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Hector Canonge

01.13.09

AUTHOR: RUSSELL BURGE
01.03.09-01.24.09 Y Gallery

In Hector Canonge's investigation of human topography, the artist takes the 7 train's journey through Queens as a conceptual departure point, assembling an archive—or three variations on an archive—that provides alternate images of the borough's heterogeneous enclaves. The first, a series of wall-mounted transparencies, is lifted entirely from the annals of the Metropolitan Transit Authority: Each plate documents a historic New York subway map, presenting zeitgeists as valuable for their narrative (the construction of the line, the end of the IRT) as for their changing depictions of the city. The second installation transposes barcodes over the stops of the 7 on a contemporary street map; a handheld scanner brings up photographs of their incipient IRT constructs. (The IRT, a private company, was the first of three subway systems to operate in New York; all were later consolidated under the MTA.) Each photograph is paired with sound bites from residents living in the corresponding neighborhoods. As the photographs beg comparison with their modern-day counterparts—the elevated track cuts through open fields, a graceful catalyst of urban sprawl—the subway is implicated in this human presence.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is also the most responsive: An interactive diagram using touch-screen technology allows viewers to explore different stops along the 7. Each waypoint brings up one or more sources of ancestry (Korean, Canadian, etc.) with related audio recordings: an interview with a resident, music from the associated ethnic group, and the ambient sounds of the neighborhood itself. While firmly entrenched in the local, Canonge's show is also an investigation of synecdoche (subway for city, sound for community) that explores the possibilities of the archive. His project exhibits qualities rarely manifest in this genre: It is sensuous and dynamic, a thoughtful abstraction of the moving currents that compose the urban milieu.

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