



# Talking With: Ella Marder on Pioneer Works

May 3, 2014

by Scott Bluedorn

Pioneer Works for Arts and Innovation is a new center for art, science and education to cross-pollinate, founded by artist [Dustin Yellin](#) in an old factory building in Red Hook, Brooklyn, N.Y. I had first heard of the work they were doing through an artist friend of mine who had recently attended a Theremin concert there (!). By virtue of such intriguing stories, I figured I better check it out for myself. As founder of a multi-arts platform space that celebrates many forms of creativity myself ([Neoteric Fine Art](#)), the concept of [Pioneer Works](#) is close to my heart.

I made the trip one day in late March with a few friends, and after self-touring the amazing space itself (galleries, studio spaces, sculpture garden...science lab?!), I stumbled into a meeting of minds that I was wholeheartedly accepted into. This institution is something different, and you will be hearing from them.



Pioneer Works exterior. Photo by Scott Bluedorn.

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I sat down with Ella Marder, programming and managing director for Pioneer Works and its first official employee since incorporating into a non-profit:

**SB: What is the concept behind Pioneer Works**

**EM:** The concept behind Pioneer Works is one of cross-pollination, of dialogue between disciplines that don't normally come into contact. The idea is to go against the compartmentalized tendency of academia. Pioneer Works represents the realization of a long-held dream of Dustin Yellin—the founder—to foster interaction and greater creativity between the arts and sciences. For the past two years, after having undergone major construction, and a devastating hurricane, we have bridged the chasm between disparate disciplines: performers and biologists, painters and geneticists, sculptors and physicists all presently work and create under one roof.

**SB: What is this building about and why is it interesting?**

**EM:** Built in 1866, the building was first occupied by Pioneer Iron Works, one of the largest machine manufacturers in the United States- constructing ships, boilers, tanks, sheet iron, detachable railroad tracks, grain elevators, and machinery for sugar plantations. The building was completely destroyed by a devastating fire in 1881 and rebuilt shortly thereafter. Pioneer Iron Works operated until the middle of the 20th century, after which the site became a storage facility for Time Moving Company. Pioneer Street was named after the Pioneer Iron Works building.

Our goal was a nursery for innovation and creation. In that short time we have mounted 8 exhibitions, 35 art & science residencies, 10 concerts, and 20 symposiums. Pioneer Works publications published a book to accompany a survey exhibition of Ernesto Caivano's Settlements, in May 2013, as well as two issues of our magazine: INTERCOURSE.

**SB: How does the community here function?**

**EM:** We became a 501c3 not for profit organization in September 2013, and are now an integral part of the Red Hook community and a hub for further growth in the neighborhood.

We work with Red Hook vendors and organizations such as the Red Hook Initiative, Red Hook Volunteers, Taste of Red Hook, Friends of the Firefighters, The Good Sheperds, Fairway, Red Hook Crit etc...and invite everyone to attend all of our public programs. They are free and donation based.

**SB: Who is involved, and how did they get involved?**

**EM:**

- Dustin Yellin, artist and founder. He's behind the whole project. Main supporter up to date.
- Gabriel Florenz, Manager of Dustin Yellin studio for 6 years, oversaw the renovation of the building, acts as COO for Pioneer Works.
- Ella Marder, Programming and Managing Director
- David Sheinkopf, Director of Education
- Marco Orozco, Faculties & Events coordinator
- Randy Lee Maitland, Editorial
- Catherine Despont, Development of long form Education Curriculum and Editorial
- Lara Holliday, Director of Advancement

**SB: What type of work is going on?**

**EM:** Exhibitions, performances, talks, monthly Second Sundays programs, film series, lecture series, dinners, artists, scientists and an institution in residence and working on developing research and programs (12 total, right now Clocktower Productions, founded by Alanna Heiss in 1972 is our Institution in Residence), a radio station, a bi-annual publication, a sculpture garden and

much more...

**SB: What is the immediate future of Pioneer Works, and how does it hope to expand?**

**EM:** As we look to continue and raise the bar on our varied programs, we need to increase our funding base, and are organizing a first spring fundraising extravaganza.

On Sunday, May 4, 2014, Pioneer Works Center for Art and Innovation will hold its first benefit fundraiser, "The Village Fête". Our goal is to launch an annual coming-together of New York's creative community and its supporters, a celebration of our founding mission for innovation in the contemporary arts and sciences. Bob Colacello, Maggie Gyllenhaal & Peter Saarsgard, Lazaro Hernandez, Sydnie Lansing, Jack McCollough, Andres & Lauren Santo Domingo and Liv Tyler are chairing the event.

We are hoping to get more private sponsorship, more directors on our board, more donations. And then to get more staff, and ever more programs going!

Look for:

- First fundraiser
- New website
- -Next big show to open on June 15: Solo exhibition of works by Louise Despont
- -The Sept. 21 opening of Rachel Sussman's *Oldest Living things On Earth* photo show. In addition to her being a Guggenheim fellow, Rachel was selected for the [LACMA Art + Technology Lab](#)! Here's the original [press release](#), and [this is a great article](#) about the original program. Sussman's proposal is a work-in-progress
- -Observatory build out
- -Recording Studio in the container out in the garden build out
- -Photo Lab and Classroom build out

**SB: When can people visit?**

**EM:** Our main exhibition space and arts and science residencies are open to the public Wednesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 6 p.m. Tours are available upon request. For more information, directions and rental information, please visit our [contact page](#).



Installing at Pioneer Works. Photo by Scott Bluedorn.

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**BASIC FACTS:** Pioneer Works Center for Arts and Innovation is located at 159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn, Red Hook , NY 11231. [www.pioneerworks.org](http://www.pioneerworks.org).

Pioneer Works first benefit “The Village Fête” will be held on Sunday, May 4. The event begins at 4 p.m. Tickets range from \$100 to \$50,000 for a dinner table. Individual dinner tickets are sold out. The Party Ticket, giving entrance at 7:30 p.m., is still available and cost \$100. Tickets can be purchased by clicking [here](#).

*Editor’s Note:* The title has been changed. The piece was originally published as “Pioneer Works Gets Ready To Cross Pollinate Art, Science & Education”

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