

PROFILE QUEENS MUSEUM



PUBLIC ART TOP TO BOTTOM: In 2013 the museum underwent a massive renovation, opening up the center space and doubling its square footage. The welcoming main room opens out to the Unisphere and Flushing Meadows Corona Park; The panorama of the city of New York was created for the 1964 World's Fair, and is often incorporated into current art exhibits; Currently on display, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*, spans five decades of Ukeles' work celebrating the hidden, yet essential, work of New York's Department of Sanitation.

QUEEN OF CORONA

THE QUEENS MUSEUM'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LAURA RAICOVICH, IS CHANGING THE WAY WE VIEW MUSEUMS, AND THE WAY MUSEUMS VIEW US

TEXT DEBORAH L. MARTIN



DIVERSITY IS SOMETHING New Yorkers cherish, and nowhere is that more true than in Queens. Laura Raicovich, the president and executive director of the Queens Museum, says, "What's special about the Queens Museum is that it is in Queens. There are over 165 languages spoken here, and when you walk around Corona or Flushing, people are skyping with friends in their hometowns, which could be Sri Lanka, Eastern Europe, or upstate New York."

The Queens Museum, in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, has been through several iterations—it was the New York Pavilion for the both the 1939 and 1964 World's

Fairs, and in between it housed the UN General Assembly—before becoming a museum in 1972. In 2013, a massive renovation enabled the institution to double its size. Raicovich says, "For me our clear calling is about connectivity to the diverse communities that surround us." To that end, Raicovich has expanded on a program begun 12 years ago by her predecessor. "Tom [Finkelpearl] had a vision that started with one community organizer, and today we have three full-time organizers on staff." Raicovich knows that this might seem like a stretch. "[Community organizing] seems tenuously related to a cultural program but my argument is we should act as an entry point for participation in the civic life of the city. In an area where there is a large immigrant population that is an important stance for a museum to take." She continues, "A big part of our cultural need is to get those voices heard. A museum can be a frame for that." The museum sponsors programs that include art education and studio grants for working artists and art students; public art, cultural, and civic programs beyond the museum's walls; and their extensive programs for adults and children with disabilities.

Raicovich is keenly aware that she is the shepherd of a truly public institution. "The city owns this building, so if you pay taxes here, this is your space." In approximately two years it will be the first museum in the country to incorporate a branch of the public library. "We already partner with the library in our education programs, now it will be physically housed inside the museum." She envisions the museum as a "third space," a safe place between home and work or school where one can do research, use Wi-Fi, or appreciate art. For her, this represents the democratic ideal. Sitting in the museum café, looking out at the Unisphere, she says, "A public park, a public museum, and now, a public library. Is there anything more democratic?" queensmuseum.org **SEE RESOURCES ■**

