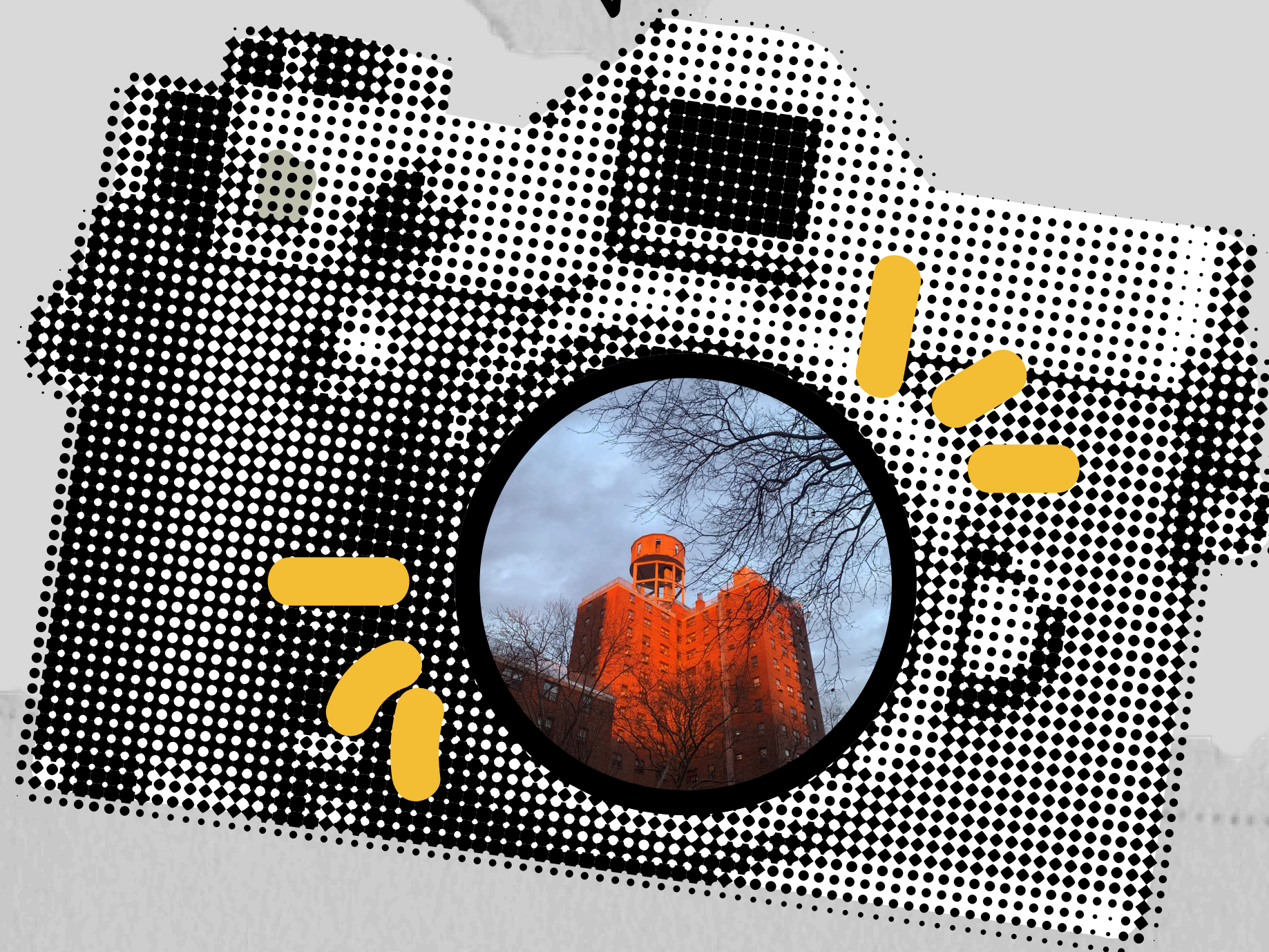


# VISUAL STORYTELLING THROUGH A PLACE-BASED LENS:

*Focusing on the **Gowanus** Neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York*



# **DISSECTING THE PHOTO:**

Assessing a Photo's Essence, Meaning, and Purpose

# *Keeping her Memory Alive: My Grandma, Rosa Leyda*



- **What do you see? What stands out to you?**
- **In what ways does this photo capture the subject's essence?**
- **Overall, how does this picture make you feel?**

**TURN TO YOUR NEIGHBOR:  
(5-7 MINUTES)**

Do you have a special memory, story, or tradition from your family or community? What is it and why is it so special to you?

