

Fine Arts: Bridges Between Cultures in Princeton

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For The Times of Trenton

Has it ever been more important than now for all of us to familiarize ourselves with the many cultures that comprise our world? To learn the richness of cultures so different from our own? To traverse bridges that connect us to gain not only understanding, but genuine admiration for lifestyles other than what we see in our everyday?

An exhibit at The Nassau Club of Princeton of large color photographs by Princeton native Dede Pickering, is stunning in its captured beauty and also offers us studied viewpoints into many diverse cultures. Pickering who has been honored with significant awards from CARE and Women's World Banking, has taken her camera and her caring to ninety countries across six continents.

I found this to be such an important exhibit, I wedged it in the review calendar to give visitors a longer chance to go and be mesmerized by lifestyles and the faces of the people Pickering met who, though perhaps different from us, express emotions so like our own.

Quietly contemplate the face of the "Bhutanese Child" who looks into the camera as she holds a half-eaten tangerine in her sticky hand.

In "Dreaming" see another little girl in pink standing in a ballet pose and, nearby, a photograph, "Ballerina" in which a young woman poses in toe shoes and pink tutu while she is also reflected in a mirror. This child, this young woman may not be people we meet in our everyday lives where we live, but, in many ways, they are.

In her signature photograph in this exhibit, "Bridges Between Cultures," Pickering teases our possible reluctance to make the leap as she presents a figure clad in and carrying a burgundy umbrella. Silhouetted against a vibrant blue sky, the figure steps from one curved bridge section to the next.

In the Artist Statement you can read on her website, www.dedepickering.com Pickering says, in part, "My camera...serves as a bridge, not a barrier, to my subject allowing me to record hope and despair as well as the beauty and the roughness of the world."

She takes us in this exhibit to "Bars of Education" where transparent blue bars try to separate us from five seated girls in cultural garb. But also to Myanmar where, in "Buddhist Monk," a boy is seen lying on the floor reading as he is highlighted in the darkness. An alternate title could have been "Coming to the Light."

Pickering takes us to ground level in Cuba where her camera captures bike wheels splashing in rain puddles that reflect not only the pastel colors of the shanties that line the street, but the same colors in the few clouds scudding above.

An effective section of the exhibit shows Cuban street scenes, complete with graffiti, hung next to the young dreaming ballerinas mentioned above. This is an important juxtaposition showing the difference between the Cuban dreams and present reality.

"Talking Shadows" seems to capture that mood well as it presents the black shadows of two men walking and talking. Only in the dark shadows do we see their hand gestures and suggestions of their words.

Venturing into the celebratory side of her travels, Pickering offers a picture of a "Brokpa Boy," a very young child seated in the lap of a woman. He is elaborately dressed in embroidered and bejeweled garments, even wearing flowers on the top of his cap. And in "Ruffles and Spangles" she captures a pair of piercing brown eyes looking out through a violet mask amid multi-colored, happy-colored ruffles of what must have been fiesta garb.

She says on her website, "Looking into the eyes of others has served as my own reflection and helped me realize that we all share one world with similar dreams and aspirations."

This exhibit offers a step into Pickering's world. Be sure to visit her website mentioned above. There you can visit with her people living their daily lives in more than a dozen countries.

That is why I wedged this review in now to give you time to visit The Nassau Club and experience this exhibition first hand. These photographs mentioned here are just a few of the many you will enjoy and that will walk with you as you leave.