft. plots, some elaborately

On May 26, a parade, a carnival and an extended pageant will mark the convergence of Loisaida community gardeners and area artists. Fittingly, they'll all come together on the former site of a Steven Spielberg set.

sculpted with granite, marble, slate and brick found around the neighborhood. Each plot is different, an extension of the gardener's personality. A walk through the garden portends hope, opportunity, possibility, an alternative, a connection through the personalities rooted in the earth. Then, of course, there is the fresh air, the chirping of the birds, the remarkable richness and completeness of nature that seems so lost in the city. In this garden you will find cherry trees, weeping willows, pine trees, blackberry bushes, tulips, forsythia, bluejays, sparrows. For a time, even, you can find peace of mind.

At the far end there is a small covered stage built for get togethers, work parties, cookouts and "storytelling."

"Each garden has its own personality,"

Sheppard said.

It is expected that both the 9th St. and Ave. C gardens and La Plaza Cultural across the street will be lost to development.

The Lower East Side has more than 40 community gardens, with more than 500 neighborhood residents sowing nearly 20,000 square feet of once-vacant lots. Gardeners contend that it would be wiser to first develop the enormous amount of vacant land on the Lower East Side than plow over a garden.

Felicia Young first openly discussed the idea for The Procession To Save Our Gardens while sitting with a few other artists in Green Oasis on Easter Sunday.

Since then she has brought together about a dozen other artists in the project, several of the Lower East Side community gardens, the Loisaida Carnival and Empire Loisaida Samba School and others in a frantic organizational rush to stage a pageant worthy of the ritualistic symbolism of the cause.

She is doing this in the middle of working for Miralda, the world-class Spanish spectacle artist who is masterminding the bizarre multi-million dollar "Honeymoon Project" to culminate in the ceremonial marriage of the Statue of Liberty to the statue of Christopher Columbus in Barcelona in Las Vegas in 1992; working on her Masters paper on her involvement in Phyllis Yampolsky's McCarren Pool Grand Reunion Festival in Greenpoint last year; and coordinating construction and installation of The Trash Monster in the World Trade Center. The Trash Monster is a 30-ft. puppet of monstrous landfill that has reared its ugly head in Earth Day processions in 1990 and 1991.

At 25 years old, Young has a lifetime of spectacles yet to come. Having studied art and archaeology here and abroad, she began to get a measure of her direction when she organized her first pageant in 1988, a Day of the Dead Candlelight Procession, when she was working for the Alternative Museum on White St. "Reaching out and collaborating with the homeless and those suffering with AIDS to create the banners, poems, puppets and other artistic elements in the procession became the most significant aspect of this project," she said.

Later that year she went to India with a friend to videotape the spectacle of spectacles, the Kumbha Mela, a celebration of the marriage of Goddess Meenakshi to Lord Shiva. The Kumbha Mela is held once every 12 years and attracts 25 million people who make the pilgrimage to be purified in the waters where two rivers converge.



PAGEANTEER WITH A MISSION
Felicia Young hopes to enliven NYC by means of primitive rituals.

HARRY M. PAMPLIN