

Nitin Mukul

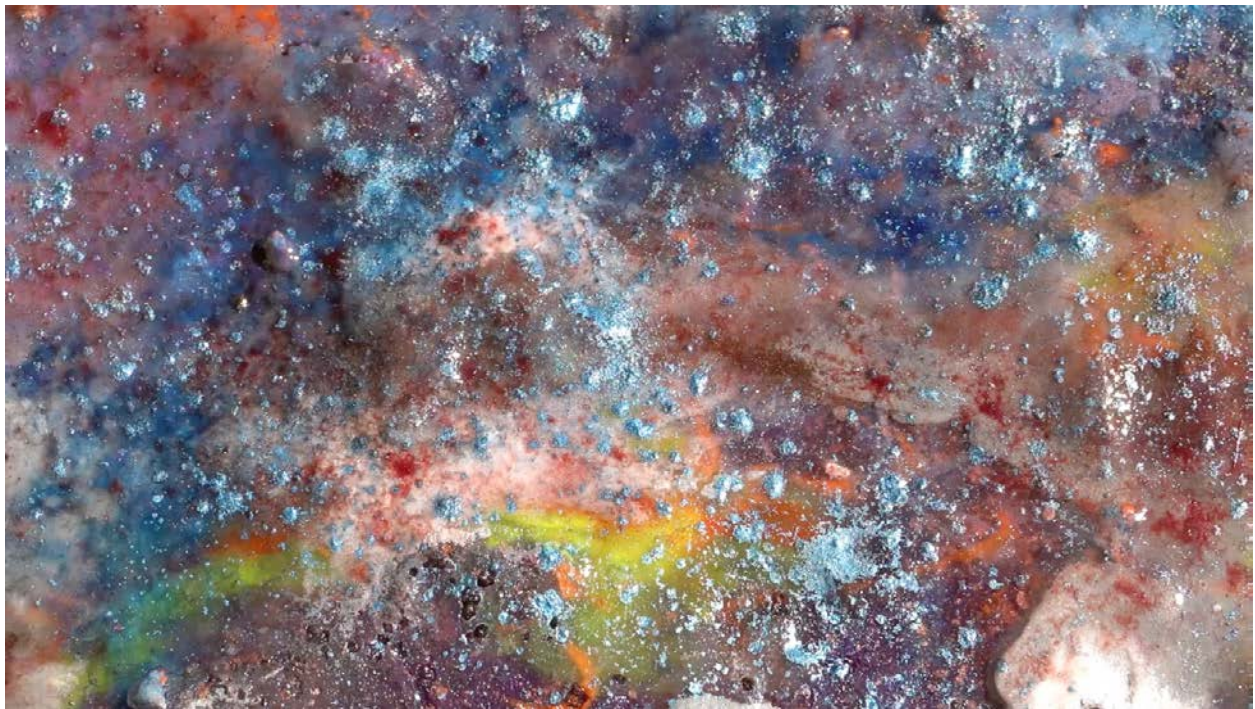
Heat Maps Queens

The Local NYC, Long Island City, 13-02 44th Avenue, Queens, NY 11101

December 2023 - January 2024

Made with support from a 2023 New York Foundation for the Arts grant.

Heat Maps Queens is a new series of durational painting video works. These pieces were made on location in 3 selected localities in the borough of Queens, NYC. In the way that the 19th century school of painters known as the Impressionists which included Monet, Pissarro and others disrupted accepted norms of landscape painting by seeking to depict the atmospheric effects of light while painting outdoors on location, Mukul's durational painting videos capture the effects of the light, heat, and climate conditions at a specific site and time. Heat Maps Queens incorporate references to hip hop culture, connecting the storytelling of iconic rap artists with origins in these neighborhoods to the realities of these landscapes.



Nitin Mukul, Maple Grove Park, Kew Gardens, Queens, 2023, durational painting, acrylic ink and pigments, dimensions variable

The concept and formal process of durational painting goes back to 2008 when Mukul lived and worked in India. That summer, he was struck by what felt like new extremes in weather conditions which prompted him to experiment with painting as video and using atmospheric conditions as a catalyst. That first piece was shot outside his studio on a 108 degree afternoon.



