

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

# Brewing Exhibit Taps Into History

By Andy Battaglia

Blue mildew, spider mites and prohibition would make life difficult for any living thing, but they proved especially fateful for hops—the flowering ingredient fundamental to beer—in New York around the turn of the century. At the time, New York state was the nation's leading producer of hops, with a buzzing

**A new exhibit allows the NYHS to build a bar inside the museum and call it a gallery.**

beer industry in the city making lucrative use of the plant. Then came an agricultural blight and 13 years of alcoholic illegality, and the noble story of hops in New York came to an abrupt close.

But beer, of course, would stage a momentous comeback—one surveyed to intoxicating effect in “Beer Here: Brewing New York’s History,” an exhibition opening Friday at the New-York Historical Society.

“Beer is one of those things that we take for granted, but when you scratch a little bit and start to look at the history, it has a long tradition in New York,” said Debra Schmidt Bach, co-curator of the show.

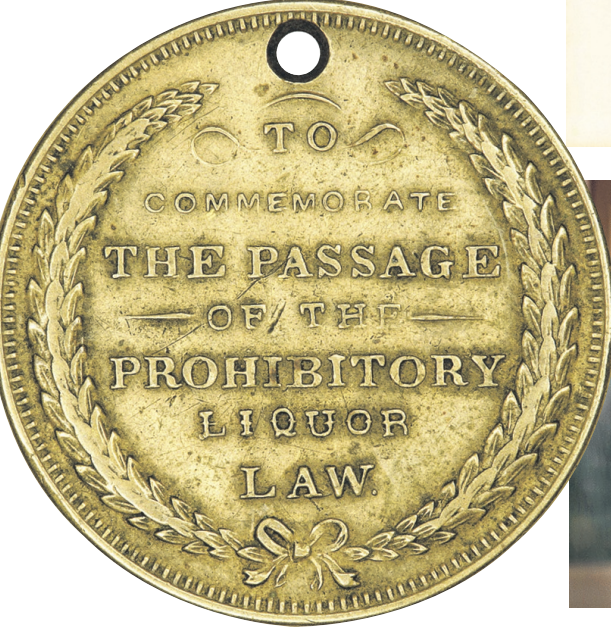
Added her curating partner, Nina Nazionale, “Beer gave us an opportunity to look at many facets of our collections here, both in the museum and the library, that connect with technology, social history, production and consumption in New York.”

It also allowed them to build a bar inside the recently renovated museum and call it a “gallery.”

It’s there, after ambling through a history that begins in the 17th century, that the past becomes present, by way of 14 present-day local brews on offer to taste. “We wanted people to get a

sense of what’s going on with beer now and how many creative people are out there,” Ms. Nazionale said.

The brewers who have established the city’s reputation in the current microbrew craze have a long lineage to uphold, beginning with the area’s first public brewery, established by the Dutch East India Company in 1632. Tax records for beer in New York date back to the 1640s, and traces of



its presence have accumulated ever since.

“Beer was such a part of common life, and it had nutritional value, so in the colonial era beer was safer to drink than water,” Ms. Schmidt Bach said. During the Revolutionary War, troops took beer as part of their food rations—so much so that the exhibit includes the account book of a New York brewer, William D. Faulkner, who sold beer to both the Continental and British

armies. It also figures into the story of immigration in the city, especially among German-Americans who popularized the making of lager in America and plied children with glasses of “kinder beer.”

Among the exhibit’s early beer-making artifacts are the saws and drills used for ice-harvesting, a thriving industry before the advent of refrigeration, wherein ice was cut from upstate lakes and shipped by boat to the

city. “Ice was expensive,” Ms. Schmidt Bach said. Elsewhere stands one of the earliest bottle-capping machines, which introduced the first dependably airtight vessels for beer in 1892.

There is of course a wealth of material relating to the temperance movement that led to Prohibition from 1920 to 1933. “What price prosperity?” reads one protest sticker. “Let people differ!” What few visitors may realize, though, is that New York

state enacted its own short-lived prohibition initiative—the Act for the Prevention of Intemperance, Pauperism, and Crime—in 1855, 65 years before the U.S. Constitution was amended.

Another section is devoted to the fanfare that attended the election of “Miss Rheingold” from the 1940s into the ’60s, when a series of bombshells courted the votes of millions in the city.

By that point in the tour, mu-

Clockwise from left, curators Nina Nazionale and Debra Schmidt Bach with vintage beer bottles; a medallion honoring New York’s prohibition effort of 1855; a ceramic mug, circa 1915, with the Atlantic Beer Garden; and a 19th-century ad for an early lager.

seumgoers may yearn for the final section—the bar. The contemporary swell of artisan brewers at work in New York now echoes what came before. “What’s going on in craft beer is not a fad or a trend—it’s a return to normality,” said Garrett Oliver, brewmaster at Brooklyn Brewery and editor of “The Oxford Companion to Beer,” as well as one of several local brewers scheduled to make appearances during the exhibit’s run through early September. “One hundred years ago, we had the most interesting and diverse food culture on the face on the Earth here. For a while we papered that over and lost it to industrial food practices. We had everything and managed to lose it. Now we’re getting it back.”

## Guided by Voices, Cro-Mags Lead Four-Day CBGB Fest

CBGB may be dead, but its spirit will live on in 30 venues around the city this summer when the first CBGB Festival corrals more than 300 bands into a sprawling four-day event.

On Wednesday the festival’s organizers announced the lineup, which will span five decades of rock music, from ’70s punk acts like Rocket From the Tombs to young indie upstarts like Cloud Nothings and the War on Drugs.

