

# The New York Times

## ART in REVIEW

### Do You Think I'm Disco

Longwood Art Gallery, Hostos Community College  
450 Grand Concourse, at 149th Street, the Bronx  
Through March 18

Some of the most innovative ideas for recent pop-culture exhibitions have come from the Bronx. A few years ago, the Bronx Museum of the Arts took an ambitious look at the trickle-down effect of hip-hop. Now Longwood Art Gallery, working with much less space and less familiar artists, has put together a similar show on the disco phenomenon.

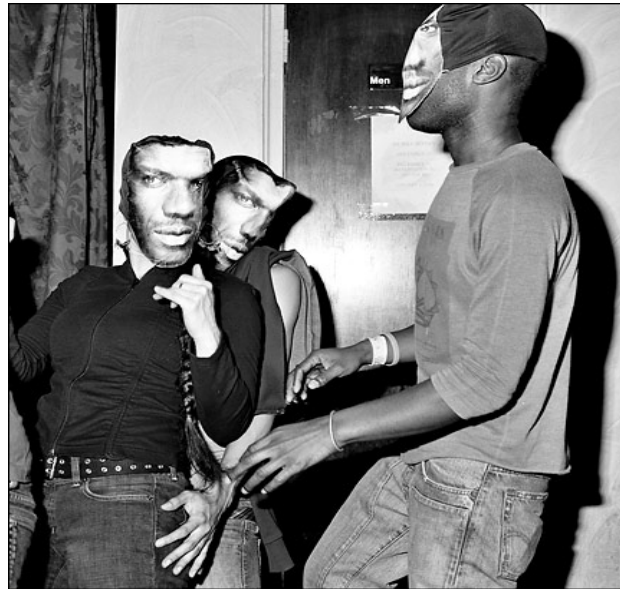
There is certainly a big story to be told. It begins with the emergence, in the early 1970's, of a new music style with roots in rhythm and blues, African-American church music, 1960's drug culture, gay liberation and all manner of anti-establishment politics. And it ends when the same music became associated with AIDS, and was subject to moral censure rooted in racism and homophobia.

All of this is touched on, unsystematically, in the lively show that Edwin Ramoran, Longwood Art Gallery's director, has assembled. A note of political resistance is struck right at the start with Carrie Moyer's lavender "Rock the Boat" posters, Shirley Wenger's video mix of disco music and air-raid sirens, and Alex Donis's painting of an encounter between a police officer and a gang member that becomes a same-sex dance.

The show doesn't pretend to be archival, but there is history. It's present in a 1979 Jamel Shabazz street photograph; in paintings by Mel Cheren, a founder of Paradise Garage; in a piece by Elia Alba about the Garage's renowned D.J., Larry Levan; and in a shadow-box evocation of the club by Ronald B. Monroe (1939-90).

In addition, Karlos Cárcamo links disco to hip-hop in a sculptural stack of vintage LPs, with Afrika Bambaataa on top, while Negar Ahkami and Swati Khurana suggest disco-mania's global reach. Naturally, dance images are plentiful: in photographs by Patrick "Pato" Hebert and Matias Aguilar; a disco tribute on video by Arthur Aviles; and in the snazzy Bronx-shaped dance floor designed by Brent Birnbaum, which sits in the center of the gallery. Here and there, glitter glitters and sequins glint, and nothing has more sparkle-power than a mosaic-painting from Mickalene Thomas's series "She Works Hard for the Money Pin-Ups."

You'll find disco balls, courtesy of Shinique Amie Smith, Nelson Santos, James Jaxxa and a miniball in a Barbie doll extravaganza by Curtis B. Carman. There's old music — Donna Summer, et al. — in the air, and new music is at least implied — in a piece by Ramdasha Bikceem, who moonlights as a D.J. under the name Designer Imposter, and in a banner by Wolfgang Mayer and Cristina Gómez Barrio



Elia Alba's "Men's Room," from the series "Larry Levan Live" (2006).  
Courtesy the artist and Longwood Art Gallery

of Discoteca Flaming Star, gender-blending purveyors of "hard-core karaoke."

On the subject of gender, Larissa Bates, Christian Marclay, Edwina White, Megan Whitmarsh and the team of Jayson Keeling and Kalup Linzy have intriguingly varied things to say. And if queer culture is the show's lingua franca, it takes many forms, with references to erotica (paintings by Boris Torres); H.I.V. and AIDS (a fine film by Derek Jackson and a conceptual piece by Iván Monforte that offers free H.I.V.-testing at the gallery); and spirituality.

This last element finds a voice in one of the exhibition highlights, Mr. Monforte's short film titled "And I'm Telling You," in which a terrific gay gospel singer, Marcellus Ari, delivers an a cappella rendition of a love song from "Dream-girls." Written to be sung by a woman to a man, the song is almost absurdly passionate; it leaves Mr. Ari vocally and emotionally exposed. And when he's finished, he seems momentarily dazed as if pondering what he has just done.

The show is nowhere near as focused as his stellar performance. But it, too, is a thing of absurdities and passions, and offers material for thought. ■ **HOLLAND COTTER**