New Yorkers: Check out Fencing in Democracy

I interviewed Margaret Dorsey, an anthropologist who has been studying the Border Wall (the Mexico-United States Barrier), last year, and she told me about her cross-disciplinary work, including a planned art exhibit that she and her partner, Miguel Diaz-Barriga, were organizing. I was recently privileged to go to the opening at apexart, an art gallery in Manhattan, where I found myself in a loud and lively space, meeting artists, art professionals, anthropologists, and all kinds of interesting people, drinking Pezels Blue Ribbons in a plastic cup, and seeing the culmination of Dorsey and Diaz-Barriga’s curatorial work.

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This bilingual exhibition (English and Spanish) features work by sculptors, painters, architects, photographers, and activists, all of whom have focused in opposition to the Border Wall, which they see as non-democratic and injurious to the people of border communities. They collectively explore ways to re-imagine borders, and ways in which artists and architects can play a role in, and personalize, the ongoing policy debate.

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Celeste De Luna, Brooch Baby, 2015, Woodcut on paper, 36 x 60 inches
I very much liked Celeste De Luna’s art, which reflects her environment and culture, and brings a strong feminist perspective to the show. I’ve heard the term “anchor baby” used as a slur, used as a joke, and used in serious policy and immigration debate...but I’ve never visualized before how pregnancy and childbirth can be rendered a crime in a militarized environment. Her woodcuts are original, bold, and quite thought-provoking, demonstrating a keen intelligence and a much-needed humanized perspective on birthright citizenship.

There’s plenty more to see. Architectural re-designs with a humanitarian focus instead of a militarized one; photographs of the Border Wall from California to Texas, inviting scrutiny; personal narratives of fear and pain and distrust, and occasionally, humanism and hope.

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Fencing in Democracy is on display through July 30th and is absolutely worth your time and attention. If you can make it on the evening of June 8th, there will be a discussion, led by Scott Nicol of the Sierra Club, on the Border Wall's impact on the environment, bringing yet another perspective to the discussion, one not generally addressed in national debates.

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Laura LeWalt is an attorney and writer who lives in Connecticut, in a not quite 100-year-old house, along with her husband, two daughters, and a cockatiel.

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