

Kambui Olijimi

BLOUIN ARTINFO

"Crossing Brooklyn" Reveals More About the Borough, Less About Its Art
BY RISA PULEO, MODERN PAINTERS | OCTOBER 23, 2014

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Paul Ramírez Jonas's "The Commons" 2011.

Less a survey of Brooklyn's artists than it is a survey of commercially and critically recognized artists working in the borough, what "Crossing Brooklyn: Art from Bushwick, Bed-Stuy and Beyond" reveals about Brooklyn is more compelling than what it reveals about art. More than any other medium, the exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum focuses on participatory practices and how "artists engage the world." The exhibition suffers from the two-fold problem of social practice: first, the method has a hard time translating events enacted outside of the museum into visually engaging aesthetic experiences within, and second, few artists create meaning through their engagements with the world, beyond pointing to already existing problems.

Movement across place is a recurring motif in this exhibition. One line of artists look to the Conceptual legacy of Richard Long and Adrian Piper, and another to diasporic displacement and immigration. Both speak to Brooklyn's new internationalism. Some works reference the borough directly, like Drew Hamilton's exacting miniature replicas of a bodega and food truck, while others engage the international visual language of Minimalism, like Gordon Hall's

recasting of the plinth as podium to present a series of lectures. Several artists trace migration patterns from the Caribbean to the city: Deana Lawson's photographs connect diasporic communities in Brooklyn, Haiti, Jamaica, and Miami, while Duke Riley trained carrier pigeons to smuggle cigars from Cuba to New York. Pablo Helguera recreates the home of one of the remaining six people born in the 19th century who moved from Alabama to Brooklyn during the Great Northern Migration. Other artists represent another diaspora — the relocation of hopeful and ambitious artists to New York City's outer boroughs.

There is a preoccupation with the sky in Kambui Olujimi's kaleidoscopic video of it shot from different locations in different weather conditions, Nina Katchadourian's sculptures, photographs and videos improvised on airplane flights, Miguel Luciano's kites, and in the canvases of Cynthia Daignault — the only paintings in the show. In contrast to New York City's vertical topography, the sky is an open field, as well as another site of movement. Many artists play the *flâneur*, using the walk to conceptually structure their engagements with the city — or in the case of Marie Lorenz's trips in a handcrafted boat, the waterways surrounding Brooklyn. Matthew Jensen created a 10-mile walking tour of the Flatbush neighborhood and displays the artifacts he collected *en route* in the museum; Elastic City conduct walking tours as sensory explorations; Yuji Agematsu walks at night; Zachary Fabri walks as an "art action"; the artist group Tatlo walks a portable cubicle down city sidewalks to survey passersby; and McKendree Key documents gentrification by recording the six minutes it takes to walk from a housing project to a condo development in Bed-Stuy in video.

Some artists do more than show us the problems in the changing landscape of Brooklyn. Linda Goode Bryant's Project EATS and Heather Hart focus on creating solutions to these difficulties, but also blur the line between "art" and a nonprofit organization. Project Eats' energy station, vegetable gardens and weekly green market address problems of quality food in Brooklyn's low-income neighborhoods, while Heather Hart's *Trading Post* proposes an alternative economic model by asking visitors to swap items and ideas without exchanging money. Hart's event *Barter Town* creates a network of exchange by extending an invitation to other artists, like Cat Tyc, to participate, and exemplifies another trend: breaking down institutional walls through collaboration.

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