Kill City: Lower East Side Squatters 1992-2000

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After being kicked out of her apartment in Brooklyn in 1992, and unable to afford rent anywhere near her school, young art student Ash Thayer found herself with few options. Luckily she was welcomed as a guest into See Skwat.

New York City in the '90s saw the streets of the Lower East Side overrun with derelict buildings, junkies huddled in dark corners, and dealers packing guns. People in desperate need of housing, worn down from waiting for years in line on the low-income housing lists, had been moving in and fixing up city-abandoned buildings since the mid-80s in the LES.

Squatters took over entire buildings, but these structures were barely habitable. They were overrun with vermin, lacking plumbing, electricity, and even walls, floors, and a roof. Punks and outcasts joined the squatter movement and tackled an epic rebuilding project to create homes for themselves.

The squatters were forced to be secretive and exclusive as a result of their poor legal standing in the buildings. Few outsiders were welcome and fewer photographers or journalists. Thayer's camera accompanied her everywhere as she lived at the squats and worked alongside other residents. Ash observed them training each other in these necessary crafts and finding much of their materials in the overflowing bounty that is New York City's refuse and trash. The trust earned from her subjects was unique and her access intimate. Kill City is a true untold story of New York's legendary LES squatters.

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