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'Foreclosed' Birdhouse Makes Gentrification Statement at East Village Park

By Allegra Hobbs ([//www.dnainfo.com/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/allegra-hobbs](http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/allegra-hobbs)) | February 7, 2017 10:50am

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Aaron Schraeter's "Birdhouse Repo" is on display at First Park through June 6.

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EAST VILLAGE — Even mother nature is getting priced out of the East Village.

As property prices skyrocket (<https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20161107/east-village/neighborhood-x-analysis-affordability-cheapest-properties-east-village-constantine-valhouli>) in the neighborhood and citywide, the birds themselves may need to flock to more affordable trees — at least, that is the idea behind the "foreclosed" birdhouse perched in First Park (<https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/first-park/map>), according to the artist and lifelong New Yorker behind the piece.

"Watching neighborhoods change from what they were then to what they are now... I always had imagined it as affecting the city to the smallest levels, and I guess in this case animals [were] the natural choice," said artist Aaron Schraeter of his "Birdhouse Repo," a boarded-up birdhouse with a red "foreclosure" sign slapped across the side.

"You'd think that it wouldn't [affect them], especially in a city like this one where you can imagine that everything that isn't human is just a survivor. And yet here we are — the birds can't live here, either."

Schraeter, who grew up in Forest Hills and now works out of a studio in Long Island City, said he spent much of his teenage years exploring the East Village and Lower East Side as an aspiring artist, watching with fascination as the artists enclave lost its grit.

He chose the neighborhood as the site of his piece because it represents encroaching gentrification citywide, he said.

"When people think about gentrification, now they think about Brooklyn," Schraeter said. "But I think for the ones who have been here for a long time, the Lower East Side was the first real flagship gentrification spot, so from a historical standpoint it made a lot of sense."

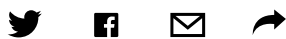
He worked with the city Parks Department and neighborhood organization First Street Green (<http://firststreetgreenpark.org/>) to bring the project to First Park, a once-derelict and rat-infested plot of land that neighbors transformed (<https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20130729/east-village/artists-invited-create-murals-east-village-park>) into a cultural space in 2008.

The birdhouse will remain on display until at least June 6, he noted.

The artist hopes the project will lend some levity to an otherwise serious subject, but he also hopes onlookers will be moved to take action, if they are able.

"I would say be proactive — don't look at this as something that is necessarily a funny anecdote about something that's been happening," he said.

"If you're a land owner, look at who you're selling to. If you're a buyer, look at what's going on around you... Where your decision is important, where your voice is heard, you should be using it."



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