

ENGAGING ARTISTS

A Selection of works from More Art's
2015 Engaging Artist Residency

February 7-27th, 2016

Opening: February, 7th, 3:30pm-5:30pm

QUEENS MUSEUM

Community Partnership Gallery

Open during museum hours

Admission: Suggested donation

Featuring artwork by Annie Kurz, Aurélien Grèzes, Christie Neptune, Hidemi Takagi, Michelle Melo, Sara Meghdari, Soi Park, and Uday K. Dhar. Closing reception features a live composition and tap-dance performance by Alon Nechushtan and Andrew Nemr.

The *ENGAGING ARTISTS* exhibition features the work of eight NYC-based first generation and foreign born artists, who participated in the *Engaging Artists* Residency. The works emerge from grassroots volunteering as a catalyst for social practice. In 2015, More Art's Engaging Artist Residents developed long-term projects to connect with aging populations through multilingual art-making projects, recreation activities, and conversations at nursing homes and community centers in their own neighborhoods, from Flushing, Queens to Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

This exhibit features works that serve as documentation and response to critical issues associated with aging, health, home, and isolation through the lens of contemporary art. *Engaging Artists* fosters intergenerational exchange and diverse artistic perspectives on the challenges associated with aging and immigration in New York City.

In two separate installations, **Annie Kurz** explores aging in a manner that provokes the symbolic dimension of her chosen materials. *Take me for*, a series of 20 iPhone photographs on aluminum depict mysterious pills that reflect the problems and hopes that surround getting older. The second, titled, *The tree*, is a mixed media sculpture made up of found branches wrapped in saran wrap. Personal cultural momentos and materials like textiles, yarns, and pearls are preserved in liquid-filled plastic bottles. Visually it contrasts kitsch with elements that remind us of skin and bodily fluids—evoking wonder and disgust.

In *Standing*, **Aurélien Grèzes** continues his pursuit of using video to destabilize the power structure of the gaze—forcing the viewer to promptly reconsider what they are actually looking at. In an abstract yet poignant manner, the single channel video shows anonymous figures standing alone as the viewer tracks every movement silently in the background. *Standing* suggests the troubling experience of isolation the artist witnessed and endured as a volunteer at a senior center in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

In *Memories from Yonder*, an installation incorporating distorted photography and video, **Christie Neptune** digitally weaves together visual narratives of Eborá Calder, a Guyanese immigrant senior, and herself, a first generation Guyanese-American artist. In an unspoken dialogue between both the western world and Guyana, Neptune spotlights the transformative nature of identity. She questions what happens when one's cultural foundations and values have shifted entirely because of a new environment. *Memories from Yonder* depicts Calder crocheting, a popular recreational activity amongst Guyanese women. The gesture serves as a

symbolic weaving of the two cultural spheres in an effort to reconcile the surmounting pressures of maintaining tradition whilst immersed in an Americanized culture.

Hidemi Takagi, who continues to visit Saint Teresa of Avila Senior Apartments in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, documents the senior's activity classes each day while composing portraits and audio-recorded dialogues of the predominantly African-American and Caribbean-American residents living in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. *Hello, it's me* incorporates portraits of three residents against a bright, ornate wallpaper. The installation is a vignette into the lives of the women depicted as well as representation of the artist's ongoing multimedia documentary of foreign-born senior citizens throughout New York City.

The five-panel textile piece, *Untitled* by **Michelle Melo**, employs the indigenous Latin American technique of *Molas*, a type of quilt made by the Kuna women of Panama. Layers of cloth are laid on top of one another. Then the final design is achieved by cutting out the upper layers to discover the fabric underneath. *Untitled* illustrates conversations about identity, hybridity, and immigration, overheard while facilitating printmaking workshops to Colombian and Puerto Rican women at the Carver Senior Center in El Barrio (East Harlem.) Each panel is adorned by a single pin stating the following statuses: "Refugee," "Nomad," "Displaced," "Immigrant," and "Alien."

The video installation by **Sara Meghdari** an Iranian-American artist, challenges the viewer's perspectives about cultural difference. *Silent Self is* inspired by conversations with American senior citizens about the negative perceptions of Muslim women wearing a headscarf, known as the Hijab. In a single shot, Meghdari directly faces the camera and performs a series of emotions while wearing the Hijab. These emotional gestures suggest a universal human behavior by which to connect with the viewer who may be of a different cultural background.

