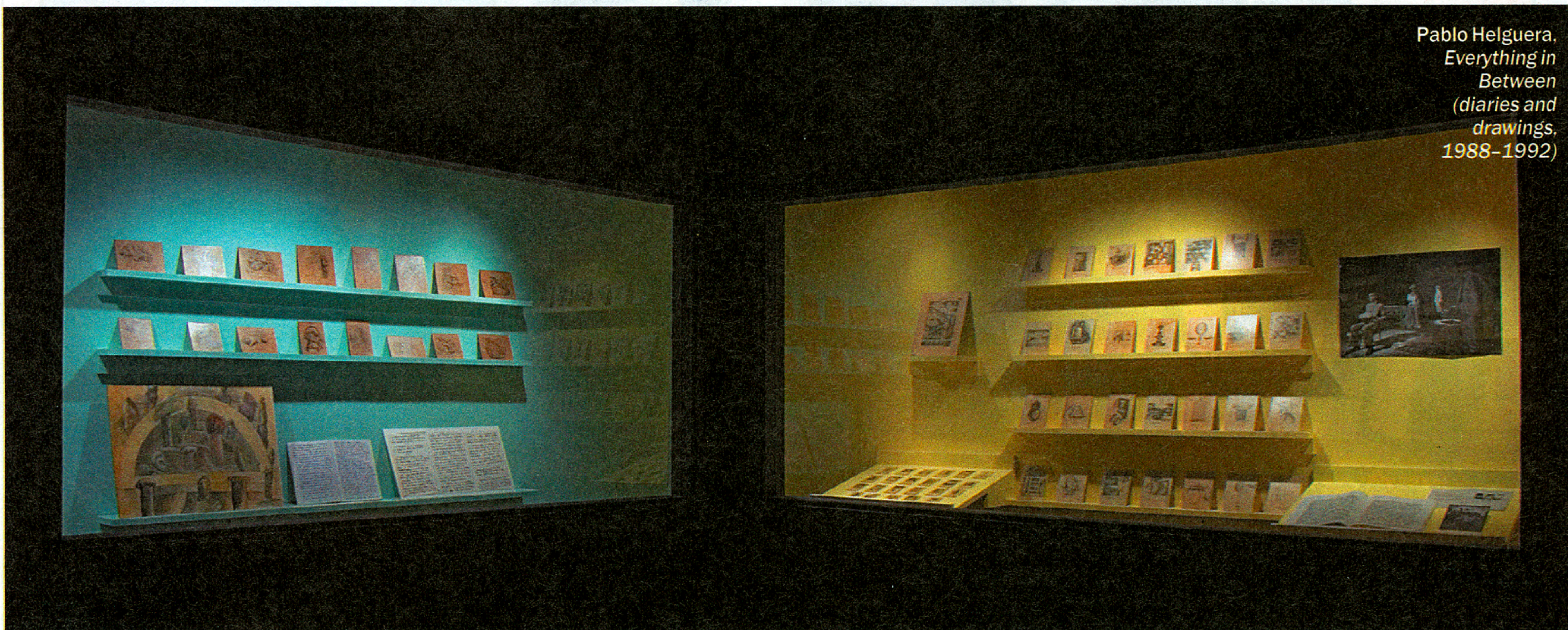


Reviews

Art



Pablo Helguera,
*Everything in
 Between*
 (diaries and
 drawings,
 1988–1992)

“Generation 1.5”

★★★★★

Queens Museum of Art, through Dec 2 (see Museums)

The immigrant experience is seen through the eyes of diverse artists.

By **Laura Auricchio**

Located on the grounds of the 1964 World’s Fair in a borough that hosts 160 nationalities, the Queens Museum of Art achieves a perfect match of site and subject with “Generation 1.5.” This sprawling exhibition presents installations by eight artists who emigrated to the U.S. as teenagers. Members of Generation 1.5 are said to be “betwixt and between” their native and adopted countries, equally distinct from their immigrant parents and their own second-generation children. Yet the term, borrowed from sociology, doesn’t begin to capture the diversity of an exhibition that evokes the varied and deeply personal experiences of migration through photography, sculpture, painting, drawing, video, sound and spoken word.

