

In Thailand there is a river that is lined with trees that are filled with fireflies. Every night, the fireflies wake up and start flashing. At first, their blinks are random and uncoordinated, but slowly patches of cooperation emerge. The patches gently merge into groups and then groups eventually coalesce into a single, massive, blanket of pulsing of light. It is moving and magical to watch.

I want to recreate this experience, except in a uniquely Gowanus way by lining the shores of the canal with barricade lanterns (the blinky boxes with a big round yellow flasher on top and a box on the bottom). These special lights would look normal from the outside, but inside they will be modified to mimic the synchronization strategy used by the fireflies. They would wake at dusk, and like their biological counterparts would slowly and magically come into synchronization over the course of the evening.

The display would be lovely from the walkways along the shoreline, but I think it would be especially impressive from the bridges - a vantage point where you would see the evolving interplay happening on both sides, and in the dancing reflections on the surface of the water.

People would come to see it - but people who just happen to encounter it by chance would also feel compelled to stop to watch for a while. I am hoping both groups of people would notice not just the visual spectacle, but also the connection to all the changes happening in the neighborhood around them. Maybe some will even feel drawn ever so subtly to be more and more in sync with those around them.

Technical details:

Here are the type of lights I would use...

<https://www.trans-supply.com/pg/71/battery-powered-barricade-light>

For the budget, I estimate we could have about 500 lights. This should be enough to thoroughly span sections between at least two bridges, but we would want to spend some time doing tests and considering other practical factors before deciding which are the best sections to cover.

I would like to attach the lights to the corrugated steel sheet piles using magnets. This would make for quick setup (possibly with help from the Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club?) and easy strike without leaving a trace. Does need some testing to make sure it will work as expected, but there are other fallback attachment methods possible as well.

Here is an (underwhelming but expositive) video of the fireflies...

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=376998216239822>

Here is a video I made showing this astonishing effect...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix66tQ93bdU>