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Margaret Morton - Fragile Dwelling

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INSPIRING PORTRAITS OF HUMAN RESILIENCE AND INGENUITY

MARGARET MORTON — FRAGILE DWELLING: HOMELESS COMMUNITIES OF NEW YORK CITY

HKDI had recently invited Margaret Morton to give a guest lecture on *Fragile Dwelling* — a 45-minute walkthrough of her documentation about the inventive ways in which homeless people in New York City have created not only places to live but also communities that offer a sense of pride, place and individuality.

Since 1989, Morton has photographed the dwellings that homeless people in New York City have created for themselves. Her project has taken her many unfavoured places yet clustered with homeless people with different cultural backgrounds. Photographs and oral histories from her ongoing project have been published in three books: *Fragile Dwelling: Homeless Communities of New York City*; *The Tunnel: The Underground Homeless of New York City*; and *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives*.

Morton's photographs document the transitory homes and gardens people build out of tin,

cardboard and scraps of wood in vacant lots, public parks, along rivers, under bridges and highway exit ramps, and underground in the abandoned train tunnels of New York's Upper West Side. These settlements have ranged from more than 100 dwellings in Tompkins Square Park to a few decorated crates hidden inside the entrance of an abandoned tunnel.

Morton's camera reveals the ingenuity of builders who have constructed homes out of discarded materials such as warehouse pallets, junked auto parts, and demolition scrap. Her luminous photographs bring to light the determination and aesthetic sensibilities of these all-but-forgotten people whose temporary encampments became permanent homes until they were demolished by the city. Seen together with compelling oral histories by the builders, *Fragile Dwelling* tells the universal story of a need for personal space and the resilience of the human spirit.



01.
BK's Place, East River

02.
Mr. Lee's house, The Hill

03.
James's tent and garden, East 9th Street

04.
Margaret Morton

Photographs by Margaret Morton
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