Early in fall 2006, Emi-

ly Allen (GAL ’10) noticed the slick bi-

cycle chained out-

side her freshman
dorm but grew sad
as she watched the seemingly
abandoned vehicle deteriorate
week after week in the cold and
rain. The building manager told
her such neglected bikes are
eventually tossed away with oth-
er garbage, inspiring the ardent
peddler, whose own four bikes
occupy part of her living room,
to apply for a grant to collect and
refurbish the wasted cycles
haunting her on almost every
campus bike rack.

Last summer, aided by a $5,000

award from NYU’s Sustainability
Task Force, Allen, former classmate
Mark Simpson (CAS ’07), and oth-
ers, harvested 50 abandoned bikes
stored in campus facilities and do-
nated them to Time’s Up!, a non-
profit cycling collective on East
Houston Street at which both Allen
and Simpson have volunteered.
Time’s Up! staff and NYU stu-
dents refurbished 25 of them—
stripping the rest for usable
parts—and gave them to interest-
ed freshmen during Welcome
Week last fall. Receipients were
required to learn maintenance skills
and safe urban riding techniques—
a must for navigating the obstacle
course of New York streets, says
Allen, a California native.

For phase two, Allen is survey-
ing students’ cycling habits and
preferences, researching other
city and university bike programs,
and will make recommendations
on parking, storage, and road safe-
ty to the Sustainability Task
Force’s transportation commit-
tee. Jeremy Friedman (GAL ’07),
the task force’s project adminis-
trator, predicts her effort will in-
spire a new campus bike recycling
policy. “It hits so many targets:
transportation, greening, educa-
tion, cost savings, and it works
within the community,” he says.

While government surveys es-

timate that just 5 percent of the
country’s bicycle riders bike for
transport, Allen hopes early ex-
opposition will convince students of
cycling’s economic, time, and
health benefits. “Part of why we
targeted freshmen was to create
an NYU rider for four years,” she
says. “If you get someone riding
in their freshman year, then when
they move away from campus
they’ll still think it’s a good mode
of transportation.” Plus, she adds,
a brisk morning ride always
wakes one up for classes.
after spending a semester in Berlin, where big trees line nearly every street and abundant parks feature thick woods and wildflowers, Moo Kyung Sohn (STEINHARDT ’08) dreaded returning to New York’s concrete jungle. “The nature we see in the city is not real,” the undergrad says about Manhattan’s carefully planted plots. “It’s an idea of nature that we made for ourselves.” So Sohn turned to NYU’s Environmental Health Clinic to assuage her green deprivation. The clinic, which officially opened last October at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, marries conceptual art with social and environmental activism. It welcomes appointments from “impatients,” individuals such as Sohn who are too anxious to wait for protracted legislative changes.

“Coming to the clinic doesn’t require that you are an environmental activist or a community organizer,” explains founder Natalie Jeremijenko. “It’s a way of coordinating diverse, local actions and making them amount to something significant.” The goal is to create environmentalism that is mediagenic, publicly legible and, most of all, approachable and manageable by anyone. “People can actually do something,” says Jeremijenko, who joined Steinhardt last semester as an assistant professor of visual art.

Jeremijenko first evaluates an impatient’s concern and, upon diagnosis, issues a prescription for action. In Sohn’s case, the “doctor” directed her to create “NoParks” in two of New York’s many no-parking zones, such as in front of fire hydrants. One sunny day last September, passersby and local residents came to admire Sohn’s micro-swamp with ferns, mosses, and rocks on East Ninth Street and her wildflower garden on Stuyvesant Street in the East Village. Her favorite visitors were a group of butterflies that made the wildflower garden their temporary home.

To help people tackle environmental issues often perceived as inaccessible and abstract, Jeremijenko plans to design a whole repertoire of such empowering actions. To folks who want to reclaim pedestrian power in a city known for heavy traffic, she might prescribe a unique pair of shoes that, through a spring in the heel, increase the wearers’ stride by 20 to 40 percent. “It’s a sensible shoe, but it’s [also] about putting a spring in your step and treating gender differences,” says Jeremijenko, whose artwork–cum–science projects have been exhibited at the Whitney Biennial in 1997 and 2006, the MoMA, the Guggenheim, and the Cooper-Hewitt Design Life Now: National Design Triennial 2006–07.

For all their high design, Jeremijenko’s prescriptions are much more than fleeting eye candy. NoParks are an “engineered micro-landscape optimized for environmental problems,” she says. A verdant island on the side of the road, a NoPark can capture the oily runoff from the road before it flows into the river and help reduce standing puddles that serve as breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which might eliminate the need for hazardous fumigation.

While Sohn’s NoParks were temporary, the Environmental Health Clinic hopes to get permission from the Department of Transportation to permanently install them. The real thing will require the impatient to dig up asphalt and plant specific flora to filter out cadmium and hydrocarbon runoff. We might soon see NoParks sprout up all over New York, with Sohn leading the charge. “The clinic is not about giving you answers,” she says. “It’s about having you create your own.”

