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Got something to say? Let's hear it

By Sarah Portlock

The Brooklyn Paper

In one of the noisiest parts of DUMBO — the Pearl Street Triangle — two local artists will soon establish an oratory oasis: a “speaker’s corner,” where people can stand on soapboxes and rant and rave, or just talk to their hearts’ content.

But as this is the Land of Free Speech, the difference here is simple: the piece, which they call “The People’s Triangle,” sets up an “embedded space,” the artists explained.



The Brooklyn Paper / Michael Lipkin

Artist Manuel Mansylla wants to create a London-style “Seaker’s Corner” in DUMBO, where participants can speak their minds in the “safe zone” of true Freedom of Speech.



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“It’s full of a certain power — if someone stands up on and speaks on a soapbox on the street, people think he’s crazy,” artist Jimena Leiva explained.

The area, which is bounded by Pearl Street, Anchorage Place, and Water Street, is directly beneath the Manhattan Bridge — and with those Q, B, D, N trains overhead — is quite possibly the loudest spot in all of the deafening neighborhood.

But that’s exactly why the artists, Leiva and Manuel Mansylla, chose it for “The People’s Triangle.”

“The encroaching noise of the train will make the voices of the orators turn on and off. This is symbolic of our democratic system that allows only some voices to be heard and others are silenced,” said Leiva.

The installation will be part of the Art Under the Bridge Festival, the neighborhood-wide art extravaganza that runs from Sept. 26–28. And since the project is under the guise of “art,” anything goes.

“Basically, it’s just coining [the Triangle] as a ‘Speaker’s Corner’ for art’s sake, but it’s producing the right excuse because it’s under the banner of ‘conceptual art,’” Mansylla said. “It really gives whoever wants to say something an opportunity to go around it in that way.”

Mansylla was inspired to create the “free speech zone” after visiting the original one in London’s Hyde Park. Legally established in 1872, speakers gather where the park meets Oxford Street, in the shadows of the Marble Arch, and lecture about anything for as long as they want, or until they get booed off — whichever comes first.

At DUMBO’s speaker’s corner, ideally, the same thing will happen (though, in the United States, of course, people don’t need a designated corner to speak their mind), and Mansylla said he is looking forward to what people say, think, and do.

“I don’t really want to influence anybody on anything,” Mansylla said. “What I wanted was for people to ... have this is one whole weekend where they can speak their lungs out from Friday to Sunday.”

DUMBO Art Under the Bridge Festival runs Sept. 26–28 and will feature nearly 70 art projects and studio tours. All events are open and free to the public. For information, visit www.dumboartscenter.org/festival.html

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