



Noyes
Museum of Art
STOCKTON UNIVERSITY



Education Guide

January 10 - March 31, 2024

Ducktown: An Atlantic City Immigration Story

Janice Merendino, artist

This exhibition celebrates the Ducktown neighborhood in Atlantic City through the stories of past and present immigrants of two area homes and the local businesses that continue to meet their everyday needs.

A neighborhood holds many different stories from people who live there, and we expect these stories to change as the people change over time. But is there something about a place that remains in those stories even as the culture changes?

To answer this question, I created work that explores the commonalities between the family life of my Italian immigrant grandparents in the 1900's, and life in the neighborhood today. I juxtapose my family's memories with stories of current residents to see what common themes emerge.

While the works are lighthearted and playful, the underlying stories reveal the joys and challenges immigrant newcomers face to adapt and assimilate. By illustrating the enduring elements of a place, we may see more of ourselves in those that came before us and after us. Ducktown was and continues to be a lively place filled with aunts, uncles, and cousins, with vibrant rhythms of family life that still exist today.

A special addition to this exhibition is artwork by young artists who currently reside in my grandparents' original homes, as well as drawings produced by children in an outdoor pop-up event called "We LOVE our corner stores!"

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Teresa and Nicolas Portrait

Date and Photographer Unknown

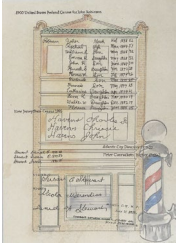
My paternal grandparents arrived from Italy in 1904. This is only one of the two photographs I have of my paternal grandmother who died in 1921, the mother of 13 children. In this otherwise formal portrait, we see a sweet hint of her personality from their linked "pinkie" fingers. Like many families, there are a flood of questions and only partial answers.



1887 Map with Railroad 2023

Mixed media on paper

In 1887 many inhabitants of Ducktown were immigrants from Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland. On this map you'll see a narrow-gauge train track in the neighborhood. As a child, how fascinating it would have been to know that "Thomas the Tank Engine" once ran right through my backyard.



Keeping Family Close I 2023

Mixed media on paper

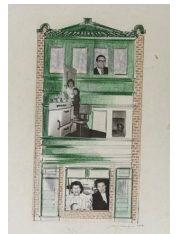
Proximity and keeping the family close affected many aspects of the immigrant life. Children of immigrants are an important part of the immigrant story. The census of 1900 showed the 13 members of the Robinson family in the building which was later home to my father and his 11 siblings, before becoming my childhood home. One of my aunts lived in the building continuously from 1919 until the 1970's.



Keeping Family Close II 2023

Mixed media on paper

Growing up in an apartment building as a kid offered a special kind of freedom. Children can move about from one floor to the next on a whim to visit extended family or play with other kids. We know our parents were once young but seeing their ages on the census and situating them in a time and place helps to bring their stories alive.



Keeping Family Close III 2023

Mixed media on paper

The handsome façade of a building isn't something you would pay particular attention to as a child. Its ceramic roof tile and the well-proportioned bay windows with their once green copper patina are mostly the same except for color changes over the years.



Keeping Family Close IV 2023

Mixed media on paper

A former resident shared pictures of her parents dancing in the first-floor apartment in the 1960's. How many graduations, parties, and other celebrations did the building witness over the century?



Keeping Family Close V 2023

Mixed media on paper

From a current resident: *"These were taken in 2012 celebrating my 7th birthday. As you can see, we did not have much, and this was a very last-minute birthday. We got the cake from our nearest grocery store which is called La Tipica. La Tipica holds a lot of significance. We have been going to that corner store ever since we moved here. We celebrated my older cousin's birthdays on the third floor a lot, too, where she used to live. All my aunts and uncles moved away. It's just my immediate family now. We moved up a floor and live on the second floor now."*



Alexa Ramirez Lopez

In collaboration with Janice Merendino

Keeping Family Close VI 2023

Mixed media on paper

Alexa is a current resident of the building featured in this series. She is 10 years old. To complete this sequence, Alexa was given the drawn outline of the building and asked to finish it. She personalized her home with bold color and details others might have missed.



Grape Truck Delivery 2023

Mixed media on paper

My cousin Joey remembers going to the train station to get crates of grapes so that my maternal grandfather could make wine before Thanksgiving. I was surprised to learn that there was a similar wine-making tradition at the apartment building where I grew up. A former resident shared how once a year a truck pulled up to deliver boxes of grapes on a conveyor belt straight into the basement on Arctic Avenue.