This temporary “microswamp” offers a lush alternative to an East Village no-parking zone.
A STYLISH STAY
You can stay at a Holiday Inn anywhere, but for a true New York experience, Donna Quadri-Felitti, clinical assistant professor in the Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports Management, recommends visitors try a boutique hotel for the personal service and unusual details. On the west side, she goes for the European luxury of the Iroquois, and on the east side, it’s the intimate bed-and-breakfast-like Roger Smith. But the HOTEL ROGER WILLIAMS in Midtown’s Murray Hill really stands out for being hip yet unintimidating. “It’s not so trendy that it’s off the scale,” Quadri-Felitti says. “Mom can still go there and be cool.” With books, scented candles, and flat-screen plasma TVs in each room—some with private garden terraces—the Roger Williams describes itself as “more fashionable apartment than hotel.” And forget waking up to miniature boxes of cereal—the Help Yourself Breakfast Pantry is virtually its own café with heaps of frittatas, European meats and cheeses, and local delicacies such as croissants from Balthazar and smoked salmon from Petrossian. Not your average hotel, but as Quadri-Felitti puts it, “Isn’t that why you come to New York—for the unique things you can’t get anywhere else?” 131 MADISON AVENUE, 212-448-7000; WWW.HOTELROGERWILLIAMS.COM

WORKINGMAN’S PALACE
Tucked in a row of buildings amidst the bustle of Times Square and Fifth Avenue is a little-known gem of city history: headquarters of the GENERAL SOCIETY OF MECHANICS AND TRADESMEN OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, a favorite of Daniel J. Walkowitz, professor of history and acting director of metropolitan studies. Founded in 1785, the society was established to provide educational and cultural services for working people and their families before there was even a public school system. And that legacy has endured—the library is the second oldest in the city and the school they started in 1820 continues today. Walkowitz says the building is a testimony to the city’s forgotten craftsmen. “We somehow think that the builders of New York are simply the great men who provide the money, the Donald Trumps—but Donald Trump’s never laid a brick in his life,” he says. One doesn’t have to be a society member or history buff to appreciate the library’s soaring three-floor-high grand atrium topped by a breathtaking skylight. “The architecture is quite magnificent,” Walkowitz agrees, “but the front is just another old building on the block.” 20 WEST 44TH STREET, 212-840-1840; WWW.GENERALSOCIETY.ORG

SPEEDY EATERY
Quick eats are a must for most New Yorkers, but fast food shouldn’t mean sacrificing quality, according to Rogan Kersh, who studies the politics of obesity and the fast-food industry and is associate dean and professor of public service at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. “We have been trained through advertising to think of McDonald’s as the purveyor of the fast food we need right now,” he says. “But an apple doesn’t take any longer to eat than a Big Mac.” For a full meal that’s quick but also fresh and inventive, Kersh hits up CAFFE FALAI. He recommends the veal meatballs in tomato sauce or fried mozzarella and beet salad, but his favorite is the honeydew melon juice. Chef
When a stagehands strike extinguished Broadway’s lights for 19 days last fall, it was a mere blip in an increasingly robust arts industry, a financial juggernaut that contributed $21.2 billion to the New York City economy in 2005.

The findings, detailed in “Arts as an Industry: Their Economic Impact on New York City and New York State,” chart the steady growth of the sector—defined as film and TV production, commercial theater, art galleries and auction houses, nonprofit culture such as museums, zoos, and dance troupes, and arts-related tourism—during the past two decades. Since 1982, after adjusting for inflation, the arts’ financial footprint has increased 86 percent in New York City. “The arts are an economic boon for the city and state,” says Rosemary Scanlon, a clinical associate professor at the NYU Real Estate Institute, who led the study for the Alliance for the Arts. Most notable, according to Scanlon, has been the expansion of cultural nonprofits, which contributed $5.8 billion in 2005—double the 1982 figure—to the city’s economy. While this sector is top-heavy—42 organizations have yearly budgets greater than $10 million—the city is also home to thousands of smaller nonprofits. Scanlon credits lawmakers’ steadfast support, primarily through tax credits and grants, for the growth: “Even when the city was struggling with its budget, it kept up its support for the arts.”

To measure the arts’ economic impact, Scanlon and other researchers considered the direct expenditures of the city and state’s cultural institutions, as well as dollars generated by wages, taxes, and other indirect spending, including outlays by contractors and agencies for hire and money reinvested by employees living in the city. She estimates the annual output of the arts rivals that of the construction trade, another prodigious city industry. More important, she says, the arts have resiliently weathered work stoppages, recessions, and even the 9/11 attacks, which many analysts feared would precipitate a protracted slump. “All the curves are pointing up,” Scanlon says.

Iacopo Falai—who learned how to cook in his hometown of Florence and was later pastry chef at Le Cirque—provides a take-out or sit-down menu, and lures customers with an elaborate dessert case up front. Just a block away from the crowds of Soho, the café offers a great break from work or shopping. As Kersh says, “On a rough day, tottering down there around four o’clock is always a rewarding experience.”

SWIMMING HOLE

When Robin Nagle tells people she’s been swimming in the Hudson River for seven years now, they’re never eager to shake her hand. But Nagle, director of the John W. Draper Interdisciplinary Master’s Program in Humanities and Social Thought, swears it’s one of the best places to take a plunge. “It’s such an extraordinary feeling to be not on the water, but actually in the water around Manhattan,” she says. Some swims are organized by the Manhattan Island Foundation, which raises awareness of just how clean the waters are. For more traditional lap swimming, Nagle heads upstream to Riverbank State Park with its spectacular views of the Palisades, George Washington Bridge, and, of course, the Hudson. The 28-acre, multi-level recreation facility—which is Manhattan’s only state park and boasts a football/soccer field, tennis and basketball courts, ice skating rink in winter, and a restaurant—has public outdoor lap and wading pools (open from July 4 through Labor Day). And just two bucks gains you entry to the indoor Olympic-size pool. Nagle says, “It’s a joy to go for 50 meters without having to turn around because it feels like you’re swimming in something more substantial than just a pool.”

265 LAFAYETTE STREET, 917-338-6207

679 RIVERSIDE DRIVE, 212-694-3600

ARTS IMPACT BY SECTOR

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