

CITY OF CURIOSITIES

A Diorama project
Curated by Art In Flux

“WELCOME” By Leah Poller

“WELCOME” speaks to the dichotomy of past and present, the stable and unstable, the ‘maybe’ and the ‘not so sure’ of city living for an artist. Unquestionably, space to work and to live is an ongoing challenge in the topsy turvy existence of the creative life.

Unique and other, the studio, as it reflects the artist in all his/her singularity, seems to always rest on the precipice of urbanization. Often established in less favored neighborhoods, it needs to be cost effective, spacious and forgiving of chaos from which creativity springs – a real and raw environment from which to spark the creative juices.

That said, “home” plays an equally vital role. In the words of artist Donald Judd, speaking of his Soho industrial space (now preserved as a mini museum), “My requirements were that the building be useful for living and working and more importantly, more definitely, be a space in which to install work of mine and of others,” he wrote of the building. (NY Times, 2014)

My own creativity also needs its complementary formal space of aesthetic harmony, its more finished environment, a step removed from the intimacy of the creative zone. There, I am able to digest the completed work, to replenish, to harness the energies to tackle the next unknown in a space shared with my artist cohorts.

Consequently, the concept of “*live-work*” space is the ideal. And finding this in Manhattan is beyond challenging!

My quest for such a space led me to Harlem just as the new Harlem Renaissance (trust me, the old never left!) gathered its adepts from an ever widening palette of locals and foreigners. My creative juices have been nourished by this curious place that has opened its doors; Welcoming its talented, and offering spaces to work, to exhibit, to live, Harlem supports the curious phenomena of identification with a time and place in a dynamic and singular wa.

Historically, once artists make their presence felt by organizing studio visits, pop up galleries, and community spaces, the first flank of cool and hip denizens begin to hitch their wagons...the non-Starbucks coffee bar arrives, the mom and pop shops proliferate, and destination restaurants beckon, all offering a safer, more well frequented milieu to rub shoulders with the thrill of adventure for the urban dweller

in quest of "IT". According to Madeline Schwartz (Dissent, '*The Art of Gentrification*', Winter 2014) "A survey of American cities published in 2010 found 45 percent of respondents had built or were planning to build artist housing as a way to revitalize neighborhoods." The plow horse is still pulling the cart.

Over the years my creative space has been subjected to multiple iterations: the Paris live-work space, the quintessential Soho loft, the shabby chic studio, a tri-plex carriage house turned gallery, the storefront workspace, the restored turn of the century brownstone with its claw foot tub, fireplaces and rescued traces of a past elegance - all of it incorporating time and space in an upside down, inside out, multi-faceted vision of bits and pieces.

In my deepest experience as an artist, I have come to understand with over arching 'knowing': If we artists were properly rewarded financially for our creative energy that is the lifeblood of our cities, then rather than being constantly priced out of the very neighborhoods we enliven, we would become the warp and woof of the urban loom with staying power.

We would remain quite simply "Welcome" to come and stay, just about everywhere...

That is my work in progress....

Leah Poller
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24 x 36 inches

A mixed media diorama incorporating fabric, metal, glass, mirror, beads, plaster, wax, tile, Plexiglas, fur, sheetrock, etc.