**If you have a picture on your phone, feel free to show it with your group and explain why it's so special to you!**

## **REFLECT/WRITE DOWN**

Did you connect with your neighbor's story? Any similarities to yours?

# History of the Gowanus: Gowanus Canal





- Lenape Tribe
  - Painting by Mario Martinez, Yaqui descent, reimagining the Gowanus Canal
- The landscape dramatically changed
  - Indigenous Land → Dutch colonization → Industrial period (mid-1800s)

# The Gowanus Canal Now



- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated the Gowanus Canal as a Superfund site in **2009**
- Superfund site – contaminated site caused by hazardous waste
- Combined Sewage Overflow
- Dredging

# The Gowanus Houses



- New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)
- Gowanus Public Housing - built in the 1940s
- Close to the canal
- Hurricane Sandy in 2012
- Lack of green space and access to the waterfront

# My Family History.

My grandmother was born in Jimaní,  
Dominican Republic.

1944

My mother was born in Santo  
Domingo, Dominican Republic.

1971

My family moved from the  
Dominican Republic to  
East New York, Brooklyn, New York

1988

1989

My family moved to the Gowanus  
Houses (public housing) shortly after

# My Family History.

cont'd

I was born in Manhattan, New York.

1998

After years of moving around, I settled in Gowanus, Brooklyn, where my family originally established their roots.

2010

I started my photography project in High School. I continue to document my family and community's history.

2014 - NOW

# WHY AM I SHARING MY TIMELINE?

- Trace back to understand the now
- My family's place in the Gowanus neighborhood
- Our contributions matter
  - Greeting neighbors or interacting with nature
- Helps to understand our story within the larger community

# WHY IS STORYTELLING SO IMPORTANT?

- Our histories are being erased
- Countless negative headlines
- Form of resistance
- Persistence and presence
- Dignity, honor, and respect
- Storytelling
  - Our own terms and words
  - Showing others how we are to be treated

# **HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY**

# A Good Photo



- A phone camera is enough
  - Your vision is enough
- An ethical lens
  - Ask for permission to take a person's photo.
- Pre-existing rapport

# Telling a Story



- What do you want to say about a setting, group, or individual?
  - Focus on your storytelling vision
    - Joyous moments
    - Serious or difficult moments

