



URBAN OMNIBUS



An Exhibit as Vast as the World



Jonathan Tarleton • Aug 22, 2014

I can't think of a more fitting a place for an exhibition of art and representation that aims to capture the breadth of the world than the Queens Museum. The institution continues to break through the walls of its recently renovated New York Pavilion building — a remnant of the 1964 World's Fair, an event that sought to bring the world to Queens — with a range of community initiatives, forswearing the insular museum tradition. Through these initiatives, it invites in and responds to a borough with one of the most diverse populations in the United States — the world within the five boroughs.

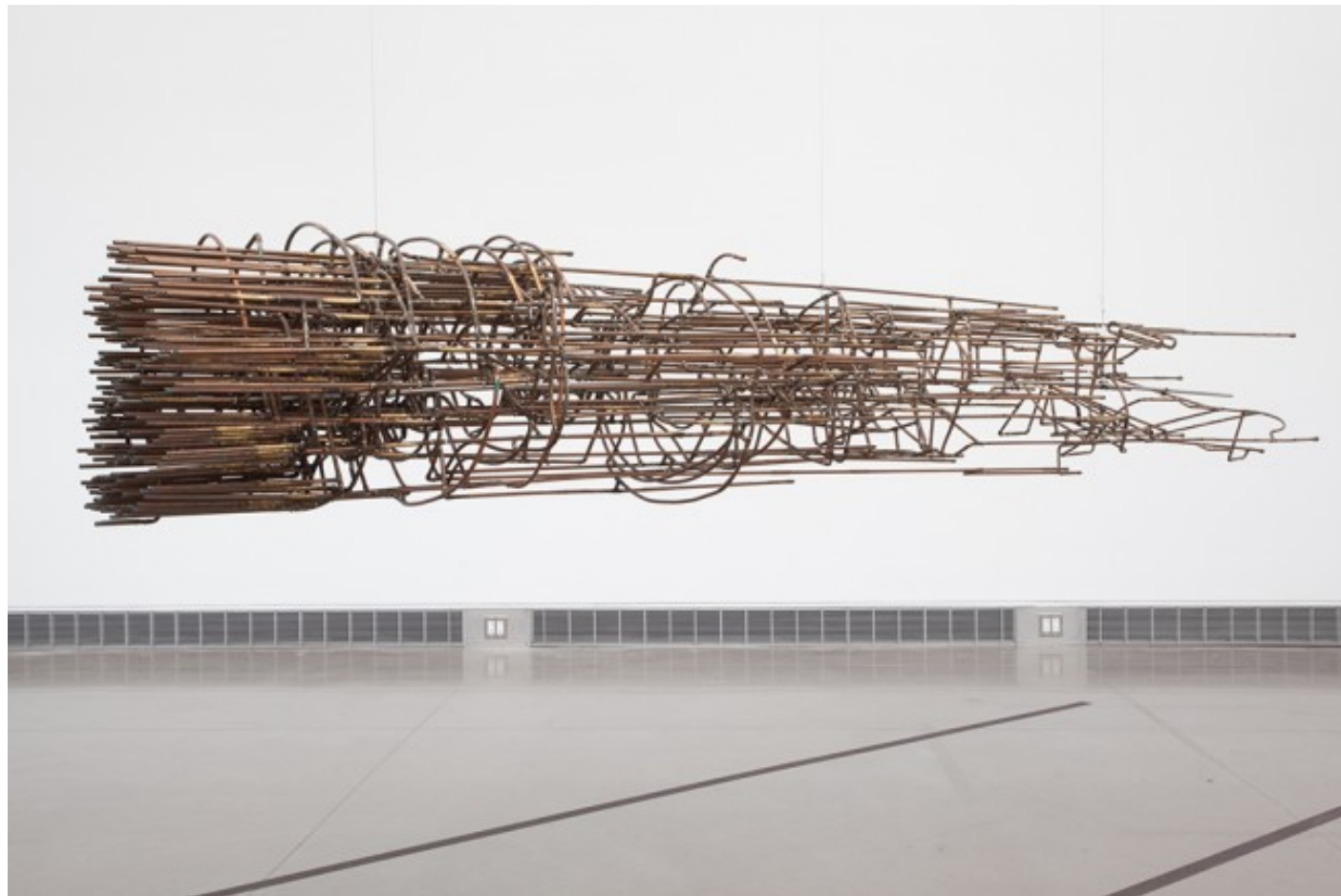


The Panorama of the City of New York, created by Raymond Lester Associates | Photo by [Chris Devers](#)

