

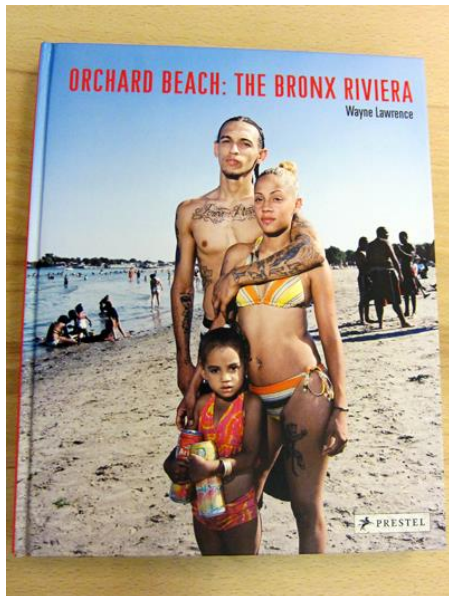
## Photographing the 'Bronx Riviera,' New York's Unloved Beach

By ALLISON MEIER | OCTOBER 31, 2013



Wayne Lawrence, "Untitled" (2005) (courtesy the artist/INSTITUTE)

Orchard Beach in the Bronx doesn't exactly have the best reputation. While the 1.1 mile stretch of beach, formed from landfill and sand shipped in via barges, was declared "The Riviera of New York" when it opened in the 1930s under the direction of Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, its profile has since declined. It's been named one of the five boroughs' dirtiest beaches, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, and some people even forget it's there. Yet Orchard Beach is still the Bronx's only public beach, and when summer arrives the locals who love it embrace the sandy shores.

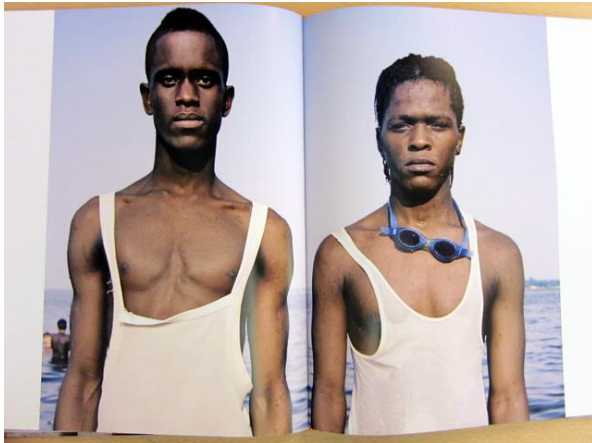


Cover of "Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera" (photograph by the author)

Photographer Wayne Lawrence has been documenting Orchard Beach for six summers. And the trek for the Saint Kitts-born, Brooklyn based artist was no easy journey, as he describes in his book *Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera*, published this month by Prestel: “I rode the C train uptown from Kingston-Throop, switching at Fulton Street to the number 4 train. This took me to 125th Street, where I’d transfer to the number 6 train, taking it to the end of the line at Pelham Bay Park. A short ride later on a number 12 or 5 bus and I’d be at *la playa*.”

And what he found was a vibrant gathering of individuality that, skimming through his book of portraits, seems to have provided endless opportunities for photographs with an engaging emotion and fashion that would make any street style blogger jealous. As he writes in his book introduction:

“From the first day that I visited Orchard, I knew the stigma attached to this place was unjustified. I felt a very strong connection to the environment and the people. I decided I’d stay a while, though I had no idea where the journey would lead. I sensed it was the beginning of a catharsis, and I committed on that day to let the work be a reflection of the love, cultural pride, and generosity of spirit I witness there.”



Portraits in “Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera” (photograph of the book by the author)

Currently, along with the recently published book, there are dual exhibitions of his Orchard Beach photographs, one at the FLAG Art Foundation and one at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, and he’s also giving a talk on November 12 at the New York Public Library.

One wonders why this is all happening long after the last sand has been washed off swimsuits and the final scraps of summer have been shrouded by the crisply falling autumn leaves, but perhaps summer nostalgia kicks in early. Lawrence has a special focus on overlooked community gatherings — such as the J’ouvert festival in Brooklyn and the world of Little League players — yet the Orchard Beach portraits have a cohesive directness to them that takes you right into this Bronx beach community.



Wayne Lawrence, “Kye, Kaiya, and Kamren” 2009 (courtesy the artist/INSTITUTE)



Wayne Lawrence, "Adam and Pamela" (2009) (courtesy the artist/INSTITUTE)

Images of Venus from Wayne Lawrence's Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera *is on view at the FLAG Art Foundation (545 W 25th Street, Chelsea) through December 14.* Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera *is at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (1040 Grand Concourse, the Bronx) through February 16.* Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera *by Wayne Lawrence is available online and in bookstores.*

## Platinum Hits and History Built in Rock: Photography Exhibitions of Elliott Erwitt, Domingo Milella and Wayne Lawrence

By WILLIAM MEYERS | NOVEMBER 29, 2013



Orchard Beach is a man-made seashore on Long Island Sound in the northeast corner of the Bronx. When Robert Moses constructed the facility in the 1930s it was called "the Riviera of the Bronx." Wayne Lawrence has been taking portraits of those using the beach, mostly blacks and Hispanics, for several years, part of his commitment to use photography to "confront long-standing ideas about race and class." A preponderance of the 26 pictures are of young women; curator Awol Erizku, inspired by the legend of Venus, the goddess born full-grown from the sea, sought divinity in this New York public park.

Almost all the women have tattoos, and most have piercings, but there is little commonality beyond that. "Yari" (2010) looks tough; she could be in her early 30s and stands in water up to her thighs, with hands akimbo and her head cocked to the side as she presents an attitude to the camera. A jewel pierces her bellybutton and "All you can eat" is tattooed above her bikini's bottom.

"Wilvelyn" (2009) is considerably younger and looks straight at the camera; her bikini is made of three triangular Puerto Rican flags. "Cathy" (2010) wears a pale-yellow bikini that sets off her dark skin; she stares inquiringly at the photographer. Mr. Lawrence shot "Brandi and Gianni" (2011) together, two 20-ish women in the skimpiest of bikinis, who turned to him with regal glances.

Note: "Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera" is also on display at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse, through Feb. 16.