The festival is being launched by a group of investors who purchased the assets of the famed Bowery rock club earlier this year. The club, renowned as much for its cramped confines and toxic bathrooms as for its music, was shuttered in 2006 following a protracted rent dispute with its landowner.

Among the New York-based acts scheduled to play the festival that were making music when CBGB was in its prime are the Cro-Mags, Vision of Disorder and Sick of It All. The three will share a bill July 6 at Webster Hall.

The following day, the festival will take over SummerStage in Central Park for a free concert featuring indie-rock favorites Cloud Nothings and the Pains of Being Pure at Heart, plus the band that, as much as any, paved the way for those younger acts, Guided by Voices.

The festival will also screen more than 25 films July 5-6 at Landmark Sunshine Cinema and the City Cinemas Village East, plus a “distilled spirits fest” and conference panels.

—Matthew Oshinsky

REPERTORY FILM | By Steve Dollar

## Dangerous Nights, Indian Delights

### The Quad Classics Series

#### ◆ Quad Cinema

34 W. 13th St., (212) 255-8800

Friday-May 31

The venerable downtown art-house launches a new repertory program this weekend, devoted to revivals of classic cinema. The inaugural screenings are inspired by the recent success of “The Artist,” and feature three signature films of the silent era. Here’s another chance to see Fritz Lang’s 1926 “Metropolis” on the screen. One of the most imitated films in history, this sci-fi fable offers a never-more-timely class analysis set in a dystopian future where the 99 percent toil in a vast underground city (a slave pit nonetheless designed as an Art Deco nightmare). The screenings offer the 2010 restoration version that adds a lost 25 minutes from the original. Also on the bill: Buster Keaton’s “The General” and Sergei Eisenstein’s “Battleship Potemkin,” whose unforgettable “Odessa Steps” sequence is the textbook example of the power of film editing. Panel discussions will follow several screenings.

#### ‘Adventures in Plymptoons!’

##### ◆ UnionDocs

322 Union Ave., Brooklyn

(718) 395-7902

Sunday

Laureled animator Bill Plympton, whose films have twice been nominated for Academy Awards, has long entertained and tweaked audiences with his perversely polymorphic lines and bittersweet sensibility. Among his fans is Northport, N.Y., filmmaker Alexia Anastasio, who turned her camera on the artist behind such features as “Idiots and Angels,” and who first reached the masses through groundbreaking shorts on MTV. She will be present, along with her subject, Mr. Plympton, to screen and discuss the new documentary “Adventures in Plymptoons!” The film examines the cartoonist’s expanded sphere of influences, including former clients like “Weird Al” Yankovic and advocates like his fellow animator, Terry Gilliam.

#### ‘Redlegs’

##### ◆ ReRun Gastropub Theater

147 Front St., Brooklyn

(718) 766-9110

Friday-May 31

You can go home again, as writer-director Brandon Harris discovers in “Redlegs,” his debut feature. There’s just no guarantee what you’ll discover when you arrive. The no-budget drama, cleanly lensed by actor-turned-cinematographer Miranda Rhyné, is set Mr. Harris’s

native Cincinnati. The city’s racial divide and hilly landscape enrich the thematic possibilities for the story of three college pals who reunite for the funeral of a fourth friend—a popular, easy-going African-American, the victim of an unsolved murder in a rough neighborhood. Actors Andrew Katz, Evan Louison and Nathan Ramos play the leads, young men who are only beginning to come to terms with adulthood, and for whom the sudden intrusion of mortality acts as an agent for some Cassavettes-inspired psychological catharsis.

### 12th Annual New York Indian Film Festival

#### ◆ Various locations

www.iaacus

Through Sunday

With some 31 features programmed into less than a week of screenings, this year’s NYIFF is thick with premieres, offering a look inside a film industry that still doesn’t get much exposure, even in New York art-houses. Of strong

local interest is “Let’s Be Out, the Sun Is Shining,” which follows the adventures of a quiet Indian-American woman named Diya (Lipica Shah), who finds passion in the Bushwick bohemian scene after her romance with an Irish bartender goes bust. Other highlights are likely to include “Big in Bollywood,” a documentary about a once-starving actor named

Omi Vaidya who catapults from anonymity in L.A. to major stardom in India after appearing in the film “3 Idiots”—the biggest box-office success in Indian movie history; and the closing-night selection “Gangs of Wasseypur,” a historical epic set in Northern India that tracks a multi-generational revenge saga from the end of the colonial era to modern times.



A scene from William Friedkin’s ‘To Live and Die in L.A.’, one of the most intense action films ever made.

#### William Friedkin

##### ◆ 92Y Tribeca

200 Hudson St., (212) 601-1000

Saturday

Now 76, William Friedkin is as bold a filmmaker as he ever was: “Killer Joe,” his second collaboration with playwright Tracy Letts, is set for a July release with an NC-17 rating because the director refused to tamper with one particular, provocative scene. The rugged roots of Mr. Friedkin’s career are honored with screenings of two rarely seen

documentaries: “The People Vs. Paul Crump”

(1962), about a death row inmate convicted of a fatal robbery at a baby-food plant, and “The Thin Blue Line” (1966), a life-on-the-street police study that anticipates “The French Connection.” The double bill is followed by one of the most intense action films ever made: “To Live and Die in L.A.” Like a fever blister on the brain, this contemporary noir generates a near-hallucinatory level of tension, with high-speed car chases run against freeway traffic and early, star-making performances by future icons Willem Dafoe and William Petersen.

**Read more about the tribute to William Friedkin at WSJ.com/NY**



Sanjivan Lal’s ‘Bubble Gum’ screens Thursday at the Indian Film Festival.

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