

THE HUNTS POINT *Express*

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Serving Hunts Point and Longwood

Exhibit Highlights Gay Artists of Color

By Bryan Mark Urbasaitis

Underrepresented niche spotlighted at Longwood Gallery Just over a decade ago, a panel on gay artists at a Chelsea gallery was stumped by a member of the audience who asked why only one non-white artist was included in a show of gay art that featured the work of 30 men. The show's curator responded: "I don't know where to find artists of color," remembered Ivan Monforte.

Now Monforte has devised his own answer to that question. He is the curator of GAY, a show of explicit, gay-themed art that opened on Feb. 5 and will run until May 7 at the Bronx Council on the Arts Longwood Gallery at the City University of New York's Hostos Community College. "Here's a room full of artists of color, that are gay," exults Monforte, a Mexican-born curator whose studio is in Harlem and who provides HIV prevention education to homeless and runaways at a Harlem drop-in center.



Artist Twiggy Pucci Garçon's and designer East Coast Mother MeMe Pucci's Bring to life your dream wedding look at the annual Kiki Legends Ball at GAY. The exhibition will run through May 7.

Photo courtesy of Longwood Gallery at Hostos



Curator Ivan Monforte

GAY explores the production of gay male artists of color from 2003-2013. Through painting, drawing, sculpture, video, performance, installation and text, the artists reject, embrace, question and celebrate the gay label, with a show that warns on a sign at the outset that it contains adult content.

Monforte said that gay male artists of color experience stigma on many levels, in their professional and personal lives. He added that he was particularly interested in creating an exhibit that showcases other avenues of gay identity than the "papi chulo" or the "black stallion," which he says stereotypes gay men of color by reducing them to oversexed, well-endowed, muscular sex objects often found in traditional media.

Bianca Pimentel, on a class trip with her classmates from Bronx Haven High School in Melrose, was untroubled about the sexual nature of some of the works in the show. "It can never be too sexual because of the fact that even though you're young, you still have to know about sex, to be open to what we have right now, the gay community and stuff like that, so why not learn about sex?"

She continued, "I'm okay with them teaching me sex. I'm okay with people explaining all different types of sex. I'm open to everything just because it's a community." As her classmates listened and nodded in agreement, she added, "Why not learn about new things?"

"I'm confused, I'm a little confused," admitted an adult named Alberto who declined to give his last name. "It has passages to where some of us think at times," he said, adding, "what that might be I don't want to explain in depth, but I'm pretty sure the people that come here, they'll be able to see that themselves." A teacher, Alberto said that some of his students had mentioned GAY to him and he had decided to come and see for himself. "It's a good thing because it gives awareness," he said. "It allows people to see other avenues."

Pointing to the growing movement to legalize gay marriage nationwide, Monforte said he was concerned that it could overshadow other aspects of gay struggle, from disproportionate rates of HIV infection to poverty and discrimination. He is concerned about what he calls "the conservative gay voice that I think sometimes squashes all the other voices within the community." GAY, he says, is intended to celebrate the diversity of voices within gay culture. ■

GAY'S Featured Artists

The Longwood Art Gallery is on the campus of Hostos Community College, 450 Grand Concourse at East 149th Street. It is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from noon to 5:00pm.

The Artists in GAY include David Antonio Cruz, Jose Joaquin Figueroa, Cacy Forgenie, Lawrence Graham-Brown, Imani Henry, Steve Locke, Rafael Melendez, Lucas Michael, Troy Michie, Netza Moreno, Twiggy Pucci Garçon, Carlo Quispe, Carlos Sandoval De Leon, Jacolby Satterwhite, Hector Silva, Rob Vassilarakis, Charlie Vázquez, Antonio Vicenty and Dorian Wood. Melendez has a studio in the Bronx, while Michie, Moreno and Vicenty are Bronx residents.