

The Brooklyn Paper

Brooklyn's Real Newspaper

It's a 'Natural'

Artists cultivate Brooklyn's flora and fauna in new show

By Kate Ray
for The Brooklyn Paper

A photograph of a life-size, fake deer stares mournfully at us from a tiny yard in Carroll Gardens.

Bits of moss and grass, collected from all over the borough, are pressed into an ab-

stract collage that is literally Brooklyn on paper.

These are just a couple of artworks featured in "Brooklyn Au Natural" — a visual exploration of the interface between nature and the city — a show which opened at the Safe-T-Gallery in DUMBO on Thursday.

The eight Brooklyn artists and one Man-

hattan printmaker are here to show us that, as urban as our borough may feel, nature has not been completely banished.

"It's not that hard" to find nature all around us, Don Burmeister, the show's curator told GO Brooklyn. "It's there at every street corner. It's creeping through the sidewalks. Nature's just itching to take over again."

To put together his summer show, Burmeister brought together artists from wildly different backgrounds, with various styles and media, who each address the topic of the natural and urban coexisting in Brooklyn.

Among the artists are Tim Connor, a digital photographer with a series on Brooklyn yards; Juliette Conroy, who created a photo-assembly out of hundreds of shots of her hosta lily taken over the course of a year; and Asya Dodina and Slava Polishchuck,

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Exposed to the elements: Digital photographer Tim Connor documents the wildlife in Carroll Gardens in Safe-T-Gallery's new show "Brooklyn au Natural."

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who moved from Moscow to Bensonhurst to paint their eerie half-human, half-animal chimeras.

Also featured are Ana Delgado, a photographer of trees around the world; Hugh Kearney, who creates collages using pieces of Kings County flora; Mary Pinto, who makes color photographs of artificial flowers; and two printmakers, Fumiko Toda and April Vollmer, who use similar techniques to produce startlingly different creations.

By introducing us to all of these artists' visions, Burmeister said, he hopes to open up our eyes to a new way of seeing Brooklyn.

"It happens to me all the time — I start to see the world around me in a different way," he said. "It's magical."

Connor, photographer of plastic deer and other Brooklyn wildlife, looks at local gardens for a small-scale perspective on human interaction with nature.

"The whole idea of the garden itself is kind of on that cusp between nature and artifice, or domesticated and wild," he said, pointing out

that while a tidy garden can represent the human impulse to groom nature to our own tastes, an unkempt garden reminds us of nature's resilient, disobedient fertility.

"One kind of morphs into the other. Sometimes artifice becomes more natural than nature and nature becomes more artificial than artifice," he said.

In one of Connor's photographs, a clump of plants is set in front of a floral mural that has been painted onto the cement wall behind it. The real plants blend into the painted mural to the point that one is almost indistinguishable from the other.

For Connor, this corner of a small community garden in Park Slope represents people's attempts everywhere to bring nature, or the appear-

precious to people," he said. "I don't know if this is always conscious. But if you look around, you'll see it on people's roofs and in little tiny backyards and pocket parks. There's a lot [of] nature. But it's different, it's transformed."

Pinto, a photographer with an entirely different style, has her own way of transforming the artificial into the natural.

In her work for "Brooklyn Au Natural," Pinto made color photographs of flowers, similar to botanical prints made in the 1800s. But instead of using real flowers, Pinto worked with silk and plastic flowers, bought at dollar stores along Manhattan Avenue.

Pinto said that she was inspired by the flowerpots of her Greenpoint neighbors.

"I like the way people mix real flowers and fake flowers," she said. "People will put some plastic geraniums in a pot with real leaves."

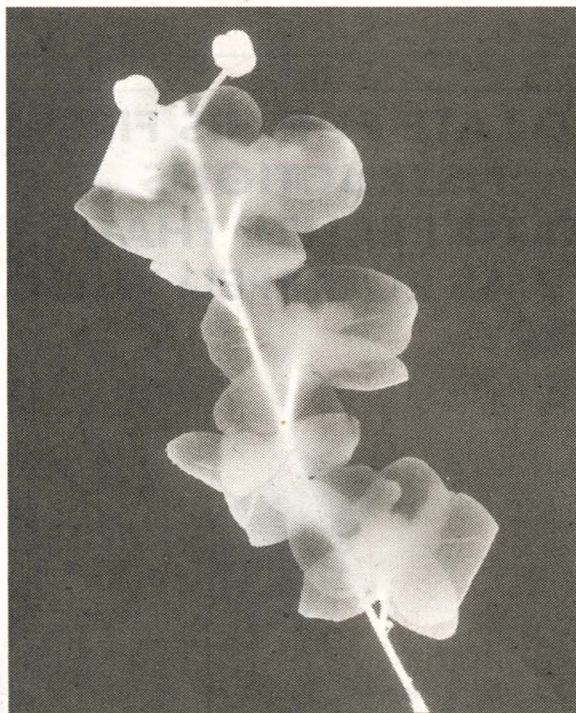
By incorporating these manufactured blooms from Manhattan Avenue into her photographs, Pinto said, her work becomes an "updated version" of those early botanical prints.

"There's a lot of real nature around me, but there's also a lot of artificial nature and representations of nature. I use the things around me to make my images, but my things are different," she said.

And whether those things are plastic flowers, real gardens, or garish artificial deer, it looks like Brooklyn is not going to surrender its natural beauty anytime soon.

ART

"Brooklyn Au Natural" is on display through July 20 at the Safe-T-Gallery (111 Front St., Suite 214, at Washington Street in DUMBO). Hours are Thursdays from noon to 8 pm, and Friday through Sunday, from noon to 6 pm. On July 20, the show will close with a meet-the-artists reception from 2 pm to 6 pm. Free. For information, call (718) 782-5920 or visit www.safetgallery.com.



Botanical bounty: Photographer Mary Pinto shows a series of color photographs made with artificial flowers bought on Greenpoint's Manhattan Avenue at the Safe-T-Gallery through July 20.

ance of nature, into their lives and communities.

"I think that green space and the natural world as it appears in cities become very