

Storefront artworks spark climate crisis conversations in Queens

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QUEENS-BASED ARTIST ANNALISA IADICCIO USES FOUND OBJECTS TO HIGHLIGHT ISSUES SHE SAYS ARE OVERLOOKED, JUST LIKE THE MATERIALS WOULD BE WITHOUT THE SECOND LIFE SHE GIVES THEM THROUGH HER WORK. PHOTO COURTESY OF HUMAN IMPACTS INSTITUTE

By Rachel Vick

A citywide arts initiative is filling empty Queens storefronts with work by diverse creators seeking to spark conversations about the impact of the climate crisis.

The Human Impacts Institute has brought its 2020 Creative Climate Awards honorees to the streets in lieu of a traditional gallery. Their work, including an installation in an Astoria storefront, highlights the impact of the climate crisis on low-income communities of color.

The Astoria piece, “Infrared Thermography Series,” features digital images captured through heat mapping by Joyce Hwang and Prathap Ramamurthy.

Photos of Manhattan’s Chinatown show where heat or air is escaping from buildings using infrared images capturing heat signatures that every object emits. The project shows the interactions between humans and the built environment, said Hwang, a professor of architecture at University of Buffalo.

“By seeing images of conditions we don’t normally see, this is a way of prompting people to really try and understand the environment – what impacts us is not only what’s visible to us,” Hwang told the website [Pollinate Art](#).

“We also want to emphasize that some of the tools for seeing the environment are accessible to everyone,” she added. “It is possible for anyone to get their hands on these things and to understand the world through a different lens.”

The installation will remain on display at Living Laboratory in Astoria until winners are announced in mid-December.

Some of the images were captured with an “inexpensive” thermal imaging camera that Hwang already owned and which she said cost around \$200.

The artists said understanding the impact of humans on the environment is a crucial step for mitigating climate change.

“I want people to be more engaged with the issue of climate change and understand how cities are at the center of it,” said Ramamurthy, a CCNY professor of mechanical engineering, earth system science and environmental engineering. “People in cities are disproportionately impacted by climate change, particularly the poor people, the working class people, and the rich people who live in the cities have a big impact on the carbon footprint so it's an unequal dynamic.”

The Astoria installation is [one of five across the city](#) as part of the CCA’s goals to inspire conversations about climate justice – the disproportionate impact of climate change on low-income communities – through mixed media.

Long Island City-based reuse facility, Materials for the Arts, will [host a panel Dec. 4](#) with Queens-based participants Tijay Mohammed, Dianne Smith and Annalisa Iadicicco. The artists create their projects using repurposed materials, like old Metrocards and discarded lamps plucked from the curb.

“Sparking meaningful action on climate justice and equity is more important in our current moment than ever before,” Human Impacts Institute Founder and Executive Director Tara DePorte said. “We are already seeing the impact of the climate crisis on our communities and this year has proven how sweeping and devastating those consequences can be.”