

When New York Was Is Cool

STORY BY: AMBER BRAVO



An exhibition at the [Barbican Gallery](#) in London features the work of three icons of the downtown New York art scene in the '70s, the sculptor [Gordon Matta-Clark](#), the artist and musician [Laurie Anderson](#), and artist/choreographer [Trisha Brown](#). Talking to Michael Kimmelman for the [The New York Times](#) Anderson explains that, "Back then, people who had plans were idiots. Like New York, we were all broke." But Kimmelman argues that it was this combination of having no money (i.e. being unimportant) and having "no plan" (i.e. gallery representation) that totally liberated this band of genre-defying artists. [Matta-Clark](#), the itinerant artist-chemist, was forever devising new ways to transform space and experience, be it by cutting away entire sections of buildings or opening a restaurant called Food, which brought ethnic cuisine to the as-yet-to-be inculcated NYC food scene. Brown tethered husband and friends to harnesses and had them dancing on the ceilings long before [Lionel](#) had the idea. And Anderson took naps throughout the city in random, unorthodox places and played her violin in a pair of ice skates frozen solid in a block of ice. Though Anderson makes the point that the SoHo of her day is no longer alive, she points to the glimmer of hope in the outer boroughs.



Gordon Matta Clark, *Splitting*, 1974

It's true, many of us living in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx are on a sliding scale of brokenness and living in rapidly gentrifying "fringe" neighborhoods, but unlike the New York of Anderson's day, the city, itself, is the paradigm of wealth; the fringe is being pushed farther and farther out, and the NYPD is busy giving Diddy an escort to a \$75,000 gig in Jersey. Crazy times, but maybe not the same brand of crazy as before? What does the next generation of up-and-coming New York (i.e. outer borough) artists make of their scene? *Irrational Exuberance*, a new show up at *The Invisible Dog* attempts to tackle this theme and others. Part of an ongoing series developed by the arts organization *Recession Art*, whose mission is to help emerging artists show and sell their work while giving collectors of all incomes an opportunity to buy original work at affordable prices, *Irrational Exuberance* "deals with seemingly rational systems of mass belief or delusion, and their relationship to values, whether economic or moral." While we may not be able to fathom a NYC that would allow Matta-Clark to cut a hole in Pier 52—*just think of the real estate value!*—because they had no use for it, we are also at a uniquely similar economic crossroads. It's just a matter of whether or not New York has the same "sense of place" that it did back in the '70s. A New York that Anderson argues "was a weird time, which I haven't really seen again."



Alma Leiva, *Celda #2, Photography/Installation, C Print 2009*