



# TEN YEARS UNDER THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE

## Remembering the DUMBO Wilderness

Photographs by Paul Raphaelson

Extended through January 2009

Brooklyn Public Library

Brooklyn Heights Branch, 1st Floor

280 Cadman Plaza West at Tillary St.

Brooklyn, NY 11201

718.623.7100

[Click for Directions](#)

Brooklyn  
Public  
Library

Photo: untitled, from the Wilderness project

©1996 Paul Raphaelson

[www.paulraphaelson.com](http://www.paulraphaelson.com)

I lived and photographed in DUMBO\* from 1995 through 2004. When I arrived, wild dogs roamed the streets down by the Jay Street pier. Groceries were a half hour away by foot and backpack. By the time I left, ten years later, tourists had displaced the dogs. We could easily lose ourselves among visitors to the bars, delis, bistros, and ABC Carpet and Home.

Now, apartment towers loom above sanitized Victorian spice warehouses, whose tenants include bank branches, galleries, and baby supply stores. SUVs fill the parking spaces, and couples with strollers meander the promenade, where buckled concrete and timbers once sloped under green tides.

The social landscape has changed along with the physical one. Most of the artists are gone—priced out, thrown out, or in some cases prodded out by changes to the community they found too distasteful to weather. Some remain. Non-resident artists pack into rustic studios at 68 Jay Street. A dwindling community still clings to affordable lofts, sometimes with help from lawsuits dragged for years through the housing courts. And a few are rich enough live side-by-side with the advertising executives, Silicon Alley savants, and various Manhattan refugees filling the newly renovated luxury lofts between the bridges.

My friends and I weren't as fortunate. When our community was torn apart by evictions and rent hikes, we scattered all over the globe. Some of us found lower rent factories deeper in Brooklyn. Others landed in Philadelphia, California, Georgia, France, or Germany. The individuals I've kept up with are doing well, but the community is gone.

The photographs shown here come from a larger project, one that explores weathered and overgrown landscapes all around Brooklyn and Rhode Island. It shows neighborhoods where I lived and walked, but more essentially, it's a meditation on a kind of place and a kind of mood. I photographed places where I saw reflections of my life and aspirations: uncertainty, chaos, sadness, and also measures of beauty and hope. I called the project Wilderness. It was an introspective endeavor. The wilderness explored was a personal one more than an urban one.

Nevertheless, while walking the streets of DUMBO with a camera, I was vaguely aware that these pictures might be of historical interest someday. And that day came sooner than I ever expected. The changes have been so swift and indelible that the old neighborhood already seems gone forever.

I'm nostalgic for that old DUMBO. I liked that no one knew about it except for the cab drivers who were afraid to go there. But mostly I miss our community, and the feeling we shared that there, on New York's last frontier, we could create or become anything we imagined.

*\*Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass*