

- About (<http://artcity.com/about/>)
- Features (<http://artcity.com/features/>)
- AFC Editions (<http://artcity.com/afc-selects/>)
- Donate (<http://artcity.com/support/>)
- Sound of Art (<http://artcity.com/celebrating-five-years-of-art-sounds-in-new-york/>)

•

Art F City (<http://artcity.com>)

Tenant Protestors Describe Brutal Landlord Harassment

by Whitney Kimball (<http://artcity.com/author/whitney/>) on March 5, 2014 (2014-03-05) · 0 comments (http://artcity.com/2014/03/05/tenant-protestors-describe-brutal-landlord-harassment/#disqus_thread) Newswire (<http://artcity.com/category/newswire/>)

Like 24

Tweet 6



(http://artcity.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/IMG_2086.jpg)

The ink in our pens was freezing on Tuesday morning in Midtown, as 25 degrees felt like a piercing zero-degree polar chill. But, for the crowd of forty or so protesters outside a landlord-only symposium at the gilded Roosevelt Hotel, they were left with few options. The crowd was made up of Spanish speakers and a handful of white artists—defying typical social tensions bred from gentrification—and chants of “What do we want? Affordable housing!” were repeated equally in both English and Spanish.

The morning’s event “Landlords Schooling Landlords (<https://symposium.landlordsny.com>)” promised the chance to “rub elbows with other pros!” and “swap advice” and “war stories.” The keynote speech was originally slated (<http://therealdeal.com/blog/2014/02/07/ratner-yanks-big-event-at-barclays-due-to-planned-protests/%20>) to be developer Bruce Ratner, the dubious winner of decade-long eminent domain battles (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/26/nyregion/exhausted-from-an-angry-and-losing-battle-against-barclays-center.html?ref=bruceratner>) over Atlantic Yards. (After protest rumors began circulating, Ratner was replaced by Joseph Sitt, of Thor Equities. The real estate giant owns parts of Coney Island and has made billion-dollar bids for the Empire State Building.)

“Essentially the only landlords we see buying into the neighborhood at this point are big landlords: big real estate, corporations, private equity,” said Lower East Side tenant organizer Brandon Kielbasa of the Cooper Square Committee. “We see the most aggressive behavior out of that type of landlord: displacing rent-regulated tenants, renovating the units, marking them up to whatever they can get.”



(http://artfcity.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/IMG_2081.jpg)

According to Kielbasa, tenant harassment is a common tactic to force rent-regulated tenants out of their apartments. Tenants are also frequently made to think that they are boxed-in and don't have the right to keep their apartments so they to take buyouts, allowing landlords to rent out the vacant apartments to new tenants at a market rate. Kielbasa hears that so-called "tenant relocation specialists", or "guns for hire" will provide misinformation to tenants; if that doesn't work, needed repairs and upkeep never happens. "When tenants report that they see cracks, landlords don't take that seriously, and eventually the ceiling comes crashing down on their possessions," he said. Such was the case last spring, for example, when tenants of 143 Ludlow Street filed a lawsuit (<http://www.metro.us/philadelphia/news/2013/03/18/residents-accuse-landlords-of-nightmare-living-conditions/>) against developer Samy Mahfar for their building's collapsed ceilings and cracking walls.

Other protesters described a hellish legal limbo where harassment runs rampant. "[My landlord] Steve Croman took me to court three times on baseless charges, which cost me over \$25,000 in lawyers' fees that I could not reclaim because of my lease agreement," said artist George Tzannes. "And he never went to trial, he just dropped it. The idea is to wear down tenants financially and emotionally until they leave on their own." As of this writing, Croman's company 9300 Realty has not responded to our request for comment.

I heard a similar story from Sunset Park resident Veronica Mirafuentes, who, translated through a representative from Neighbors Helping Neighbors (<http://www.nymc.org/neighbors-helping-neighbors->), told me that she'd been fighting her landlord for basic repairs in court for over five years. She claims that her apartment had no heat or hot water for an entire winter. In further efforts to remove her, her landlord called child services and accused her of obstructing an entrance.

Mirafuentes's neighborhood has been prominently spotlighted lately due to the warehouse complex-turned-"creative business hub" Industry City (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/19/nyregion/industry-city-the-soho-of-sunset-park.html>). There, the new landlords Jamestown Properties (proprietor of the Brooklyn Navy Yard) has reportedly doubled rents on artist studios.

And like many artists in the neighborhood, Mirafuentes says that six out of her building's eight families have given up and moved out. Some left the state. While Mirafuentes continues to fight for simple repairs, she says that the rest of the building has experienced a full-on luxury makeover. "They renovated the other six empty apartments. Beautiful kitchens, beautiful bathrooms—everything upgraded to rent them out at a higher rate."

And the more Mirafuentes shares her story, the more she finds solidarity. "This is happening all around her," said her translator. "The harassment continues, and as she comes out, she's meeting more and more families in similar situations."

Tagged as: a sci-fi eco-system sculpture (<http://artfcity.com/tag/a-sci-fi-eco-system-sculpture/>), Brandon Kielbasa (<http://artfcity.com/tag/brandon-kielbasa/>), brooklyn (<http://artfcity.com/tag/brooklyn/>), Bruce Ratner (<http://artfcity.com/tag/bruce-ratner/>), LandlordsNY (<http://artfcity.com/tag/landlordsny/>), Neighbors Helping Neighbors (<http://artfcity.com/tag/neighbors-helping-neighbors/>), Steve Croman (<http://artfcity.com/tag/steve-croman/>), sunset park (<http://artfcity.com/tag/sunset-park/>)

Like 24

Tweet 6



(<http://artfcity.com/2015/06/15/this-weeks-must-see-events-we-are-not-in-basel/>)

weeks-must-see-events-we-are-not-in-basel/)

This Week's Must-See Events: We Are not in Basel

(<http://artfcity.com/2015/06/15/this-weeks-must-see-events-we-are-not-in-basel/>)



(<http://artfcity.com/2015/06/17/at-art-basel-kader-attias-seductive-destruction/>)

basel-kader-attias-seductive-destruction/)

At Art Basel, Kader Attia's Seductive Destruction

(<http://artfcity.com/2015/06/17/at-art-basel-kader-attias-seductive-destruction/>)

()
()