**CAPTURING THE LONG ISLAND SOUND  
COMMUNITY IMPACT FUND PROGRAM**



- **What stands out to you? What do you see?**



- **What stands out to you? What do you see?**

**MY STORYTELLING PROJECT:  
GOWANUS HOUSES, 2014 TO NOW**

How I Tell My Story

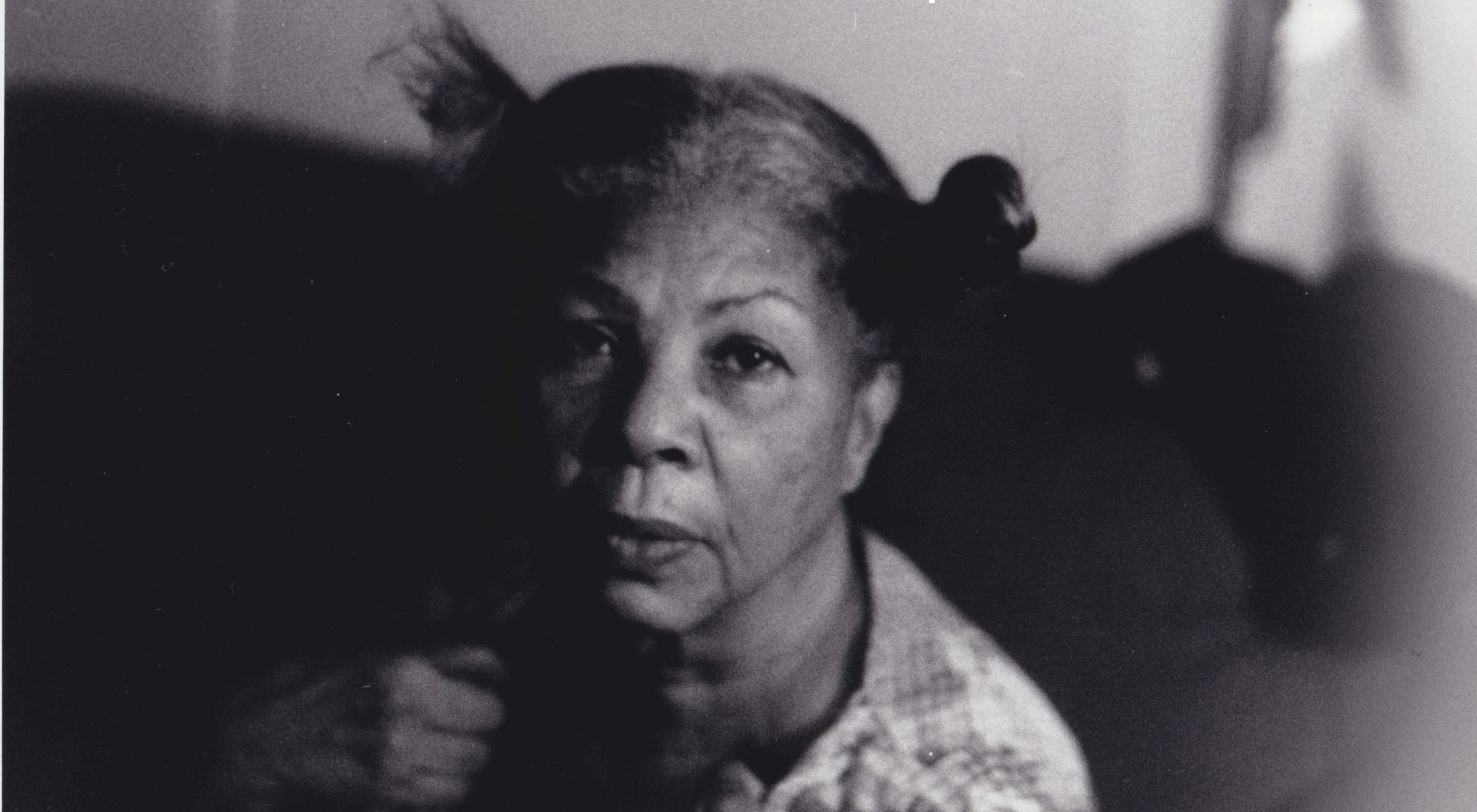
Tip #1: Angles say a lot





**2022/23 - Grandma**

2016/2017 - Gowanus Houses Apartment



Tip 2: Experiment with Lighting





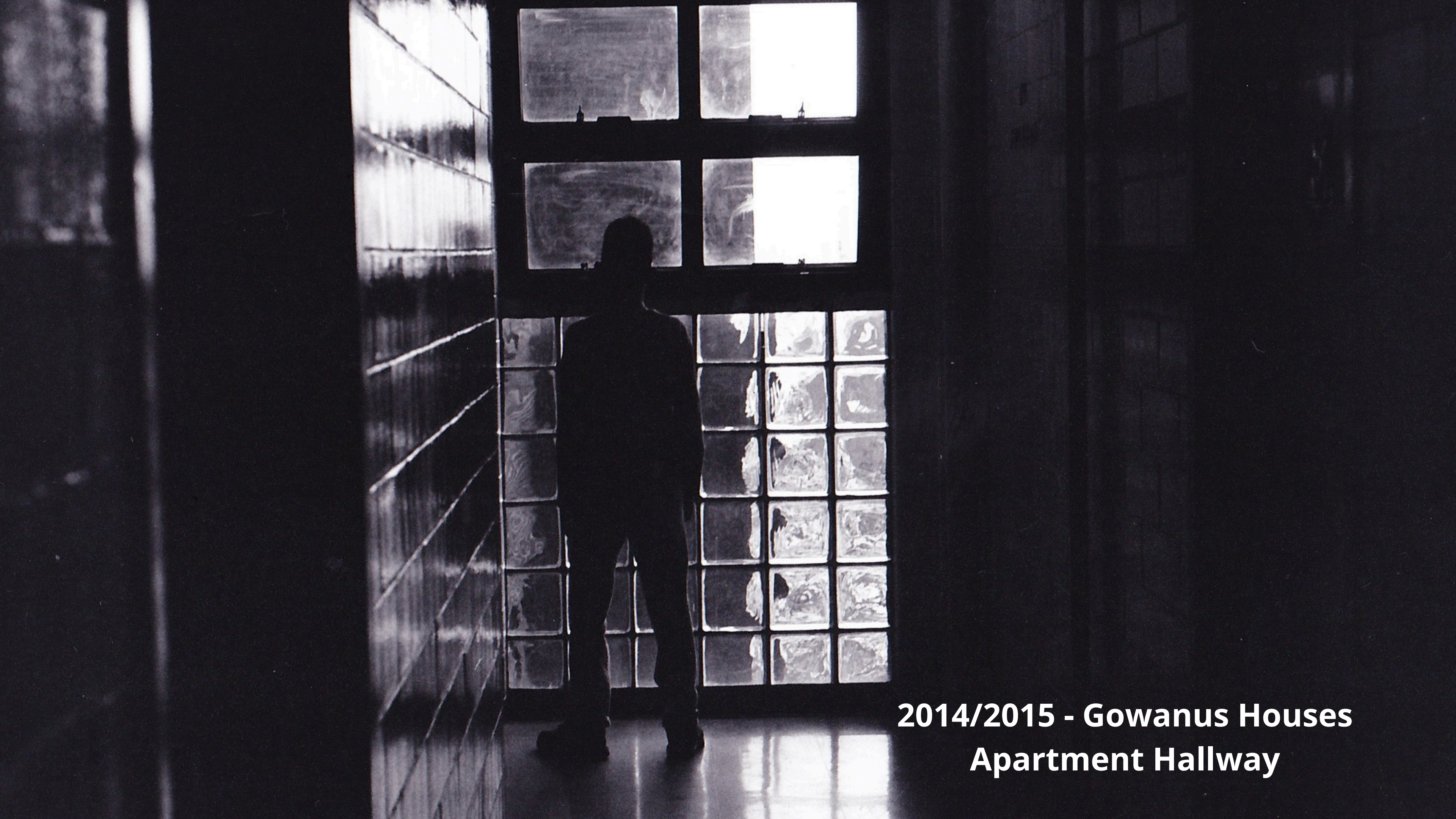
**2022/23 - Gowanus Canal Map Drawing on the Window of the Smith - 9<sup>th</sup> Streets Station**

