

Going, finding, being “home” at the Queens Museum

By Jennifer Vignone for <http://www.NY-ARTNews.com>

A museum and its exhibitions may be approached and appreciated in several different ways. This summer, the Queens Museum has exhibitions through the summer months that range from installations extended from the Queens International 2018, exhibitions by individual artists, to the major Spring/Summer exhibit.

Though at first glance the visitor to the Queens Museum may not see the connection, further consideration reveals an underlying unifying theme of “home”. Be it celebrating the known environs of one’s neighborhood, resurrecting the forgotten people buried under a playground, or the future through the eyes of the Latinx heritage — the sense of seeking, finding, creating, or rebuilding “home” pervades.

Upon entering, one is greeted on the large curved wall by a work by the first artistic collaboration from artists Liz Phillips and her daughter Heidi Howard, “Relative Fields in a Garden”. Ms. Howard’s brushstrokes fill the curved wall in epic style, recreating the chaos of a garden, the sounds of air sweeping through the branches, flowers, and grass. Images of family and friends in both representational and symbolic form are part of the lively display, the colors and brushstrokes serving to depict the levels of intensity in relationships. The piece spans the seasons, beginning with spring and carrying through summer, fall, and winter. Ms. Phillips’ interactive sound installation plays sounds recorded from her garden and neighboring activity of the street and daily activity. The intensity and variety of the sounds are triggered by the changes in heat and light in the museum, so that the installation feels like a living, responsive part of the visitor’s space. The piece is evocative for everyone as they may consider their own neighborhood of now or long ago, and how it feels to be surrounded by their own “home”.



Liz Phillips and Heidi Howard, Relative Fields in a Garden as installed in the Queens Museum.



Liz Phillips and Heidi Howard, Detail: Relative Fields in a Garden as installed in the Queens Museum.

Alexandria Smith's "Monuments to an Effigy" examines the histories of the Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground and the Macedonia A.M.E. Church in Flushing, Queens to memorialize and honor the African-Americans who were literally paved over in their final resting place when the Parks Department built the Martin's Field playground in 1938. The gallery is constructed of mounted church pews, glistening black walls, stained glass, iconic columns, sculptures, and ghosted drawings suggesting faces from the past. A recording of a musical composition by Liz Gré, "At Council; Found Peace", performed with readings of the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, is evocative of the hymns sung paying tribute to those past, while seeking their guidance in life today. The collaboration is a solemn retreat and place of revelation, not just of those once buried under a playground, reclaimed in 2006 and now celebrated as the Olde Town of Flushing Burial Ground, but to our sense of loss, resurrection, tribute, and faith — the final resting place, or "home".



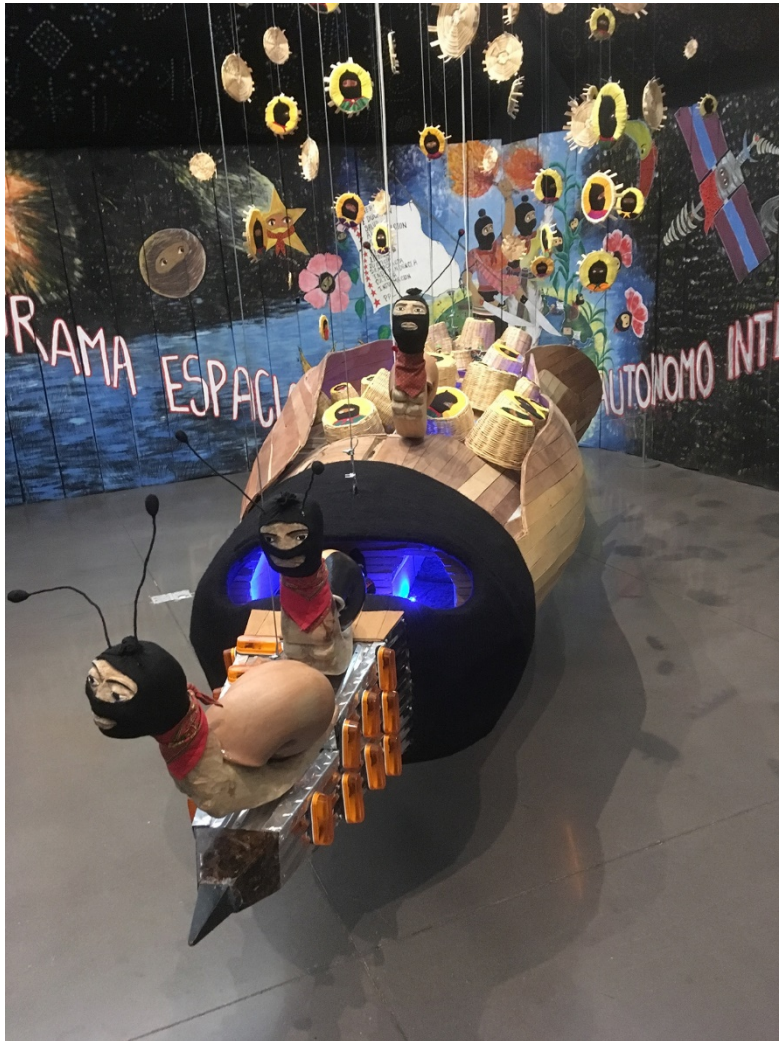
Alexandria Smith, Gallery Installation, Monuments to an Effigy as installed at Queens Museum showing sculpture in center of gallery.



