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qboro—Day Tripping At ‘Queens International’

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(courtesy Yin Mei) Yin Mei in a performance of “Magic in the Square World,” part of The Queens Museum of Art’s biennial.

First, you have to get past the lobby.

Immediately to the right upon entrance is a bombed out Tehran apartment created by Little Neck artist Sara Rahbar. Dimly lit and fully furnished, shrapnel and gun casings are scattered on the floor under a dusting of plaster from the hole riddled walls.

Immediately to the left of the entrance is an old car that has been completely coated in sugar frosting to look like a police cruiser by Long Island City artist T. Charnan Lewis

Welcome to Queens International: Everything All At Once, the Queens Museum of Art’s third installment of a biennial of over 50 artists based in the borough. The show’s title is both apropos of the variety of mediums, styles and themes and the overwhelming sensory experience of walking through it.

Having absorbed the lobby, wander into the cathedral ceilinged main gallery space, where there is an installation that looks like an apartment designed in a dream of Dali: A clothesline is strung out from a bookshelf mounted high on one wall across to a dresser perched atop a wooden pole in the

center of the room. On the floor many feet below is a desk and a fish tank set on a Persian rug.

Turn now into a small gallery that—despite the curators’ insistence they adhere to a kind of chaos theory of arrangement—seems to loosely revolve around themes of sexuality. **Notable among the pieces here is a series by Blanka Amezkua, which takes the traditionally domestic women’s craft of embroidery to depict bawdy, comic book style women, some scantily clad and others nude, all in brightly colored thread.**

Also in this space are a pair of exquisite headdresses crafted by Long Island City based artist Debra Hampton. One glittering in soft gold and the other in harsher black tones, both pieces reassemble discarded materials, military history and world mythology into a distinctly feminine and feminist expression of strength.

Continue the tour by seeking out two sculptures by Paul Gallaway. His satires on American wastefulness take the form of a gold painted cardboard monkey head supported by its own doppelganger, and a tower made by strategically stacking yellow and pink styrofoam meat trays.

An alternate path through the show would be to follow the threads that explore the immigrant experience and the theme omnipresent in Queens of ethnic diversity.

Among the colorful, political and painful works that touch on this theme is a piece sourced from an unexpected place—the memoirs of an average, middle class white girl. Find the brown picnic table and you will find “Half a World Away,” a giant pop up book. It was made by Southerner by birth and Sunnyside resident by choice Amanda Sparks, who meticulously collected, cut, folded and glued together the paper and fabric remnants of childhood memories.

Dubbed by the gallery sign as a “manifesto of typical American whiteness,” Sparks sees the piece also as an exploration of the pathology of saving stuff, like the boxes of snapshots from sun drenched family beach vacations that extend as a rainbow across two pages of the book.

For a last stop, take in “The World in a Picture, the World in a Borough,” which offers snippets and vistas of Queens geography and culture in a spread of photographs. It includes some of Jeff Chien Hsing Liao’s stunning series of cityscapes, along with shots from Carolina Penafiel’s exploration of the Latina Quinceanera, and its American counterpart, the sweet 16 celebration.

To maximize the sensory intake, schedule one’s journey into this fray for a Sunday afternoon, when you can catch Yin Mei’s “Magic in the Square World.” Using her body as a brush, Mei dances and writhes on a canvas that resembles a paper covered Slip N Slide, dipping occasionally into an inflatable pool of black ink. By the end, Mei’s body is drenched in ink and the sodden paper beneath her is torn apart.

Whatever path one chooses through the maze of worthy works too numerous to mention here, this chance to slide down the rabbit hole into the world of the borough’s own artists shouldn’t be missed.

Queens International will be on view at the Queens Museum of Art in Flushing Meadows Park through Jan. 14. For information and a schedule of ongoing events and performances, visit www.queensmuseum.org.