Tossing Nickels 2023

Mixed media on paper

My cousin Stephanie remembers how my Aunt Josephine would throw nickels out of the window for her to go to the corner store for bread and then she would deliver it to her upstairs apartment.



Aunties, and children in the backyard 2023

Mixed media on paper

This painting was based on a more recent story that was recounted by a young woman whose family lives in the apartment building:

I was born in Bangladesh. I moved to America when I was 3 years old. My family and relatives immigrated to the US in 2008. We lived in Pleasantville for a couple of months and then moved to the apartment building in 2009. On the first floor lived my immediate family and my uncle's family. On the second floor lived one of my aunt's family. On the third floor lived another one of my aunts. It was a full house! I grew up with my cousins. We made do with what we had, which was not much at the time.

We played outside to pass time. The parents would sit outside on the lawn chairs gossiping while drinking tea or gardening while the kids played ball or tag. The ball would go over to the neighbor's side, and we would have to sneak in and throw it back over. Or it would be kicked onto our moms' precious plants, and we would get yelled at. Us kids also really liked swinging on the big green fence. When people would pass by the sidewalk we would stop momentarily and then hop back on. We were a very close-knit family. We would celebrate birthdays together. Run from one floor to the next. The moms would exchange curries.

Cono's Fig Trees 2023

Mixed media on paper



My grandfather, like many Italian immigrants, knew that his fig trees could only survive the winters if they were covered in burlap. Apparently, my young cousin thought that the wrapped trees were giant presents and decided to unwrap them after my grandfather had just finished covering them. When my aunt heard my grandfather cursing loudly, she told my young cousin to go and hide in the apartment on the third floor until my grandfather calmed down.



***Teatime* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

A quirky memory from growing up in an apartment building was hearing my mother bang on the pipes with a teaspoon to signal my aunt who lived in the downstairs apartment when it was time for afternoon tea. The present resident recounts how her aunts would “gossip while drinking tea.” Teatime traditions continue.



***Sheer Curtains and Blinds* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

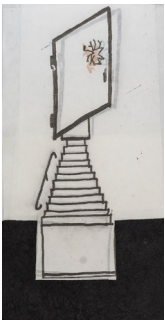
The sheer curtains that hung in our living room struck me as a metaphor for the entire exhibition. So many details of my grandparents’ lives, and their children’s lives are obscured and filtered through weak memories. Other stories are totally lost or hidden, opaque, like the blinds.



***Highwire Messenger* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

One Christmas, my uncle bought us this circus clown that could balance on a high wire. As kids we would sit at either end of a long hallway as the clown delivered messages to us back and forth on a tiny piece of paper. Butter cookies were always our snack.



Dennis Dantro

In collaboration with Janice Merendino

***Dennis’s Story* 2023**

Mixed media on paper



Stephanie Dantro

***Stephanie’s Story* 2023**

Pencil on paper



***Vanity* 2019**

Ink, color pencil on paper



Her Desk 2023
Mixed media on paper



Coffee with Sisters 2023
Mixed media on paper



A Dresser with a bit of magic 2023
Mixed media on paper



Aunt Anne's teacup and creamer 2023
Mixed media on paper



10¢ Ride 2023
Mixed media on paper



Vanity with Ivy 2023
Mixed media on paper



Grandmom's Orchid 2019
Ink on paper, colored pencil

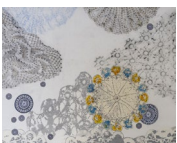
In 1920, when she was 19 years old, my maternal grandmother Carmela Reino came to Ducktown from Italy for an arranged marriage. She told us that she arrived with only a picture of her potential husband. In that picture, he was wearing a stylish straw hat and she thought that he might be hiding thinning hair (she shouldn't have worried; my grandfather had a thick head of hair). She had two sisters, but she was the only person from her family that came to America. She returned to Italy for one visit, fifty years later.



Grandmom's Chair 2023
Mixed media on paper

Janice Merendino, in collaboration with Farzana Israt
Doilies with Mandalas 2023

Mixed media on paper



As an immigrant garment worker, my grandmother worked in factories that helped with the war effort by patching soldier's uniforms. Her daughters made extra money tying fish hooks, working in a cigar factory, and knitting "a sweater a day".

In my grandmother's home, the fine crocheted doilies on tables and the backs of chairs showed the patience of labor-intensive handiwork. Now, under the same roof, Farzana Israt creates mandalas with intricate designs that feel right at home with the textiles made there 70 years earlier.



