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'3 Legged Race'

**Janine Antoni, Marcel Odenbach,
Nari Ward**

*307 West 141st Street
Harlem
Through Oct. 14*

This show of installations set in a run-down 19th-century firehouse in Harlem is an example of the way art ought to go and is increasingly going: out of galleries and museums and into the world.

The three artists, who are also friends, served as their own curators, planning their individual pieces together — hence the show's title. They worked with little financing (Marcel Odenbach received some support from Goethe House in New York). The space itself is on loan from local owners, and the Church of the Meek next door serves as caretaker.

None of the three participants are native New Yorkers — Janine Antoni was born in the Bahamas, Nari Ward in Jamaica, Mr. Odenbach in Germany — but they have all taken the city as a metaphor here.

Mr. Odenbach's installation mixes video images of boats plying their way up and down the Hudson, men cruising on one of Manhattan's waterfront piers and political refugees arriving on American shores. The picture of the harbor city that emerges, as a place of restlessness, sanctuary and yearning, is powerful.

Mr. Ward contributes two works. One, made from castoff materials found on the premises, is a fantastic walk-in spider's web of rope, tubing and string holding dozens of treasures: a child's crib, an old fire bucket, clusters of books and tools. The other is a string-tied curtain of old bottles the artist gathered last summer at the Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake in Maine, where a number of contemporary artists were invited to create projects. Both installations are magical.

So is Ms. Antoni's site-specific piece, which consists of her renovation of the kitchen of an apartment in a burned-out and long abandoned building adjoining the firehouse. She hoisted herself into the room by pulley, painted the walls white, pulled up accumulations of linoleum (each of which revealed layers of newspapers dating back, successively, to 1921) and laid down a new floor. (To see the room, visitors must go to the roof of the firehouse and look through a window.)

The result of Ms. Antoni's project, immaculate and gleaming in the midst of charred wood and brick, is part urban archeology and part architectural restoration. As is the case with this moving show as a whole, her work is restorative in many more ways than one.

HOLLAND COTTER