Soi Park's *Young Geong Sajin (Prearranged Funeral Portrait)*, crystallizes the complex facial expressions of the over one hundred and eight Korean American seniors who have participated in Park's portrait workshop and service, so far. *Young Geong Sajin* brings to light the unique cultural tradition practiced in South Korea where memorial portraits of the elderly are joyfully prepared while the individual is still alive. Throughout 2016 Park will continue this project in collaboration with More Art and the Korean American Senior Citizens Society of Greater New York in Flushing, Queens, among others organizations providing social services to aging Korean Americans.

Conceived in response to working with South Asian seniors similar in age to his parents, **Uday Dhar's** *I am my own Mother*, documents a continued performance of the artist dressing as his mother. The series of mixed media photographs as well as the performance itself underscore the tension between tradition and the desire to honor heritage versus the possibilities of personal freedoms and self expression—a principal feature of immigrant life.

Taking place on February 27th during the closing reception, Engaging Artist residents **Alon Nechushtan** and **Andrew Nemr** will present *Duologue* – a cross-cultural exploration of music and percussive dance traditions. They will engage in a constant flow of musical information, rhythmic and ethnic cultural references, morphed in a contrapuntal dialogue. Native of Israel, Nechushtan brings a few modal surprises from his homeland to this project, while Nemr, from a Lebanese heritage, finds complementary rhythmic input to complete the cycle.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Sunday, February 7, 2016 (3-4:30pm) at Queens Museum Theatre

Artists.Roundtable (A.RT): Art + Intergenerational Exchange

moderated by Silvia Juliana Mantilla Ortiz, IMI Corona Community Organizer and Artist Services Coordinator, Queen Museum

Engaging Artists Residents will discuss the challenges of working with aging immigrant populations. The event is co-produced by More Art and Artist Volunteer Center and a part of the ArtsEverywhere/Musagetes Artist Round Table (A.RT) series. A.RT is a platform that proposes new models for bridging artistic and scientific methods. Artist speakers include: Hidemi Takagi, Andrew Nemr, Guido Garaycochea, Aurélien Grèzes, and Raul Ayala.

Sunday, February 7, 2016 (4:30-6pm)

Engaging Artists Opening Reception

Meet the exhibiting artists and learn more about their experience working with seniors throughout New York City.

Sunday, February 14, 2016 (1-4pm)

Family Art-making: "Memory Mats" Weaving past and present

More Art teaching artists will lead a textile collage activity. Both children (ages 4+) and adults are encouraged to draw a set of symbols and brief descriptions of memories on patches of textured fabric. Families will use thread and yarn to weave these patches together, incorporating multi-generational perspectives into a single memory mat. The final object can be both decorative and used at family meals.

Saturday, February 27, 2016 (4-6pm)

Engaging Artists Closing Reception + Live Performance

Meet the exhibiting artists for a walkthrough of the exhibit and enjoy a live musical performance exploring intercultural exchange and cultural heritage.

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Engaging Artists is produced by More Art in partnership with Artist Volunteer Center (AV Center). The Program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with City Council. In-kind programming space provided by School of Visual Arts (SVA) and subsidized studio space provided by Industry City.

We thank the Artist Volunteer Center for facilitating volunteer opportunities in community organizations such as: Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration, Marcy Plaza Farmers Market (Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn), Brooklyn Gardens Nursing & Rehabilitation Center (Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn), Gaylord Senior Center (Harlem, Manhattan), India Home at Sunnyside Community Center for Active Adults (Sunnyside, NY), Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly - Carver Senior Center (East Harlem, Manhattan), Jefferson Senior Center (Harlem, Manhattan) The Korean-American Senior Citizens Society of Greater NY (Flushing, NY), The New Homestead Home (Kew Gardens, NY), Prospect Hills Senior Center (Crown Heights, Brooklyn) Saint Teresa of Avila Senior Apartments (Crown Heights, Brooklyn), Queens Community House, Kew Gardens Senior Center (Kew Gardens, NY), Washington-Lexington Senior Center (East Harlem, Manhattan)

More Art is a nonprofit organization that fosters collaborations between contemporary artists and underrepresented communities to create thought-provoking public art and educational programs that encourage social change. Since its inception in 2004, More Art has produced a wide range of projects reflecting the concerns and challenges of various New York City residents, including: aging, gentrification, homelessness, immigration, and war trauma.