2016/2017 - Mom, Gowanus Houses Apartment





**2014/2015 - Gowanus Houses  
Apartment Hallway**



**2014/2015 - Gowanus Houses  
Apartment Hallway**



**2013/2014 - Gowanus Houses Apartment**

Tip #3: Create a diverse array of shots and  
mediums





**2025 and 2026 - Image and oil pastel depictions of the Gowanus Houses Projects**



**2015 - Gowanus Houses Apartment,  
Grandma's Room**



**2025 - Grandma at the Gowanus Houses  
Apartment**

**2025 - Looking in the Construction  
Scaffolding Window**





2026 - Neighbor Looking in the Construction Scaffolding Window

**2024 - Grandma's Home Attendant**





**2025 - Neighbors visiting Grandma's Home Attendant**

**2024 - My Grandma's Home Attendant**





2025 - Zine Made at Powerhouse Arts

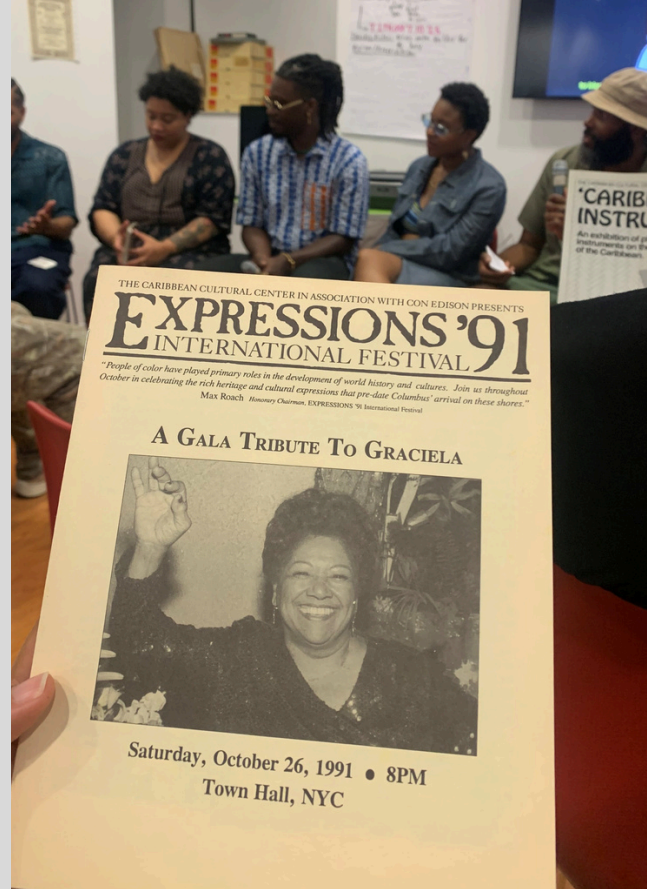
# Tips Explained



- Angles are everything!
- Experiment with lighting
- Develop a diverse array of shots and mediums

# OTHER WAYS TO TELL YOUR STORY

- Videography
- Audio Recording
- Preserve Zines/Sketch Designs/Paintings digitally
- Get Creative! The sky is the limit
  - Other ideas: intergenerational collective storytelling projects, collaging, origami, etc.



