

# The RIVERDALE PRESS

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## Show explores borough's ties to Africa

by Will Speros

What does it mean to be African in the Bronx? How are influences from the continent evident in the borough and its people? How does one make sense of his or her own identity against a backdrop of many?

These are among the questions posed by 25 artists in the upcoming exhibition "Bronx: Africa," which will be unveiled at Hostos Community College's Longwood Gallery on Wednesday, Feb. 3. Curator LeRon P. Brooks, an instructor at Lehman College and curator with the Bronx Council on the Arts, said the show was formed around the question of how to give language to the Bronx's African communities.

"What does it mean that many people from the continent are in the Bronx? How do we actually recognize the diversity of what the Bronx is and recognize the voices and influences?" he mused. "Really, it is an exploration of influences of African cultures in the Bronx, the idea of individuality within larger communities."

While not every artist featured in the exhibit is African or a resident of the Bronx, the multimedia show will cast a spotlight on the African spirit within the borough and how the vast identity of the continent is translated.

"I think New York is a city of neighborhoods," Mr. Brooks explained. "There's so many new voices in this show. It's an introduction to the transformation of New York, the way New York is becoming the most diverse city in the world."

Photographer Dennis RedMoon Darkeem identifies as both African American and Native American. He said trying to understand identity in regard to place is a key component of the portraits he has featured in the show.

"Through my work, I like to push these questions and allow people to ask themselves what they're looking at and how that resonates in your own community," he said.

Racial and sexual identity is grappled with in Seyi Adebajo's short documentary "Oya: Something Happened On The Way To West Africa!" The film tackles the disparity in identity between queer or gender fluid Africans in New York and in Nigeria, where Ms. Adebajo was born. She explained how stigmas in her home country toward the gender queer community came about as a result of colonialism.



'Bronx: Africa,' by Nicky Enright, part of the eponymous exhibition at Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos Community College beginning next month.

Photo courtesy of the Bronx Council on the Arts

"It was never anything wrong to be multiple genders in Nigeria," she said of the pre-colonization era.

Ms. Adebajo explained that the gender queer community of Nigeria still exists, but is not welcomed with the acceptance once found in the nation's roots.

"There's a level of freedom [in Nigeria] that doesn't get readily acknowledged," she said. "I hope people really get a sense of possibility."

Nicky Enright, a Latino artist, created one of the show's most poignant pieces on the scope of African identity in the world at large. His painting "Overturned" depicts a traditional world map flipped upside down with Africa in the center.

"There's no reason to show the continents and the ocean the way we do over another way," Mr. Enright explained. "It's literally a Euro-center map. By flipping it, I make basically an Afro-centric map."

"The whole show is saying, 'take another look, take a real look at Africa,'" he added. "It is humanity's motherland, where we all come from and yet it gets this negative connotation. I like the idea of overturning that. Symbolically I'm overturning this idea that Africa is somehow below, inferior and putting it front and center."

*Hostos' Longwood Gallery, located at 450 Grand Concourse, will display "Bronx: Africa" from Wednesday, Feb. 3 through Wednesday, May 4. ■*