Bridging Communities,

Rating:

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Bridging Communities,” a two-part art exhibit hopes to break down self-imposed borders. The Diaspora artists featured in Harlem’s latest pop-up art show – “Redefining Diaspora, (Part 1)” now–March 7, Postcrypt Gallery; and “Bridging Boundaries (Part 2),” now–April 11, ALOFT Harlem Hotel Gallery, Frederick Douglass Blvd., 124th Street – will provoke and get you talking.

“I’m Dominican and Haitian. But I also consider myself Black. Too many Dominicans have been brainwashed to deny their African roots. My art celebrates our ancestors and beyond,” said artist Leonardo Benzant, at the recent opening of “Redefining Diaspora (Part 1)” at the Postcrypt Art Gallery. I escaped the bitter cold and descended into the warm basement of the majestic St. Paul’s Chapel at Columbia University. The hidden Postcrypt Gallery, an intimate space, was a perfect setting for an exhibit that breathed with emotion and spirituality.

The “Diaspora” exhibit is a joint venture between Columbia University’s African Students Association and Art in FLUX Harlem. Most of the ten Harlem-based artists and ten Columbia University artists placed an emphasis on African Diaspora. But no matter your background, viewers will find inspiration and much to identify with — family heritage, culture, gender, identity, ritual and spiritual philosophy.
As a mixed-heritage person, I was particularly engaged by a student work called “You Made Me This,” by Emma Sulkowicz, who has a Japanese/Chinese-Jewish/Polish heritage (four prints, 12”X12,” C-print). Her work’s words and images explored being “half-this and half-that.”

Benzant’s “Memoria Konga” investigated ways culture is retained and expressed through memory in his spiritual multidisciplinary work. Benzant incorporated mixed media, acrylics, African and Native tribal sculpture, beaded rope, and Caribbean coffee grounds onto his canvas. Some of the same artists in Part 1 are also featured in Part 2 at Aloft Hotel. Each entry in this two-part show is certain to generate dialogue about who you are and how we are all connected. “Bridging Communities” is my top art pick for New York’s “best hidden gems.”