

The New York Times

Metropolitan Album

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTINE OSINSKI



Summer in Another World

IN THE CLASSIC NOIR FILM “Sorry, Wrong Number,” a character played by Ann Richards tells Barbara Stanwyck’s character about “one of the weirdest days I’ve ever spent.” To convey just how weird the day was, she asks, “Have you ever been to Staten Island, Leona?”

Christine Osinski, a photographer and a professor at Cooper Union, came to know the borough’s otherworldliness in the early 1980s, when she and her husband were forced out of their Lower Manhattan loft and went looking for a house they could afford. The search took them to a century-old fixer-upper near Snug Harbor, on the island’s northern shore, and to a landscape Ms. Osinski embraced at first sight.

“What I saw in Staten Island I felt drawn to, because I’m from a working-class background on the South Side of Chicago,” she said from her home in Connecticut, where she moved in 1996. “It’s an area that’s not noticed. The people are not noticed. It had an edge to it. It’s not happy. It’s a tough edge. The people and the houses and the landscape — I think that’s where the edge comes from.”

At the time, she said, the island was pulling in different directions. Packs of dogs roamed the shoulder-height grass in her neighborhood park, yet nearby were families who had occupied the same houses and tended the same lawns for generations. New houses sprouted on farmland, signaling the changes to come.

The images here, taken from a new book, “Summer Days: Staten Island” (Damiani), show the island’s game face in 1983 and 1984, the one it turned to the outside world. Ms. Osinski, now 67, worked with a large-format camera that became part of her engagement with her subjects. They were home, braced for what might come their way — close to the hurly-burly of the other boroughs, but separated from it by water.

“Taking that ferry ride home, no matter how hard a day you had, that was Manhattan,” Ms. Osinski said. “You could leave it behind. That water was a break. You realized you had arrived in a different destination.”

JOHN LELAND



LENS: For more photographs from Christine Osinski: nytimes.com/lens