

HARLEM FOCUS

Harlem Focus is a blog with an eye on community, culture, art, food and life in and around Harlem. It is a product of the CCNY-Amsterdam News Urban Digital Media Lab in collaboration with the Documentary Forum.

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Art As Resistance' Debuts at La Maison d'Art

Story and photos by Bianca Silva



The "Art As Resistance" exhibition made its debut June 4th at the La Maison d'Art gallery in Harlem. The exhibition, presented by the Harlem Arts Festival, features the work of six past and present Harlem Arts Festival artists who have made an impact on the local arts scene.

Tania Balan-Gaubert, one of the organizers for "Art As Resistance" and on the Harlem Arts Festival marketing team, said that the artists featured have a connection to Harlem.

"I think a lot of artists naturally gravitate to Harlem from elsewhere trying to get a little of bit of that mojo, whatever they feel exists in Harlem," she said.

For some of them, Harlem's rapidly changing image and rich history has been influential in creating their respective works.

"There's an energy I gravitate towards and a culture that I respect that is a lot different than other places in New York. It allows me to explore my creative side," said J.T. Liss, one of the featured artists.



Liss, a photographer living in East Harlem, frequently merges his pictures, creating multiple layers that show what he observes on a daily basis. Some of his influences come from the variety of people interacting with each other and the music that comes from the streets. Much of his work highlights what East Harlem currently faces.

"My work is a social commentary on a variety of issues and gentrification is one of them," he said. "I'm coming from an outside neighborhood and I don't belong here but I respect and appreciate in wanting to keep the culture as intact as possible whereas some other individuals may want the drastic changes to fit their needs."

Similarly, the works of Lance Johnson, another Harlem Arts Festival artist, is influenced by the history of the arts and culture scene of the community as well as artist Romane Bearden.

Johnson has a deep connection with the neighborhood, as his family lived there and he later attended school and worked there. At the age of 14, he saw a documentary on Harlem that sparked his interest in art.



"Once I saw that, I was like, I need to create, to extend the legacy almost," he said. "My work tries to tie hip hop culture with jazz culture and the Harlem Renaissance."

Johnson is more welcoming of the changes occurring in Harlem despite the risks of losing some of its cultural identity. He credits the influx of people coming in from different places in addition to the community continuing to support its local artists that have long ago made their impact.

"The energy in Harlem is very refreshing," he said. "There's a lot of culture developing, artistic institutions coming in and breathing life into the area. I think it's awesome and I think it's amazing."

Some of the other artists in the exhibition include: Tiffany Latrice, who creates pieces that highlights the struggles women face in society, Zulu King "Slone," Lady Millard, Alice Mizrahi and performance artist Jasmine Reign who provided the music for the opening of the exhibition.

The "Art As Resistance" exhibition will run at the La Maison d'Art through July 15.