

NEW YORK STORY

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This spring, before the Observatorium took place, I had been strolling on the spacious Snug Harbor grounds with Nancy Cohen to see *Only Connect* (1997), her installation in collaboration with Dieu Donne Papermill (a nonprofit papermaking studio in New York City's Soho) and the Staten Island Botanical garden. Cohen has suspended her translucent abaca paper stretched over skeletons of branches, garden implements, and steel in the Botanical Garden's Greenhouse Conservatory, where the artist's forms-in conjunction with the great variety of luminous leaves there-served as light catchers.

The abundant foliage at Snug Harbor is more yellow-green overall at this time of year. Cohen's hanging forms "grow" through her choice of materials and an art process that takes its changing context into account. There is no evidence of the intricate ritual involved in Cohen's coordinating institutional cooperation for this organic spectacle.

The orderly balance of the formal gardens, though, reminds me of the stylized conventions of such negotiations, and contrasts with the chaos of the propagation room, where vines grow wild and tropical flowers bloom for only a day. Cohen writes "One week tables overflow with seedlings; the next week they have been transplanted and the tables are bare."

The juxtaposition of harmony with ferment inspired the installation, which is named for a phrase in E.M. Forester's *Howards End*: "Only connect the prose and the passions, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height."