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Second Queens International Exhibition

By Laurel Angrist

Queens, the most ethnically diverse locality in the United States, is a hotbed for artistic innovation and dialogue. Nothing reflects this better than



Manauvaskar Kublall, Rotishop, 2003, Holga C-print
courtesy of the artist

the Queens International 2004 exhibition, currently running at the Queens Museum of Art.

Ambitious in scope, the show strives to reflect the rich cultural and stylistic diversity of the borough's working artists. Five continents are represented and a range of media from photography and painting to sculpture and video installations. The artists featured hail from countless countries, including China, Japan, Israel, Mexico, Spain, Guyana and Belize.

Queens itself is only 109 square miles, but its overwhelming diversity makes it an excellent model for cultural study. The best works in this exhibition use culture as a jumping-off point to help us understand the intricacies of this place where thousands of people have forged a second home.

Tamara Gubernat's "Discovering the G" is a candid photographic documentary of the neighborhoods connected by the G train, which runs from Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn all the way to Forest Hills. Connected via a black angular line that references a subway map, her photographs chart the diverse social and economic structures

Information

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Foto Museum

GALERIE JOHANNES FABER

Huis Marseille

of this vast swath of New York soil.

Many of the images in the series possess such telling narratives that they could easily be shown separately. There is a deserted pool near the Bedford-Nostrand stop and a street-side stand along Metropolitan Avenue selling watermelon and sweet Italian sausage. A stunning Shinto shrine hovers above Elmhurst Avenue and children play next to a sleazy-looking pawnshop at Grand Avenue and Newton. Near Rego Park, a small red brick balcony signifies domestic harmony with ferns, marigolds and a wealth of potted plants, all lit-up by a glowing Japanese-style lantern.

Together, these images reveal elements of communities that are largely overlooked on our daily commute. The insular structure of the subway serves as a metaphor for the one-track mind that only thinks of home and work. One way to escape these linear confines is by taking a closer look at the places we travel through.

Another strong photographic installation by Aissa Deebi takes a microcosmic view of Arab American life in the New York. "Killing Time" weaves sound, text and image to document life in one of Astoria's Shisha cafés, where men of Arab decent relax and talk politics over pots of coffee and bubbling water pipes.

The quiet chatter and music that plays from a speaker helps us feel the café's vibe as one of camaraderie and relaxation. Deebi's large-scale photographs of men reclining and reading the paper, chatting on the phone and smoking pipes help set the scene as a place of quiet refuge, and his close-ups of hand gestures as people speak reveal the subtleties of communication between the café's patrons.

Coupled with his images, Deebi's understated narrative reveals the unspoken connections between those he documents. He speaks with a terrified refugee from Iraq and talks of Darfur and the Sudan with a young Kurdish friend of his. It's clear this is a place where parallel political struggles emerge on a regular basis, where men bond over shared feelings of homesickness and cultural isolation.

Deebi views the café life with a sociologist's eye, focusing his analytical lens on its prevailing social mores. Into this distinctly male atmosphere he brings his wife, Jaime, conducting an experiment to observe the patrons' reactions. "Everyone looked at us normally although none of them who have wives would bring

them to the café," he notes. "This is male territory, but there is some sort of unspoken concession to the occasional presence of foreign women." Through such telling complexities as these, Deebi leaves us knowing we've only caught a glimpse of what life is like in these men's shoes.

Liz Philips' "Echo" is a poetic 3-D video projection that takes us into the kitchens of local ethnic restaurants. Two projectors converge on a spherical screen, creating warped double-exposures on the semi-translucent surface. Slow motion shots of dough being spun into sheets overlap with images of people laughing around a table, arranging breadbaskets, smoking pipes. The effect is mesmerizing, and the multicultural music playing enhances the dreamlike quality of the images projected.

Several artists featured in the show present works constructed through particularly striking media. Cui Fei uses twigs and vine tendrils to create sculptural installations inspired by Chinese calligraphy and China Marks creates wild, Bosch-like narratives out of scraps of patterned cloth. Rosemarie Fiore's sixty-foot spirograph drawing, made with the aid of a Scrambler Kick-Spinner, must have been wildly fun to create.

The *Queens International* runs through February 6th along with exhibition related programs that include films, lectures and poetry readings. Free weekend tours are also offered on Saturdays and Sundays from 2-3 PM.

