

Amusing the Zillion

Art of the Day: Coney Island at Valentine Museum of Art

January 18, 2016 by [Tricia](#)



Poster for Coney Island exhibit at Valentine Museum of Art. Photo of Coney Island's Bowery in 1977
© Hazel Hankin

Coney Island has come to Flatbush Avenue -specifically, the Coney-themed work of seven photographers and two painters is on view at the [Valentine Museum of Art](#) through March 11. Photographer [Larry Racioppo](#) curated the exhibit, which grew out of a meeting with Michael Valentine, publisher of [Breuckelen Magazine](#), to propose a special Coney Island issue. The upcoming edition of the magazine will feature interviews with each of the artists in the show.

In addition to Racioppo, the photographers are Norman Borden, Dan Burmeister, Hazel Hankin, Ron Meisel, John Rossi and Jamel Shabazz. The painters are Greg Frux and Marc Kehoe. The work spans Coney Island's past and present, and is supplemented by archival images from the Brooklyn Public Library's Brooklyn Collection.



One of a series of paintings by Marc Kehoe depicting riders on Coney Island's Spookhouse dark ride. Oil on canvas, 1987.

As a member of the Coney Island Hysterical Society in the mid-1980s, [Marc Kehoe](#) painted his "It's Spooky" mural on the exterior wall of the group's Spookhouse, a dark ride renovated as an art project. Both are long gone. What remains are Kehoe's 20 canvases portraying the lurid faces of Spookhouse riders whose expressions mirror the macabre stunts that made them scream.

"Boardwalk Renaissance: How the Arts Saved Coney Island," a concurrent exhibit at City Lore in Manhattan, which we wrote about in "[Art of the Day: Remembering Spookhouse – A Ride Through Gallery in the Dark](#)" (ATZ, November 16, 2015), showcases some of the work of CIHS artists, including Kehoe and Hazel Hankin.



Ruins of Coney Island's Spookhouse just before its demolition in 1997. Photo © Larry Racioppo

At VMoA, Hankin documents the Spookhouse in operation while Larry Racioppo captures it after it had closed and fallen into ruin. Racioppo, whose subjects range from revelers at the Mermaid Parade to the derelict beauty of the abandoned Thunderbolt roller coaster, took up photography in 1970. [Hazel Hankin](#) also began photographing what was left of the Coney Island of her childhood in the 1970s. Her forte is beautifully framed shots of old school concessionaires and snoozing ticket takers who have all but disappeared from the new Coney Island.

The two posters for the exhibit feature Hankin's stunning photo of the Skydiver ride and other vanished attractions on Coney's Bowery and Racioppo's heartbreaking shot of the half-demolished Thunderbolt with its ramshackle cars in the foreground. The posters are available for sale via the museum's [online store](#).



One In Wins, 1977. Photo © Hazel Hankin

Also striking at VMOA is [Jamel Shabazz](#)'s sympathetic documentation of the Tribute to the Ancestors of the Middle Passage, which has been held annually on Coney Island beach for more than 25 years. Attendees are encouraged to wear white and bring offerings to place in the ocean to honor the spirit of African ancestors who died during the voyage across the Atlantic where they were being taken as slaves.

Two [public programs](#) are planned at VMOA in February:

FROM BROOKLYN COLLEGE to CONEY ISLAND – Saturday, February 20th, 2pm -6 pm.
Brooklyn College graduates Hazel Hankin, Larry Racioppo and John Rossi discuss/illustrate their photography careers.

TRIBUTE TO THE ANCESTORS – Saturday, February 27th, 6pm. Artist talk with Jamel Shabazz about the history and significance of this annual event.

The Valentine Museum of Art is located in the Philip Howard Apartments, where art collector and longtime resident Michael Valentine has teamed up with the co-op's board to activate a 5,000 square foot art gallery space. The next exhibit, in May, will feature work by BFA students from nearby Brooklyn College.

“Coney Island,” [Valentine Museum of Art at Philip Howard](#), 1655 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11210. Exhibit runs through March 11, 2016. Gallery open Wednesday – Sunday, 12pm – 6pm. Free admission.



Annual Tribute to the Ancestors of the Middle Passage in Coney Island. Photo © Jamel Shabazz.