

The cutting edge of art in Northern Manhattan

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Artist Hector Canonge shaves his head during a performance piece called "Hombre de Pelo en Pecho" during the opening reception of the Uptown Arts Review at the NoMAA gallery on June 6. PHOTO: Mike Fitelson

by Erica Varlese

Hector Canonge circles a mirror placed on the floor that is covered in his hair that he and invited guests just clipped. He grunts at the audience and pounds his chest, sticky from the hair he pasted there. Looking upwards, he pauses and bows. The audience claps in appreciation.

He calls this performance art piece "Hombre de Pelo en Pecho."

(Canonge will also lead a series of tours at Inwood hair salons and barber shops during Sun., June 12's day of [open studios](#).)

Such was the scene Tue., June 7 at the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA) Gallery during the opening reception of the Uptown Arts Review, an annual exhibit showcasing the work of this year's NoMAA grantees during the Uptown Arts Stroll.

The work of 22 artists, all of them from Washington Heights and Inwood, is spread through two rooms and hallways, housing paintings, sculptures, photographs.

Diana Schmertz' paintings "Cause of Itself" and "Without Intention" welcomed guests into the gallery with striking images of hands – twisted and bent – grasping on to one another. The mass of painted flesh looked almost like a newborn in the fetal position as the objects seem to turn in on themselves. Schmertz, a Washington Heights resident who teaches art in Westchester County, has worked on this series for about three years.

Inspired by laws of physics and "grey areas" of time theory, Schmertz said, "My work is about memory, perspective, and contact." She added that her paintings are an attempt to show contact in a nonlinear way and to deconstruct the manmade concept of the segmentation of time. Coupling this deep, theoretical influence with a hyper-realistic style, these pieces were a fascinating introduction into the work of NoMAA's diverse grantees.

Other highlights in the show include Roni Mocán's black and white photographs of bridges in Northern Manhattan and Enrico Miguel Thomas' series of watercolors of New York landscapes painting on subway maps. Jessica Lagunas, a mixed-media artist, exhibited "Bittersweet," an installation of broken teacups that have been glued back together. Lagunas is interested in relationships and the modern woman.

"['Bittersweet' represents] all of the difficulties in a marriage, all of the discussions, and the heated conflicts," Lagunas said. "All of these crevices and cracks can really hurt you."

Lagunas has participated in the Uptown Arts Review for the past four years and has contributed projects on such various subjects as beauty standards and menstruation. A common theme in her work is the world of appearances. The teacups may appear whole, but "once you take a closer look," Lagunas said, "the cracks cannot be repaired."



Canonge invites artist Maggie Hernandez to participate in his performance. Canonge will also lead a series of tours at Inwood hair salons and barber shops during Sun., June 12's day of [open studios](#) during the Uptown Arts Stroll. PHOTO: Mike Fitelson