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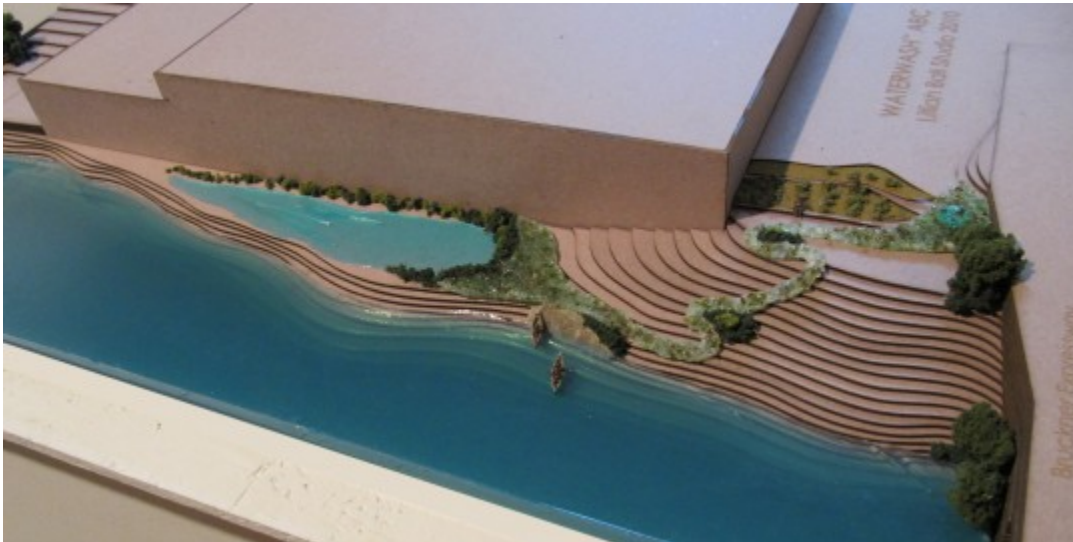


Photo courtesy of Lillian Ball

Lillian Ball's model of ABC WATERWASH

Bronx River inspires an artist to clean up shore

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ABC Carpet will host a riverside environmental sculpture

If shoppers who enter the ABC Carpet furniture store on Bronx River Avenue were to venture around the huge warehouse building, they would find an uninviting tangle of asphalt, gravel and weeds leading down to the Bronx River.

By 2012, though, plans call for a park-like setting of native plants and a walkway and steps made of colorful, spongy material that invites visitors to sit and relax. The river bank will be transformed into a wetland, offering natural protection to the water.

The project, called WATERWASH ABC, is the latest effort to improve the quality of the river, making it more hospitable to fish, birds and other wildlife, as well as people.

Artist and environmentalist Lillian Ball is the visionary behind the planned transformation of the ABC Carpet site, across the river and just upstream from Hunts Point Riverside Park.



This neglected spot will become the entrance to Waterwash.

Working with Rocking the Boat, the project's fiscal sponsor, and funded by a \$5 million package of grants and funds from the state Attorney General's Bronx River Watershed Initiative, Ball and her team of engineers and designers plan to transform the area into a work of public art, as well as a way to curb pollution.

Every time it rains, water spills from the ABC store's 120,000 square foot flat roof, washing onto the Bronx River's east bank where it mixes with a variety of pollutants and carries them from the shore into the river. The steps and pavement made from recycled glass will be able to absorb dirty water and filter out the pollution. Native grasses and wetland plants will also filter the runoff.

Ball succeeded with a similar project, also called Waterwash, on the banks of Long Island Sound.

What makes Waterwash a work of art as well as environmental cleanup is its effort to reach, teach and intrigue viewers. Ball is a sculptor working with the land, instead of a traditional medium, says Jennifer McGregor, who heads the art program at Wave Hill and who included Waterwash ABC in a recent show at the public estate in Riverdale

Ball hopes the ABC project will inspire commercial property owners to care more about environmental issues, and will also reach Hunts Point residents and shoppers at the furniture store.

Signs explaining the function of the new river plants will be as prominent as the current advertisements plastering the warehouse building that read, "Take 50% Off" and "Largest Selection of Remants." As in Long Island, Waterwash, the signs will also to provide information about wildlife and about how visitors can do their part in curbing pollution.

Plans also call for a rooftop weather station that will be monitored by scientists from Drexel University. The station will broadcast information to a digital billboard on the roof of the store, in another effort to engage shoppers and passersby.

Ball was introduced to Adam Green, executive director of Rocking the Boat, by Lynn Dwyer, assistant director of the Northeast Eastern Partnership Office of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which provided funding for the Long Island Waterwash project. Green says the two hit it off right away and decided to find a space on the Bronx River for a second Waterwash piece.

"I was looking for a space where I could do the most good while having the most impact and while making it interesting, ensuring that people would be seduced by nature enough to care about it," says Ball. When they came across the ABC Carpet building, they found that ABC's vice chairman Paul Chapman shared their views on the environment.

Ball plans to begin the construction of the wetland, community garden and spongy recycled walkway in April. By May, the team will begin planting the native grasses, followed by the installation of the signs. The grand opening is set for the fall.

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