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### **WOMEN'S WORK**

**All-female artists' exhibit at NJCU focuses on idea of home**

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The title of a new exhibition at the Visual Arts Gallery at New Jersey City University provides several clues to its content. The designation, Homegirls - a female version of the urban street term, homeboys - usually refers to a group of allies sharing a common bond. The homegirls in this context are women artists who respond to the idea of home in various ways. This is more than a clever play on words. The art showcased manages to be hip and edgy, while exploring some traditional connotations of the words "home" and "girls." Incorporating paintings, drawings, video, sculpture and photography by 13 artists, the show often subverts accepted ideas about home and domesticity.

Organized in association with the Feminist Art Project, a national initiative recognizing the aesthetic and intellectual impact of women on the visual arts and culture, the exhibition was a year in the planning - and it shows in the final product. Curator Margaret Murphy has crafted a diverse yet cohesive show that seems quite at home (no pun intended) in the gallery space. She also sets up interesting juxtapositions that invite meaningful "conversations" between neighboring works.

Flower imagery seems to play an important role. The decorative quality of floral lace patterns in Estella Lackey's ink drawings is underscored by their arrangement as domestic wall décor. Jenne Willis's photograph of flowered cups and saucers conjures ideas of comfort, nostalgia and maybe even obsolescence. By embroidering a meandering floral pattern directly into her own hand, Christina Mancuso adds a literal meaning to the phrase "hand-stitching." For both Nancy Friedemann and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, flowers provide a visual link to memories of home, connecting with other times and places, even other cultures.

Many of the works are richly nuanced, requiring the viewer to look twice: Judith Page's bride and groom sport bulbous heads and noses made of tar; Nina Levy's Stroller holds a disembodied adult head, (her own); a family gathered around a Thanksgiving turkey in Margaret Murphy's Family Dinner is really a ceramic keepsake. Lisa Dahl's On the Homefront blends video footage of the suburbs with a soundtrack of Iraqi war sounds - a conflation of American Dream and national nightmare. Amy Chan gives her neat suburban houses eyes, animating them with a slightly sinister edge. And Charlotte Schulz's multiple-panel drawing addresses less visible aspects of home, creating a dreamscape of space, memory and emotion.

A local home improvement store supported this exhibition in a unique way. Lowe's of Jersey City provided two pallets of cement pavers that Stefanie Nagorka used to create 2.20.2007, Jersey City, NJ (Home Alone,) a site-specific sculpture. The appetite for home improvement is also referenced in Susan Hamburger's painting installation, Modular No. 2, that presents fragmented images of home décor elements broken down into digestible sizes.

The show relies a little too heavily on groupings of smaller works, making the overall effect somewhat fragmented. But that may be just the point - the exhibition acts as a prism, refracting and reflecting the individual visions of the artists into the limitless aspects of home.

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