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THE CITY VISIBLE



The United Nations of Queens

A photographer from Belle Harbor captures the face of a borough transformed.

By BONNIE YOCHELSON

LAST week, The City Visible featured Frank Gohlke's black-and-white photographs of Queens neighborhoods. Mr. Gohlke shared a commission with Joel Sternfeld to produce photographs for Powdermaker Hall, the social sciences building at Queens College, which was completed in 2004. They spent two years photographing in Queens, often parting at the start of a day and meeting up in the evening to compare notes. This week, the focus is on Mr. Sternfeld's color photographs.

Because Mr. Sternfeld, 64, was born in Belle Harbor, Queens, one might think he would approach his subject with a greater sense of familiarity than Mr. Gohlke, who grew up in Wichita Falls, Tex., and has never lived in New York.

But Queens today is a very different place from what it was in Mr. Sternfeld's postwar childhood. The population, which has nearly doubled in half a century, is almost half foreign-born, and the borough is now the most ethnically diverse and multilingual locale on earth.

Mr. Sternfeld was captivated not only by the profusion of ethnic groups but also by the jumble of cultural artifacts attesting to the process of Americanization. He characterizes his and Mr. Gohlke's project as "an intricate narrative of denial and accommodation, mourning and celebration."

Mr. Sternfeld's photographs of the famed Lemon Ice King of Corona celebrate Queens tradition, while his pictures of an onion-domed laundromat in Jamaica or a factory converted into a Hindi temple in Elmhurst masterfully capture the cultural fusions that are modern Queens.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL STERNFELD



ONLINE: QUEENS IN COLOR

A slide show of the borough's neighborhoods in photographs by Joel Sternfeld:
nytimes.com/thecity