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Bridging rivers, bridging cultures

by Willow Belden , qboro Editor

The Queensboro Bridge turned 100 in March, and among the various celebrations marking the structure's birthday is an art exhibition that deals with the concept of bridges, both literally and metaphorically.

Organized by Long Island City Artists, a group that hosts exhibitions, open studios and seminars highlighting local artists, **Trans-Positions Along the Queensboro Bridge: Contemporary Art Production Bridging the Boroughs** showcases works by 44 artists in five venues in Long Island City.

"The theme is really the notion of crossing a bridge," said Karen Fitzgerald, one of the artists featured in the exhibit. "A bridge spans geography. ... It brings people together. It brings cultures together."

Some of the art takes on the bridge theme literally, with realistic depictions of the East River crossings. Those range from Catherine Kirkpatrick's somber black and white photographs of the Queensboro Bridge, which evoke a sense of snowy tranquility, to Paul Johnson's holographic images of the structure.

Many of the works deal with the bridge idea in a more conceptual manner.

In the center of one of the exhibit's venues is a sculpture made of wood and rope, which looks like a bridge — only with bizarre twists, turns and angles. The piece, entitled "Audre Lorde Meets Abraham Lincoln," is supposed to represent what a meeting between Lincoln and Lorde, a feminist writer, poet and activist, might have been like, had the two interacted.

According to the description of the piece by artist Carla Rae Johnson, the meeting might have involved an attempt to bridge the divide between those who have influence, power and privilege and those who don't — which, as Johnson points out, wouldn't have been a straightforward crossing, as the sculpture's complex structure demonstrates.

Another angle on the bridge theme comes with Winn Rea's "22 Days," a piece involving stones placed atop maps and connected to time lines of personal and international events with thin metal cables. The maps are of places the artist traveled on a trip to the West Coast, and the stones are souvenirs from the trip. On the top of the work is a timeline showing Rea's itinerary; on the bottom is a timeline quoting news headlines from the same day.

The piece is "trying to talk about how there are simultaneous things going on," Rea said — to connect personal life to global events. For example, her personal timeline for one day reads, "Boulder City, NV — Hoover Dam," while the media headline reads, "Baghdad, Five More American Soldiers Die in Iraq."



Works by Catherine Kirkpatrick.

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Some works are even less concretely bridge-related — for example, there's a series of abstract oil paintings in grays, blues and yellows by Barbara Laube, and a sheet of blue and turquoise plastic squares with round holes in them, called "Cat's Cradle," by Mary Schiliro.

"There's a lot of latitude in this theme of trans-positions," said Curator Judith Tolnick Champa. "There's a kind of bouyancy in a lot of the work. There's a kind of gritty, urban character in others. Some of it is abstract; some of it is representational, and there's an iconography of the ambience of where we are, but then some work seems to be about things of the future."

Trans-Positions

When: Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Through July 31.

Where: Five venues in L.I.C.:

Henry DeFord III Gallery at CitiGroup, One Court Square

Clocktower Building, 29-27 Queens Plaza North

Holiday Inn, 39-05 29th St.

Packard Square Lobby, 41-34 Crescent St.

Space Realty Group, 29-09 39th Ave.

LICArtists.org.