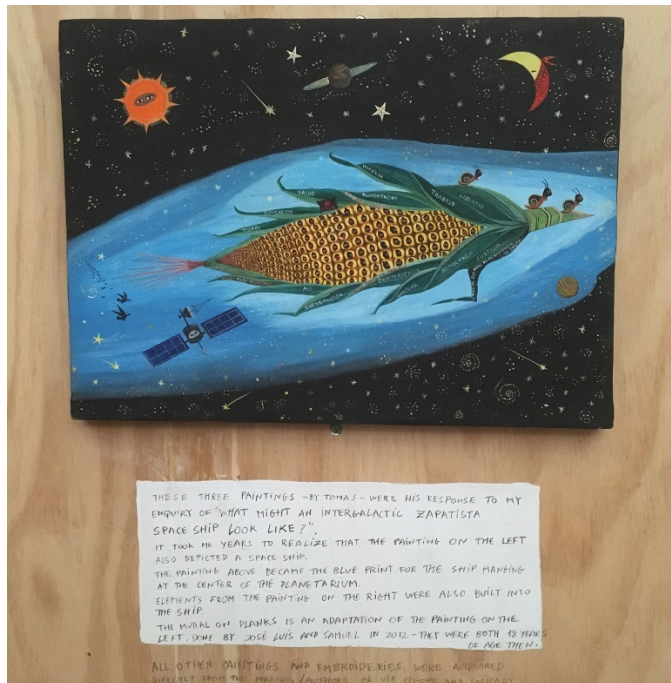
Alexandria Smith, Stained Glass, Monuments to an Effigy as installed at Queens Museum.

The exhibit, “Mundos Alternos (Alternate Worlds): Art and Science Fiction in the Americas”, occupies the Atrium and surrounding galleries with contemporary artists presenting their alternative view of the world as seen through the Latinx perspective. All the works interpret what the past and future might have looked like if more engages with the Latinx heritage. It is a fascinating show. In particular and to the point of this article, Rigo23’s collaborative installation about the Zapatista Revolution, “Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program” (2009 – ongoing) utilizes an entire gallery, creating an environment of painted wood, embroidered hangings, basketry, paintings, objects, videos, culminating in the creation of a “spaceship” meant to take the Zapatistas into the future. The ship is filled with their basketry work, crops, a ball field where people gather. It, the vehicle that will protect them and allow them to take their essentials with

them. In order to meet the future, the core, stabilizing sense of “home” is critical to meeting the future.



Rigo23 Collaboration, The Spaceship, Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program Effigy as installed at Queens Museum.



Rigo23 Collaboration, Painting that inspired the Spaceship, Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program Effigy as installed at Queens Museum.

These exhibitions have so much more of a story to tell. The common thread of being transplanted, moved, having to re-establish and find what it is now or will be "home" touches on how we all want to have our space, our core, and live. There is a striving for redefinition while still holding onto a sense of self, and how that gets incorporated into the new now, and the future to come. It is a museum experience well worth having.

Heidi Hoffman and Liz Phillips, Alexandria Smith, Mundos Alternos until August 18th, 2019 at the Queens Museum, Flushing Meadows Park, Corona, NY.