

Green Streets

'The Experimenters'

By Chris Viaggio

Remember the geodesic dome that appeared in the parking lot between Beach 94th and Beach 95th Streets in March of 2013, and hung around until midsummer?

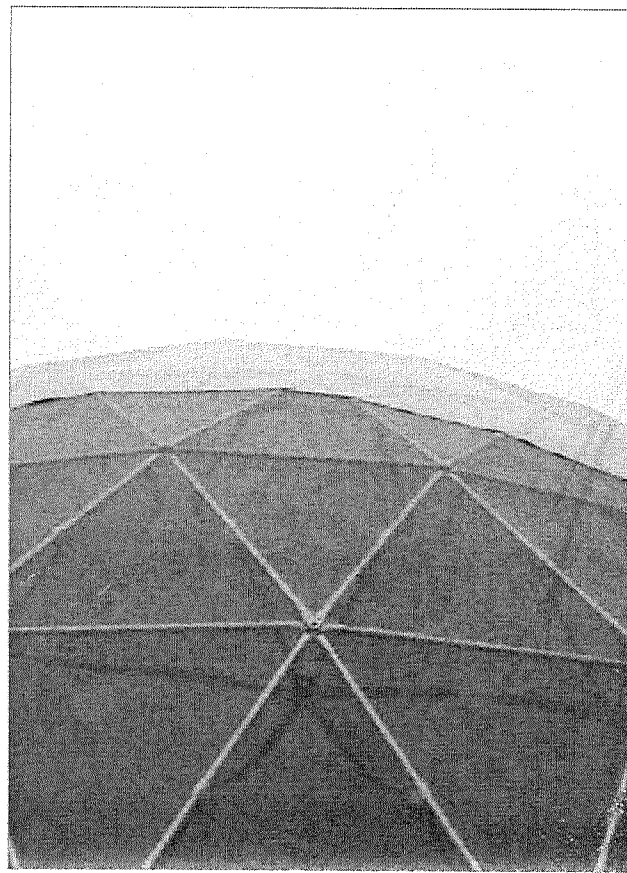
Sponsored by Volkswagen, with a permanent counterpart at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City, the VW Dome 2 was erected in the months after Hurricane Sandy "to serve as a center for culture, education, and community," according to PS1—to be "a flexible space" for a variety of programming coordinated by local organizations and alliances.

Built based on the engineering principle of "tensegrity", or tensional integrity, a concept developed in part by visionary R. Buckminster Fuller, it stood as a gathering space and communication venue in lieu of the surrounding facilities damaged or compromised by the storm.

Eva Díaz recounts the history of Fuller's revolutionary work on dome structures in part of her new book, "The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College."

Díaz, who lives in Rockaway Beach with her husband Michael Connor and daughter Arizona, is assistant professor in the History of Art and Design Department at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

The publication focuses on three key figures involved in Black Mountain College, an "experimental" art school founded in 1933 in Black Mountain, North Carolina: Josef Albers, John Cage, and R. Buckminster Fuller. Each of their pedagogical methods are examined—positioned both in accordance and at odds with one another. Fuller, the neo-futuristic architect, systems theorist, author, designer, and inventor taught at the school and con-



ducted research there during the summers of 1948 and 1949.

Díaz's next book will be devoted solely to the work and legacy of Fuller—titled, "The Fuller Effect: The Critique of Total Design in Postwar Art."

To celebrate the release of "The Experimenters," an exhibit of performances and discussion was hosted by Cabinet Magazine in their Gowanus

event space on Thursday, Feb 12. There was a rendition of John Cage's "Experiences No. 2" by Nick Hallett, a poem spoofing Albers and color theory by Jeremy Sigler, a few short films related to Black Mountain College, and a Q and A period, all providing a rich packaging for the featured book.

Díaz has written about domes before.

About a month after a documentary on an improvised community in southeastern Colorado made up of geodesic domes, called "Drop City," screened at the VW Dome 2 in Rockaway on June 21, 2013, a piece by Díaz came out in Rhizome's online journal titled, "Under the Dome: Architectures of Networked Engagement from Drop City to Rockaway Beach."

In it, she picks up on the present-day proliferation of dome construction, specifically in art contexts, and how one ended up in Rockaway. "...a sense of the dome as exemplar of a new art of utopian public sculpture has taken root, and many contemporary artists make use of domes as elements or even defining characteristics of their practices.

"Many use domes as sculptural structures, as temporary interventions in urban sites, as kiosk production, and as shelter/information display hybrids."

Mentioning some of her own experiences in Rockaway's dome, Díaz testifies to the genuine engagement it reacted in its audience during its lifespan.

"...the dome is not merely a stand-alone shelter, kiosk, or gathering space, but becomes a unique but hybrid object: a sculptural artwork cum pedagogical tool that foregrounds its connectedness to networks of various kinds: material resources, communities and communication."