Nitin Mukul, Jackson Mill Park, East Elmhurst, Queens
2023, durational painting, 16 minutes, dimensions variable



Claude Monet, San Giorgio Maggiore at Dusk, 1908-12, oil on canvas

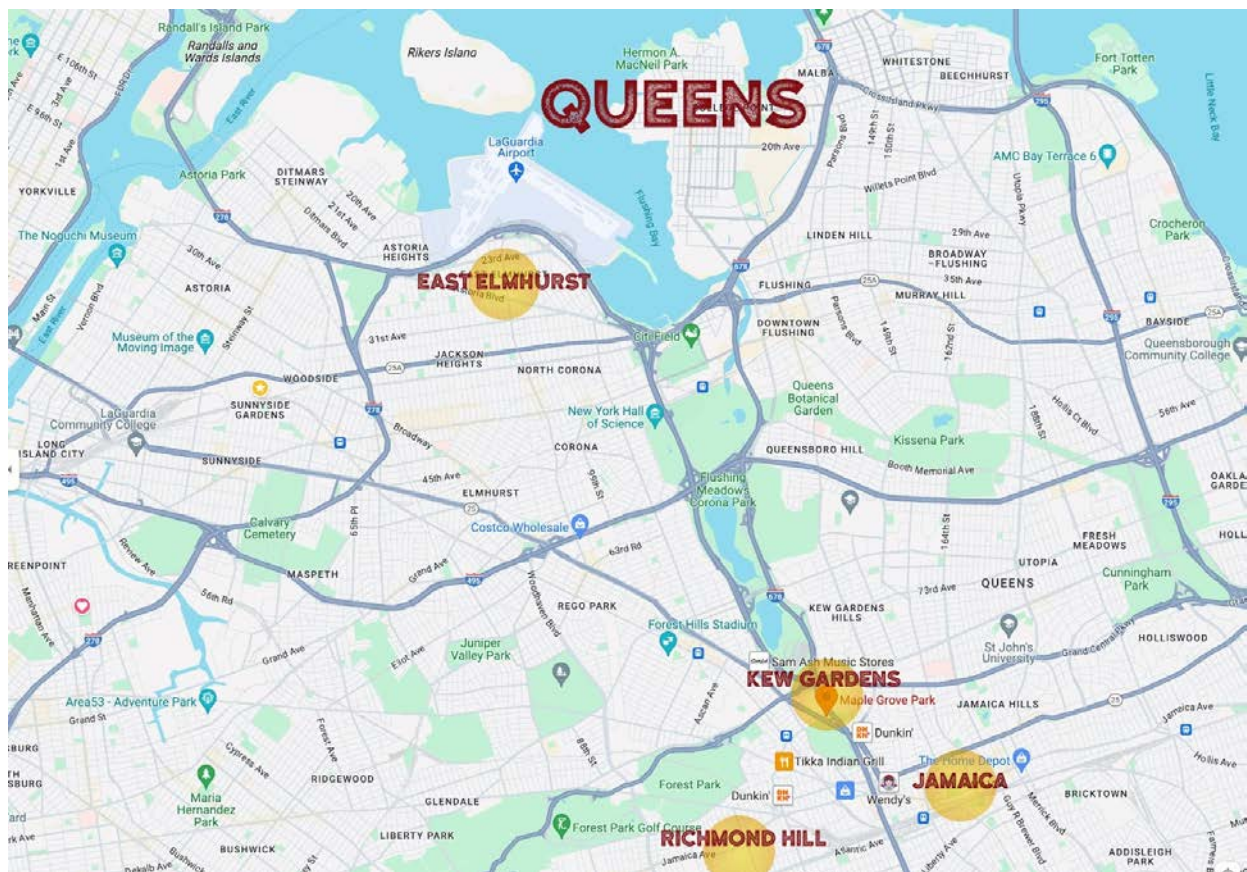
Durational Painting

A durational painting bridges painting and motion pictures to arrive at a new format for painting as an event. These pieces begin by layering paint in sheets of ice, freezing each layer of paint, water and various media so that they accumulate layers of color and texture. Placing the frozen mass outside, it melts according to natural weather conditions while it is filmed. These abstract pieces aim to function as empirical reflections of the site on which they are made: light, temperatures, time of day, location, our climate at large, and a historic resonance. This became a new context for me to understand abstract painting as a deep viewing experience and appreciate the potential of my materials to act with their own agency.



Shooting the Jackson Mill Park durational painting in East Elmhurst. The painting is in the white container on the easel.

My intention with this particular project, supported by a grant for Queens based artists from the New York Foundation for the Arts, was not only to contextualize the durational painting process alongside the canon of eurocentric landscape painting, but to raise awareness of the climate crisis on a local level. These pieces serve as documentation of green space inequity in the city by focusing on 3 specific neighborhoods in Queens that have been rated high risk on a scale called the **Heat Vulnerability Index (HVI)** : **East Elmhurst and Corona, Jamaica and Hollis**, and **Kew Gardens and Richmond Hill**. Elmhurst is within walking distance of my residence in Jackson Heights, where the need for more green space and pedestrian friendly space peaked during the pandemic.



“The HVI shows the risk of community-level heat impacts, like deaths, due to extreme heat events. It is made up of data on surface temperature, green space, air conditioning access, poverty, and Black population (the population most excluded from heat resources). Differences in community-level heat impacts stem from structural racism, which limits access to preventive resources.”



