

*Transfer Station*

June 12 – August 15, 2021

Alyssa Davis Gallery  
2 Cornelia St, № 1102,  
New York, NY, 10014

You find yourself standing atop a vast and unnaturally grassy mound of earth. The Statue of Liberty and Manhattan's Financial District loom in the distance. You sit down and rest your hand on the ground, only to discover that the soil beneath the fresh sod has stained your skin a rusty orange. Your location is Freshkills Park, a 2,200-acre veneer constructed over the impermeable cap (impermeable, they say) of the Fresh Kills Landfill on the west side of Staten Island. You talk to a park employee about the strange orange soil, you haven't seen this kind of dirt in New York City before. They explain that the soil was a special order, but that someone accidentally requested the iron-rich blend. Soil and sod were shaped into four gargantuan mounds to cover up 150 million tons of household waste and toxic debris excavated from the Twin Towers' Ground Zero, a landfill once described as "our generation's A-Bomb".<sup>1</sup> Across the river channel, artificially planted trees encircle One Chase Manhattan Plaza; the Financial District comprises a series of gleaming plazas concealing potter's fields underneath.

You take the ferry to Manhattan in time for a tour of the Federal Reserve bank downtown. You think about Jerome Powell and his influence over fluctuating post-pandemic federal interest rates. Distracted, you almost miss the guide announcing that 20 feet beyond the subterranean vaults is the 2 Train barreling past. Commuters pass oblivious to their proximity to millions of dollars of gold bullion. You watch as foreign governments' debts to one another are made tangible, as the Federal Reserve staff carts gold bars from vault to vault. You begin to question what else may lie buried within the bedrock of your perceived reality. You think about liquid trash runoff possibly leaking through the soil of Freshkills Park into the East River and beyond. You think about the leakage of Industrial Capitalism, and how it has perpetuated the accumulating layers of filth and economic strife running rampant throughout the city. What else rumbles and oozes below?

Transfer stations are waste management sites intended to be temporary, which only became part of the municipal trash lifecycle after the Fresh Kills Landfill closed. You begin to notice the stations mutating and multiplying around you. In New York City, they present as innocuous and privately-owned warehouses sealed with roll gates. Household trash sometimes goes to transfer stations before heading to a more permanent landfill, an intentionally obscured process that exacerbates systemic pollution in low-income neighborhoods. To similar hostile effect, an industrial coating product called NeverWet™ has become popular in urban areas. It makes surfaces hydrophobic, repelling liquids aggressively, with the intent of warding off public urination. Exteriors of glimmering new housing developments can be coated with NeverWet™ so that if a person urinates onto the side of a building, the wall pisses back onto them. Pollution and its symptoms continue to be weaponized against the city's unhoused and working class, and the trash wars rage on. The city itself is becoming increasingly antagonistic to its inhabitants.

You begin to feel a pull towards this ceaseless problem of waste, yet you find yourself at a loss. You start collecting interesting scraps of refuse in your free time. A facetious solution forms in your mind: how could we put our collective shit to work? Once repurposed, perhaps waste could be the answer to a more just society, or in the very least, it could hold up a mirror to the absurdities of capitalism. You once read about human urine being utilized to tan leather in the Middle Ages. What if our city sewers could be repurposed into a functional leather tannery, and we could all benefit from the profits? You start drafting plans. These questions simultaneously entertain and haunt you, and you feel a bizarre and growing compulsion to buy a shovel and start digging.

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<sup>1</sup> John May, "Bringing Back a Fresh Kill: Notes on a Dream of Territorial Resuscitation" in *Verb: Crisis. Barcelona: Actar*, 2008, p. 94.



Sophie Friedman Pappas was born in 1995 in New York, NY. She lives and works in New York, NY. Friedman-Pappas has exhibited at Alyssa Davis Gallery, New York, NY, organized by Octagon (2021); in lieu, Los Angeles, CA (2019); Resort Gallery, Baltimore, MD (2018); King's Leap, Brooklyn, NY (2018); and ADDS DONNA, Chicago, IL (2017). In 2020, she completed a year-long residency with the Freshkills Park Alliance, New York, NY. Friedman-Pappas received her BFA in 2017 from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and will begin her MFA in September 2021 at the University of California Los Angeles.