***In the Same Kitchen, 60 years apart* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

On most Sundays, my Italian immigrant grandmother rolled out dough for pasta for our traditional family dinner. On a Sunday 60 years later, another immigrant mother from Bangladesh is making samosa in the very same kitchen and inviting me to stay for lunch.



***Centennial Dining Dance Hall* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

Based on past and present photos of family dining rooms from one street in Atlantic City, a formal Sunday dinner space turns into a raucous place where chairs from different families get together for a dance party.



***Centennial Avenue, morning* 2019**

Ink, color pencil on paper

For a class assignment in art school in the 1970's, I took a series of photos of my grandparents' home. I am not sure why I chose the bathroom as a subject then, but in this exhibition, I find these ordinary yet intimate spaces in the home meaningful as places where we prepare for our day.



***Another Morning* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

The current residents of my grandmother's home are immigrants from Bangladesh. They graciously allowed me to photograph the rooms there. I used that opportunity to stand in the same spots I had photographed 50 years earlier to see the spaces anew with their current personality and style.



***Families and Neighbors I* 2023**

Ink, color pencil on paper

This work imagines a reunion for the Italian American residents of a Ducktown street across multiple generations.

***Families and Neighbors II* 2023**

Mixed media on paper

Although immigrant family stories are complicated and unique, when we listen closely, we often see similarities to the stories our family told us. The bravery in the decision to come, the initial struggles, the help from strangers and what it took to thrive and build a family are repeated time and again. Excerpts from a conversation with Golam Rabbani:



My parents before they came here weren't rich or anything, they were a normal middle-class family. My dad bought a DV lottery, and he won it in 1993 or 94. It's like in America when you apply for a Visa, a work Visa. He lived four hours away from Dhaka. He won (the lottery) first then he went to our grandpa, our grandma and his brothers and told them he won the work permit to come to America. First my grandpa and his sisters thought it was a hoax, so they said, "No, No, nobody made it" and my dad didn't know English at the time, he only went to High School, he didn't finish his High School. They were like, "What are you going to do if you come here (America) we don't have money to provide you." But he's ambitious, so he didn't give up his hope.

At that time, they told my dad, "Why don't you sell your lottery?" People were offering 3000 or

5000 dollars to buy it from him. That time it was a lot of money over there. My dad didn't want to sell it, he wanted to try it. My dad always wanted to come to a foreign country. He had to hire an attorney too, because he doesn't know English, so they had to fill out the questions they were asking him, and he provided all of the stuff. After a year, he got an interview with the US embassy. 70-80% don't make it. His major job title was a construction worker. In 1993-94 there was a major movement of them needing construction workers in America, so they selected him. So, my dad was happy. He came home and he didn't know how to express it, so he told my grandma, then his father and brother and they were kind of shocked because first they thought he's not going to make it. So, by the mercy of God, he made it.

The same time he applied for us. We were going to get the visa the same time as my dad, so he delayed purposely because we didn't have money and because he never came to this land before, so he didn't know the outcome when he came here. He came here with \$500. He didn't know anyone here and he had no relatives here- no one here.

He flew from Dhaka to JFK, he landed and somehow, he found someone from Bangladesh to help him. This person was a stranger, but he was from Bangladesh. He only had luggage with five or ten clothes, max, maybe five extra clothes. He came to Atlantic City and at that time it was booming. The stranger he came with used to live here [Atlantic City], so he followed him here and lived with them. That person also had a family so he stayed with them, but he couldn't stay there because of the family's size. So, he asked if they could help him to find a room. He still talks about that person today.

His first job was at the Baltimore grill as a dishwasher, he started there. He worked there and a year later we got a call to go to the embassy. And between that time, he also worked at Bally's "Virginia City Buffet", so he was doing two jobs, working like a horse. At the same time, he was helping overseas, my grandma and grandpa to build a house over there. It wasn't stable and not in great condition in terms of their lifestyle. So, whatever he was earning about 60% was sent to help his mom, dad and brother and sister have a better life. He helped us to go through the embassy process and in two years they called us to the embassy, took our interviews and checked our blood DNA, so that we would match. I was close to six years old.

When my dad came here, he realized if you don't have your own house, it's going to be tough. Within four years, (in 2000) he bought a house, helped his mom and dad and bought a lot of land overseas, building a house helping them. He was also helping his brother in another country, Saudi Arabia, going there to make their life easier. That's our dad, he's a man of taking risks. This is how we got here.