The title of *Bringing the World into the World*, on view through October 12th, is inspired by Italian artist Alighiero Boetti's assertion that art and the world contain and are contained by each other. As conceived, the exhibition couldn't happen properly anywhere else. Its pieces all draw inspiration or operate in dialogue with the majestic Panorama of the City of New York, the world's largest model of an urban environment. The Panorama alone is well worth a visit to the Museum. After 50 years it is still unique in its ability to show the vast scope of New York City. If there is any danger in constructing the exhibition around the Panorama, it's that once inside the sprawling model's inner chamber, I found it difficult to break away to

over the Panorama — a perfect perch for the film's zooming from human scale out to the universal and down to the atomic. And suspended above the Bronx floats the sun in Chris Burden's *Scale Model of the Solar System*, with ball bearings representing Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars nearby. Neptune sits in the Mexican restaurant Tortilleria Nixtamal a couple of blocks outside the park, the rest of our solar system sprinkled in eateries or parkland surrounding the museum. While you are taking in the horizontal expanse of the city, you are reminded of all that surrounds you, the molecular to the planetary.

Look up from the Panorama to the surrounding walls and you'll see one of the most playful pieces in the exhibit. I almost missed the goose butt sticking out from the wall at an angle, as if the waterfowl had breached the Panorama's container. Yumi Kori's *Flight* led me out into the rest of the museum: the other half of the goose is peaking through the other side of the wall.



Hikaru Hayakawa's *Panta Rhei* (4,000 years of human history) | Photo courtesy of the Queens Museum



Harun Farocki's Deep Play | Photo courtesy of the Queens Museum

This skepticism of the geographic authority that the hyper-detailed Panorama represents runs throughout the exhibition. Clarissa Tossin balls up tracing paper and sketches a globe, only to unfold that representation into a vaguely recognizable but scattered new view of the world in *Unmapping the World*. And in what may be the most attractive sculpture possible for an avid reader and urbanist, Liu Wei presents a fractured cityscape constructed from books, breaking apart what seems so coherent and rational in the Panorama. Even the triumphant lettering of Lawrence Weiner's *As Far As the Eye Can See*, composed of those words emblazoned across a wall in four-foot tall letters (as if an airplane were just ahead, pulling the banner behind), seems to make fun of just how constrained a view the eye, and human perception, actually provides.

Liu Wei's Library II-II sits in front of Lawrence Weiner's As Far As the Eye Can See | Photo courtesy of the Queens Museum

This dissonance is what makes the exhibition worthy of praise from both artists and urbanists. It juxtaposes pieces that reach the heights of our belief that we can somehow fully capture the world around us with those that complicate this endeavor, showing the myriad perspectives through which a single place or event can be perceived. Then, it critiques itself. I only wish I had more time to skim the books of *Reanimation Library / Corona Branch* — a curated collection of over 200 books from “the rapidly receding 20th century” on topics like the future, perception, cartography, and geography — to find some now-debunked simplifications of the world, or to fully understand what was going on in Wong Kit Yi's *Too Much Water, Too Much Wood, Lacking Fire*, a series of sculptural and architectural interventions with embedded video of conversations between artists and curators arranged throughout the museum according to the practice of feng shui. Be sure to give yourself multiple hours to delve into this exhibition, which appears to have few artworks at first but quickly shows its vastness and depth. Whether it's the world containing the art or the art containing the world that you are searching out, each will take a good bit of time to comprehend, and it's well worth spending it.

Reanimation Library / Corona Branch | Photo courtesy of the Queens Museum



Jonathan Tarleton is a writer, activist, and urbanist with aspirations to contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive urban environment. He is a former assistant editor at The Architectural League and *Urban Omnibus* and has made his way to Brooklyn from his roots in Georgia and North Carolina. Follow him @jttarleton.

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