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## Opinion

# Propia Visión (Our Vision)

**Mexican Photographers in New York**

By *Monika Fabian*



A service employee perched on a ladder wipes the silver letters of the Whitney Museum. Besides his dark skin and short straight black hair, the only detail we can gather from the Mexican man is the "Azteca cleaning company" on the back of his shirt. This daily scene captured in a black & white photograph could have been seconds earlier on the street it is so common. Mexican workers employed in custodial and kitchen jobs have become as familiar as the buildings that line Manhattan's streets. But like the vertical dwellings, beyond the most prominent, most go unnoticed.

This photograph, on display in *Propia Visión (Our Vision): Mexican Photographers in New York* currently at the **International Center**, asks the viewer to think about how many times one actually sees an individual person rather than a member of a work force. Organized by Mexican cultural organization *Mano A Mano: Culture Without Borders*, *Propia Visión* opened on April 17th as an inaugurating event of the city's annual Immigrant History Week. The exhibit will be at the International Center until May 11th and subsequently be displayed at the Queens Museum of Art (QMA). Artist and participant in the exhibit Pedro Lasch currently has an emerging artist show on display at the QMA.

*Propia Visión* comprises works from photo hobbyists to working artists, in a successful smattering of contemporary Mexican photography. While a couple of photos could have benefitted from technical improvements (e.g. better printing, focusing, and presentation), the show embraces concepts of traditional and contemporary themes of culture and art, at various degrees of skill and completion. A trend in the many of the pictures seems to be the union of típico (and typical) Mexican iconography such as kitch, in the case of Javier Soriano's photos of mariachi pairs grinning while posed in front of a rainbow backdrop. "From the socially-oriented photo to the personal, mundane of friends and family to labor in a different array of media," said Frank Moreno, a Latin American studies/curatorial studies graduate student, "the exhibit questions what exactly is a Mexican photograph?"

The photographers also seem to be inspired by time. Elvis Solís's "x" photo depicting (presumably) Mexican women sewing in a maquiladora or factory seems aged by its sepia hue. There are references and traces of Mexican photographers like Manuel Alvarez Bravo and Graciela Iturbide in photographer Mary Teresa Giancoli's style. The California-native of Mexican and Italian heritage, Giancoli documents indigenous imagery in the five boroughs and throughout rural Mexico with a vintage twin lens Yashica box camera.

The idea for a photography exhibit emerged from a chance opportunity to host a talk by New York Mexican scholar Robert C. Smith, explained professional photographer and the exhibit's curator Enrique González Ibarra. Smith, a social scientist at Baruch College, recently published *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*, an ethnography following the lives of Mexican migrants over ten years. Upon visiting the International Center,

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