If I hadn't come here, I wouldn't speak English, number one and I wouldn't understand how the other side of the world is...I wouldn't be able to speak to you. We were able to learn and acquire more knowledge, be able to understand and see the different world point of view and we got education from America, able to work. My sister was 14 [when we came] she started high school.

By the time we came my dad also met the other people from our country, he already had a friendship. When I moved here there were only five or six other families from Bangladesh in Atlantic City, and when my dad moved here it was only one or two. He was so fortunate to meet someone to help him. Initially he was going to stay in New York, but this man told him there was more guarantee for work with casinos and the boardwalk. Also, it was the best decision because of the living cost.

In 2000 he came to get us and bring us here. It was a lot of money especially then. I give "props" to this guy, he did something that I think a non-educated person can do. My mom only finished 5th grade, so she's not even that educated so when we came here, we had to learn ourselves, most of the things. Even learning words, vocabulary, understanding English at that time there wasn't any dictionary in Bangla for us to understand. It was a learning curve, there were a lot of things we learned to do.

I was excited and apprehensive to come. I was excited, but I don't want to leave because of my comfort zone over there. I know the language. And here even my dad doesn't speak English. So, for us it was a totally different new world to explore. It was like learning a new alien version of stuff. Still today I am learning, still today...

I want to give everything over to my parents - I see how much they struggled. That's why I'm keeping my parents here. This is my dad's house. I bought it and gave it to him. Even if I do [things] for the rest of my life, I don't think it's going to be enough for me.



Holding Hope 2023
Mixed media on paper



Generations 2023
Mixed media on paper



Kolpona's Garden 2023
Mixed media on paper



Clothesline with Rabbit 2023
Mixed media on paper

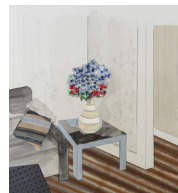


Our Neighbor's Kitchen 2023
Mixed media on paper



Giuseppe's Corner 2021
Mixed media on paper

If there was one place in Ducktown that I was most curious about revisiting, it was this corner of my maternal grandparent's home where my grandfather's chair once sat. I thought about the history of a place, imagining how many times this spot changed and what occupied that corner now.



That Corner Now 2023
Mixed media on paper

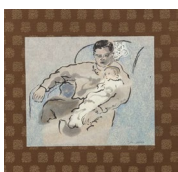
When my cousin and I were warmly invited into what was my grandparents' house, we were brought into a parlor-like room where my grandfather's chair once sat. A colorful vase with bright cheerful flowers now sits in that same corner. Since that first visit, we spent many happy hours in that spot learning about the family of the young artists that live there now.



Holding Hope I (1919) 2023
Mixed media on paper



Holding Hope III (1954) 2023
Mixed media on paper



Holding Hope II (1948) 2023
Mixed media on paper



Sister and Brother 2023
Ink on paper



Grandpop with Pipe 2020

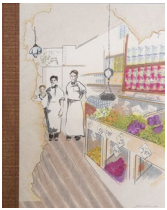
Ink, color pencil on paper

My maternal grandfather, Giuseppe Scuncio, arrived from Italy when he was a teenager in 1911. He was an only child whose parents had died young. The ship manifest shows that he came here with a cousin to live with an uncle in Atlantic City. He worked as a laborer in the city department, street cleaning and as a cement worker employed by the WPA (Works Progress Administration). He told us that he helped to build the Atlantic City Convention Hall. He married in 1920 shortly after my grandmother arrived, and together they raised four children.



On the Porch 2021

Ink, color pencil on paper



Ducktown Grocery 1930's 2023

Mixed media on paper

This work depicts the "A&P" (possibly on Florida and Arctic Avenue) which was the first job my father had as a teenager (he's in the middle). Small businesses often have family members pitch in to work but also continue to rely on neighborhood teens who need a job.

Fred Hess, photographer

Date unknown

[2500 Arctic Ave]



This historical photo of corner store Florida and Arctic Ave., dated to the late 1920's, was found on the "I'm from Ducktown" Facebook group. The census shows that the owners of the store were immigrants from Italy who came here in 1904, the same year that my paternal grandparents arrived. It has been a corner store since that time, always changing food stuffs to meet the needs of the different neighborhood cultures.

We ♥ our corner stores, La Tipica 2023

Including the art from neighborhood children

Mixed media on paper

Proof that you were "growing up" was the adventure of being allowed to go to the corner by yourself for the first time and being trusted to get your mother's order correct. The thrill of eyeing the candy display is a strong memory for a child. Even today, children still negotiate with their parents about keeping some change to buy a treat.



