



FOX AND INTERVALE

an exhibition by

PERLA DE LEON



EL SUR DEL BRONX

En 1977 el Presidente Jimmy Carter hizo una jira por el Sur del Bronx donde prometio dar mas de un Billon de dolares para su re-construccion. Poco tiempo despues decidi documentar dicha transformacion cual hasta hoy en dia no se a logrado. En una area en donde viven miles de habitantes en condiciones similares a las de guerra (la mayoría son de habla hispana o negros americanos) lo encuentro muy dificil el no documentar tal fenomeno cual lleva unos 15 anos sin arreglo.

The South Bronx

In 1977 President Jimmy Carter went for a tour of the South Bronx where he promised more than a billion dollars for reconstruction. A short time thereafter, I decided to document the expected transformation which as of now has yet to take place. In an area where thousands of people live in war zone conditions, (the majority of them black and Hispanic people) I find it hard not to document this phenomenon which has now gone fifteen years without improvement.

Perla de Leon



Fox and Intervale, an intersection of streets anonymous in comparison to another street nearby named Charlotte. The nearby street is now famous for its infamy. Charlotte Street. The name has become a code and a slogan. Presidents and presidential candidates, lesser politicians and even the Russians, have come to gawk in disbelief. All that these visitors have proven is one thing:

The neighborhood is the epitome of the importance of America's urban policy. The government, Federal, State and city, cannot or will not rebuild the housing or build new housing; the Fire department cannot control the blazes; the Police department cannot catch the Arsonists, known also as "torchers"; the Welfare department cannot stop the rent gouging on the few ramshackle apartments left; the Sanitation department cannot control the rats or haul away the garbage; the Traffic department cannot take away the abandoned cars; and, the Transportation department cannot take you there, or get you out—safely or on time.

In the center of this devastation it is not easy to overlook the misery, poverty, filth and degradation that exist.

But an artist can make us see the common in uncommon ways. Perla de Leon has walked the streets of the South Bronx a thousand times. She has seen "the children walking to school through a corridor between two walls of garbage." She has been chased away by Sanitation department workers and ridiculed by police when she was seen photographing things as they are. But an artist also knows that the surface is just the beginning. In the 17th century Van Leuwenhoek took a lens and looked at a drop of dirty water. Behind its repulsive exterior he discovered another world of dynamic, living creatures, breathtakingly beautiful. And now Perla de Leon using another sort of lens has shown us another world behind the deterioration.

Perla de Leon has found boys dancing in the streets and joyfully flying pigeons from the rooftops of abandoned buildings. She has found whole, solid buildings, tranquilly occupied, surrounded by vacant lots. Under her camera's probing a brick and rubble strewn lot, takes on a leaf and lawn like quality; an abandoned building in the evening light takes on a baronial mood. In another photograph the composition resembles an English landscape, and even in the most desolate photographs, Perla de Leon manages to infuse tenderness. Although the type of printing paper used adds a warm, tannish tone to her photographs, it is really Perla de Leon's open, unprejudiced and penetrating approach to her subject that makes her photographs succeed.

Perla de Leon has been challenged by a formidable subject, and by avoiding both sensationalism and sentimentality, she has made us reconsider our image of Fox and Intervale, and everything physical and spiritual that surrounds them.

Perla de Leon was born in N.Y.C., 1952. She did undergraduate work in fine arts at Fordham and N.Y.U. In 1978 she graduated with a Master's Degree in Fine Arts (Photography). Ms. De Leon is at present a production assistant at Channel 13, WNET-TV.

EXHIBITIONS

- 1978— Henry Hicks Gallery, Brooklyn New York.
- 1979— Eleventh Street Photo Gallery New York.
Citibank New York.
Mujeres (group show) El Museo del Barrio New York.
- 1980— Brockman Gallery, Los Angeles California.
N.Y.U. East Galleries, New York.
El Museo del Barrio, New York.
- 1981— Montclair State College, Montclair N.J.
School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Mass.



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