Still from East Elmhurst durational painting and a view of Jackson Mill Green

Elmhurst and Corona

Heat Vulnerability Index rating: 4 out of 5

Location: Jackson Mill Green

Patron rapper: Kool G. Rap

“Jackson Mill Green appears more like a median at an intersection than a park. I timed myself walking the length of it, which I managed to do in one minute. There are a few large boulders which may have been placed there but it’s hard to tell. The ground is scattered with long twisted maroon colored seed pods from the tall honey locust trees that populate the green, a species that has been around since the dinosaurs roamed here. They provide the only shade cover in view. Given the proximity of this area to La Guardia Airport and the notoriously inhumane and dysfunctional prison Rikers Island, it’s easier to understand how it’s a high risk area. The only store in sight is a liquor store.” - NitinMukul

“This property takes its name from the nearby mill that ground wheat and corn for the residents of north Queens. The mill had three names over the course of its existence: Kip’s Mill, Fish’s Mill, and finally Jackson’s Mill. A large water wheel that harnessed the flow of the adjacent pond provided power to the mill. The road crossing the dam is now 94th Street, and the pond is now part of the Grand Central Parkway. The whole area is now the entrance to La Guardia airport.”

“Cities create challenging environments for many nonhuman species, and the presence of nonhumans in cities influences the health and well-being of the humans with which they share the environment. Distinct urban conditions are created by landscape modification, but the history of this transformation is not equal across urban environments. Schell et al. review how systematic racist practices such as residential segregation, enacted in part through redlining, have led to an unequal distribution of “nature” within cities. These inequities continue to play out in both the ecological processes of cities and the welfare of their residents.” - Science.org



Still from Jamaica, Queens durational painting and a view of Rufus King Park

Jamaica, Queens

Heat Vulnerability Index rating: **5 out of 5**

Location: **Rufus King Park**

Patron rapper: Pharoahe Monch of Organized Konfusion

“This park was getting a lot of use when I visited, the playground was busy and adults of all ages were at leisure. The fragrant smell of cannabis permeated the air. The colonial era building which is the King Manor Museum is an imposing but well maintained presence”

“Rufus King Park in Jamaica was the former estate of Rufus King, a lawyer and statesman who was one of the original signers of the United States Constitution, and a leader in the early anti-slavery movement. The historic King Manor Museum continues to engage visitors with stories of history and tolerance, including an annual naturalization ceremony.

“Hot weather is dangerous. In New York City – and across the country – more people die from heat than from all other natural disasters combined. As our climate continues to warm, we expect more heat events that can put people’s lives at risk. In New York City, the risk of death from heat is unfairly distributed across neighborhoods. We identified neighborhood environmental and social factors associated with increased risk to create a heat vulnerability index. This can identify neighborhoods at highest risk and help inform neighborhood-level policies and programs that can protect people - sending resources to where they're needed the most.” (from NYC.gov)



Still from Kew Gardens, Queens durational painting and a view of Maple Grove Park

Kew Gardens vs Richmond Hill

Heat Vulnerability Index rating:

Kew Gardens: 1 out of 5

Richmond Hill: 5 out of 5

Location: Maple Grove Park

Patron rapper: Roxanne Shante

In this instance, I wanted to bring attention to the fact that two neighborhoods, at just 1 mile apart, have the lowest risk rating (Kew Gardens) and the highest (Richmond Hill). It seems to be a glaringly clear example of systemic inequalities in urban planning.

“This park is located just east of Maple Grove Cemetery, a nondenominational burial ground founded in 1875 to ease overcrowding in Jamaica’s Prospect Cemetery. Built in 1668, Prospect was the first cemetery built in the Town of Jamaica, and is located at 159th Street and Beaver Road, just south of the current Long Island Rail Road tracks.”

Installation views:









Nitin Mukul is an American visual artist of Indian descent mapping spaces where painting and video intersect as a durational experience. He has lived and worked in Massachusetts, India, Los Angeles, Washington DC, and currently is in New York City. In 2020 he was awarded an Artist Residency at the Caldera Arts Center in Sisters, Oregon, and is the recipient of a 2020 and 2023 New Works Grant from NYFA. In 2019 he completed video installations at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Pioneer Works, Brooklyn and Lincoln Center, NYC. His work was included in the 2013 Queens Biennial at the Queens Museum. Mukul was an assistant to the late artist Sol Lewitt, and a former creative director of the Indocenter of Art & Culture in Chelsea. He has been showing with Aicon gallery in NYC since 2008.

See more of his work at nitinmukul.com and his [Instagram](#).

For more information and press images, contact the artist at nmukul@gmail.com