One young woman shared her gratefulness of having La Tipica in the neighborhood. She recounted how her mother got a cake there and "saved my last-minute birthday party as a child." Another young man told us about the first time he ventured to the corner store himself at about age 8 and how nervous he was that he "might make a mistake". These familiar stories of the corner stores resonate through time.

We held this pop-up outdoor event to recognize the importance of corner stores in the community and to collect children's drawings for this piece. We bought candy and snacks from two corner stores, then posted these signs to encourage them to draw:

We ♥ our corner stores!

Pick your favorite Candy or Snack, Draw it, and Take it!

Nosotros ♥ nuestras tiendas de esquina

Escoge tu caramelo o bocadito favorito, dibújalo y llévatelo



Dominican Barbershop 2023

Mixed media on paper

The vibrancy of a neighborhood depends on it being a welcoming place. Only one door away from what was "Phil's barbershop", a new barbershop continues to make neighborhood memories.

Neighborhood Barbers 2023

Mixed media on paper

While the home is the center of family life, the barbershop is a gathering space outside of it. This painting collages some of the past neighborhood barbers and barbershops over the years. A picture from the 1950's showed "Phil's barbershop" (1940's-60's) on Arctic Avenue (before the barbershop pole was stolen). Each generation can recount their trips and their first haircuts with their fathers.



Street Portrait series 2023

Mixed media on paper

An old photo of my grandfather holding my sister near a utility pole inspired this series. As I looked through other family photos from the 1930's and 40's, I was amused by how many others posed in front of that same nondescript pole. This work introduces this "photo spot" to current residents by asking them to pose there too.



Farzana Israt
***I miss you a lot, Bangladesh* 2021**
Ink on paper



Farzana Israt
***Untitled 2* 2023**
Ink on paper



Farzana Israt
***Untitled 3* 2023**
Ink on paper



Farzana Israt
***Untitled 1* 2023**
Ink on paper



***Laundry Day* 2023**
Mixed media on paper



***Backyard Clothesline* 2023**
Mixed media on paper



***To the Laundromat* 2023**
Mixed media on paper

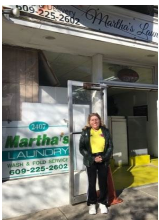


***Martha's Laundromat* 2023**
Mixed media on paper

Martha Marin in Front of her Laundromat 2023

Photograph

There are all sorts of untold stories behind the small businesses who meet the needs of the area's residents. Martha Marin, the owner of the laundromat has lived in Ducktown for 38 years and has been a source of support for many immigrants to get a foothold in the area. At the time that she came here, she was the only Columbian in the neighborhood and one of only ten Latinos in the area. Martha is a true "soccer mom", passionate about coaching kids to "keep them out of trouble". She has experiences as a casino worker, a dressmaker, caretaker, neighborhood leader and most recently, a business owner.



BIO

Janice Merendino is a teaching artist, former college professor, one of five founders of The Clay Studio, and the founder of the Branch Out Project, (www.branchoutproject.com) where she teaches business executives and others how to draw and apply visual thinking in their organizations. Since 1998, Janice has designed and taught workshops for Accessible Programs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art for a variety of audiences, including people with Parkinson's disease and Veterans coping with PTSD and other challenges.

Janice graduated from Moore College of Art and Design in 1974 with a BFA in Ceramics and BS in Art Education. As a student, Janice did an independent study in Japan to study ceramics and visit ancient kiln sites, which sparked a lifelong love of the country and its culture. While there, she developed a passion for calligraphy and traditional Japanese papers which she incorporated into her paintings and ceramic work. Janice exhibited her works on paper and porcelain pottery in Tokyo and returned to Japan multiple times to learn various techniques. Janice studies calligraphy with artist Mayumi Tomii at Shodo Studio Momi.

Janice shares her love of the medium through workshops and demonstrations at "Shofuso", the Japanese House in Fairmount Park and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. More of her ink paintings and a video about her work can be seen at janicemerendino.com.

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Neighborhood Businesses

AC Auto Service
Kenny Diaz

Dominican Barbershop
Israel and staff

Florida Grocery and Convenience Store
Dilara Begum
Mr. Nurul Hoque
Salina Shilpi

La Tipica
Leonidas Polanco
Sophie Crone

Martha's Laundromat
Martha Marin

Sovereign Ave School Asian Club
Nhi Luu

"We♥ our Corner Stores"
Neighborhood Pop-up Event

Special Assistant
Jafrin Jenice

Participants

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Aleena
Esmeralda
Ethan
Evelyn
Haifa
Irtaza
Jarif
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