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LETTER OF INTEREST

The Greenpoint Bioremediation Project (GBP) purposes to build the capacity of local partners to innovate and harness nature's ability to clean toxins from Greenpoint, Brooklyn. For over 140 years a cumulative spillage estimated at 17-30 million gallons was released into the ground water in Greenpoint, dumping into Newtown Creek one of the most industrial waterways. This was twice the amount of the infamous Exxon Valdez oil spill. At this location, working as the Artist in Residence of Newtown Creek Alliance, a community organization dedicated to restoring the vibrant water-dependent commerce and community. I began working with Exxon/Mobil, to create The Fairy Rings: Mycoremediation, using the pink oyster mushroom mycelium that has the capacity to neutralize toxins at the molecular level. Nine mycelium rings wrapped around monitoring wells used to track the clean up efforts at the epicenter of where one of the largest oil spills occurred in US history. However, because the site was already capped with clean soil and is not accessible to the public, the project became about negotiation, trust, and shared interests between a multinational corporation, the community, and a Superfund site. As a media artist, I create social sculptures and interfaces that foster innovation and creative thinking through social cooperation and art making. The landscape has become my framework and I work with living organisms as the interface to create systems that allow for unpredictable results as a reflection and critique of our political and social systems. I have been exploring the generative principles of how complex systems interact between two different entities, whether cultures, nature, or people. The GBP is the next iteration of how community, art, and science can lead to social change by bringing groups together to implement a healthier physical change in the environment. For the GBP, I will combine my skills with partners who have also laid significant tracks within the community to collectively test the efficacy of bioremediation as an innovative approach to cleaning urban pollutants. The partners include socially conscious groups such as: Brooklyn College; Fortune Society; Build it Green; Brooklyn Grange; 596 Acres; and other individual advocates. During 2014, Phase 1 begins with Brooklyn College developing an affordable hydrocarbon soil test, which along with heavy metal tests will be offered free to the community in Greenpoint. Professors, students and partners will then develop custom strains of the bioremediators (mycelia, plants, and microbes) best suited for known local contaminants. The project will offer public bioremediation workshops about soil testing, phytoremediation (plants), mycoremediation (mushrooms) and compost at 61 Franklin St's Garden. The project is born of Newtown Creek Alliance's bioremediation workgroup, where I will work to lead coordination of partners through Phase 1's initial research, and communicate the results to the community while planning for the next larger phase of the project. The ultimate long-term goal is to clean up the toxins as much as possible by creating additional viable options for the EPA to consider and a workforce of local residents that are ready to implement the task.