

The Village Voice

October 9-15, 1996

Other Rooms

By Lesile Camhi

3 Legged Race
307 West 141st Street
October 12 through 14

Exit the subway at 145th Street and you enter a world of beautiful architecture and crumbling infrastructure, a second city, where the art world rarely travels. There, three artists have transformed an empty Harlem building with installations that evoke themes of displacement, memory, and renewal. Their exhibitions un-common power lies in its combination of literal and imaginative dislocations.

On the ground floor, Marcel Odenbaeh projects video images on facing screens of activity along Manhattan's edges. On one side, men in tight jeans cruise the piers; in the opposite direction, pleasure boats and barges glide through the Hudson. Odenbach mixes in footage of armed strife, island culture, and refugees boarding ships for New York. The metropolis emerges as a place of disjointed, restless energy and yearning.

A narrow flight of stairs leads up to Nari Ward's two sculptural installations. Ward has woven an enormous web, using colored yarn, wire, and objects he found in the vicinity. (The building housed, successively, a fire, piano movers, a limousine service, and a family.) Headlights, piano keys, books, and a crib are held in suspended animation: do they belong to past or present? Ward's second installation is a lyrical curtain of old bottles knotted and tied into a screen for the projection of shadows and light.

Janine Antoni has left the building's top floor bare; her installation, in the burnt-out shell next door, is visible from the window or the roof outside. She climbed into this decaying, gutted structure, and lovingly restored a single kitchen. It gleams, white and gemlike amid the charred ruins that surround it. Though her renovation was not for human habitation, the work radiates with a sense of idealism and the patient labor that can illuminate even the forgotten spaces.