## Examples of projects that focus on memory work in New York City:

- [Dear Neighbor Project](#), [Tiffany Baker's project](#) – Gowanus, Brooklyn
  - Climate storytelling through art, text, and audio stories
- [Queens Memory Project](#) – Queens
  - [Memories of Water Project](#)
    - Climate storytelling through audio stories
  - [Queens Name Explorer](#)
    - Honoring and remembering Queens neighbors through written stories
      - [The Stories Behind Their Names: Queens Women in Action](#)
      - [The People Behind the Names: Black History in Queens](#)
- Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute ([CCCADI](#)) – East Harlem
- [Harlem Place Memory and Culture Archive](#) – Harlem
- [Bronx Narratives](#) - Bronx
- [LES Yearbook Project](#) – Lower East Side
- [My Projects Runway](#) – Public Housing Stories in NYC
- [Barchives](#) – NYC
- [Map Stories](#) – NYC



# LES YEARBOOK: A LIVING ARCHIVE EXHIBITION



## Lower East Side Yearbook: A Living Archive

October 17, 2025-January 4, 2026

In 1935, the Lower East Side (LES) became home to New York City's first public housing development, the First Houses, which established a vision for affordable housing in our city. Today, the LES's coastal skyline is defined by the towers of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, which make up nearly 25% of the neighborhood's rentals.

Photographer Destiny Mata, a lifelong resident of Lillian Wald Houses, has been documenting the lives of local public housing residents for two decades. In 2023, she joined a group of residents to launch the LES Yearbook, a storytelling project about public housing community and culture that exists both as a physical book and an online platform.

Lower East Side Yearbook: A Living Archive brings together Mata's photography and selections from the archives of Acha Charif, Promise Jimenez, Cheryl Kirwan, Camille Napoleone, and TO Rosario to tell a shared story about how architecture shapes the way we move, build relationships, and make memories. Hallways, outdoor benches, and brick exteriors appear again and again as extensions of home. This collective album is a testimony to a community's love for itself and the connections that keep it strong.

-Ali Rosa-Salas, curator

LES Yearbook Committee members are Anael Flores, Fotos by Javi, Roxana Hurtado, Maylyn Zero Iglesias, Edwin Pagan, Nadea Benmore, Nelson Pineda, Ryan Lee Rodriguez, Heriberto Sanchez, DJ SLUD3, Allison Stumpf, Kristina Stumpf, and Anna Del Vecchio.

5





# **Digitization Series – Organize It Or Lose It: Digital Declutter Series**

**Attend the Queens Memory Project's series on how to archive and digitize historical records, including photos and audio.**

**Register [Here](#) or with the QR Code Here:**



WINTER '26

@PAPERSOULART + @WL\_PMA

PRESENT

IN COLLABORATION  
WITH @LESYEARBOOK

# COLLAGE-1- CONNECT



**SATURDAYS:**  
**JANUARY 24**  
**FEBRUARY 21**  
**MARCH 21**



**2-4PM**



**WE'RE BACK FOR PART 2: A NEW THREE-PART JOURNEY IN COLLAGE,  
MONO-PRINTING, AND STORYTELLING.**

**CENTER FOR  
WELLBEING &  
HAPPINESS ☺**



**ALL AGES**

HEAT STORIES:

# MEMORY, PLACE, AND A CHANGING CLIMATE

JOIN US FOR A TOUR OF THE QUEENS LANDING BOATHOUSE FOLLOWED BY AN EVENING OF CLIMATE STORYTELLING. HOW DO WE TELL STORIES ABOUT EXTREME HEAT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN NYC? AND WHO TELLS THESE STORIES?

**FEATURING:**

- ORAL HISTORY POP-UPS
- WRITING PROMPTS
- ART-MAKING
- SNACK BAR



PHOTOS COURTESY OF QUEENS DIGITAL ARCHIVES

FREE WITH RSVP



26

# FEBRUARY

6 - 8PM | 56-27 2ND ST UNIT 105, LIC



**QUEENS  
MEMORY**



URBAN ARCHIVE



# **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

**Photography Instagram Page: @kellieingrained**

**Substack: @kelliemarty**

**Email Address: kmarty@estuaries.org**