

Brooklyn artist brings a Barcelona neighborhood together

By DAMASO REYES AmNews European Correspondent | Posted: Thursday, May 26, 2011

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BARCELONA, SPAIN- Even in the most diverse of communities it can be difficult for neighbors of disparate backgrounds to come together. Often it takes an outsider to reaffirm that old chestnut that there is more that binds us than sets us apart. Brooklyn artist Debbie T. Davies is a believer, and in an exhibition here at the ADA Art Gallery, she brought together dozens of strangers in Barcelona's Raval district in an attempt to create bonds through the power of art.

She originally came to Barcelona last year to exhibit her paintings in a group show. While in town she was struck by the complex melting pot that Barcelona has become over the past two decades. "It really surprised me just how many different kinds of people there were here," she said in a recent interview. When she met with a local gallery about a solo show, she at first wanted to show her photography, which primarily consisted of self-portraits taken with a microscope camera. The more time she spent in Barcelona, however, the more she realized she "wanted to do something more relevant to the place I was in."

In that spirit, she decided to start the I Love You Project. She invited residents of Raval, where the gallery is located, to come and be photographed saying the words, "I love you," in their mother tongue. Photographed with her microscope camera, Davies' images are ethereally out of focus and dreamlike. Along with the still images, she created a video of the images to accompany the work. Because of the changing demographics in the area and the large number of immigrants who live in Raval, there has been some friction. Davies hopes, through her project, to bring people together who had up until then been strangers.

"As we were shooting, neighbors who didn't know each other met in front of the gallery for the first time and shared a moment together," she said of the time she spent photographing for the project. "It didn't matter what color people's skin was or what their religion was," people managed to connect to one another.

Davies, a 44-year-old Trinidadian who came to Brooklyn when she was 4, has been engaged with the arts from an early age, describing herself as the "kid who was always drawing." Her career path was very circuitous: She worked in an engineering firm specializing in highway and roadway design for several years as well as in advertising and photography. Several years ago she founded Focus and Finance, a firm that provides financial planning services to creative people and artists. She also embraced her art and desire to connect people. She is planning to take the I Love You Project to Berlin next, continuing her focus on immigrant neighborhoods. You can learn more about her work online at www.debbiedavies.net.