Works on view run the gamut from literal to abstract, presenting visions of cultural crossings that are alternately hopeful, terrifying, insidious and disorienting. None is more moving than *Quartet Project* (2005/2007) by Lee Mingwei who,

during his adolescence, moved from Taiwan to the Dominican Republic and then to the U.S. Mingwei has filled a large, dark room with the strains of Antonin Dvorak’s “American Quartet,” written during the Czech composer’s 1893 visit to Spillville, Iowa, and replete with transatlantic musical references. Softly glowing TVs illuminate partly concealed speakers placed along each of four walls, and visitors gradually discover that each speaker is playing just one instrument and falls abruptly silent as you approach. Hearing the complete piece requires standing somewhere in the middle of the empty space—preferably alone—where you feel awkward, vulnerable and wary of making a wrong move.

Shirin Neshat’s harrowing 18-minute video, *The Last Word* (2003), immerses viewers in a nightmare of bureaucracy, surveillance and unspecified threat. We follow the Iranian-born artist through an underworld of dank, cinder-block tunnels where she approaches a bearded man equipped with all the attributes of officialdom. Wearing a white dress shirt, he sits behind a desk beneath a single hanging light fixture as he thumbs through mounds of books, papers and files that are gradually piled before him by a troop of identically attired men. First speaking, then shouting, then rising to his feet, he hurls vague but menacing accusations at the seated

woman, who finally silences the tirade by chanting the Farsi verses that saved Shahrazad in *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In contrast, Rirkrit Tiravanija’s upbeat vision of a seamless global community strikes one as slick, if not complacent. Reprising his familiar theme of cosmopolitan travel in *Untitled 2006 (passport no. 3)*, Tiravanija, who has lived in Argentina, Thailand, Ethiopia, Malaysia, Canada, the U.S. and Germany, presents a colorful replica of one of his well-used passports, which spills its insides out like an unfolded accordion to form a star-shaped arrangement. Bursting with ornamented stamps and visas, this attractive display suggests the easy wanderings of privilege, not the arduous trek of migration. The only hint of trouble in this transnational paradise appears as an afterthought in the accompanying wall text, which notes in passing that the painstakingly detailed passport was handmade in Thailand. Evidently, Tiravanija is comfortable replicating the global outsourcing of labor without comment.

Optimism similarly informs Ellen Harvey’s *A Whitney for the Whitney at Philip Morris/Altria or I Can Be an American Visionary Too!* (2003). Originally installed at the Whitney Museum of American Art’s satellite branch, the piece comprises 20 wall-size panels covered with small paintings that reproduce every work

featured in the Whitney’s publication *American Visionaries*, which discusses selected pieces from the museum’s collection. Harvey intersperses her miniature replicas of familiar works by artists ranging from Edward Hopper and Georgia O’Keefe to Eva Hesse and John Currin with small mirrors. You too, she seems to suggest, can be an American Visionary. Yet Harvey, a New Yorker born in England to a German mother, acknowledges in the exhibition’s blog that her bright attitude toward the American dream derives, in part, from her Anglo-Saxon heritage, which makes her barely “recognizable” as a foreigner.

**Members of
 Generation 1.5
 are “betwixt and
 between.”**

Fittingly, the path out of Harvey’s installation leads to a show of World’s Fair memorabilia that celebrates the possibilities of international exchange. In their distance from Neshat’s traumatic netherworld and Mingwei’s immersive confusion, the “Kon-Tiki” cups and ads for “Bell-Gem waffles” seem like naive vestiges from a distant past when Americans still believed that “a small world” could be a utopian dream. ■