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“Circumanhattanation” Exhibit Opens At LIC Gallery

by Keach Hagey

Chronicle Reporter

In comparison to Queens, Manhattan appears to be an island of pure density, where every inch is occupied and accounted for on the city’s ubiquitous subway maps. We seldom stop to think how the MTA distorts geography for its own purposes, or what lies in the blank spaces where trains, cars and buses don’t take us.

On Saturday, March 6th at 7 p.m. at the Local Project in Long Island City, four artists with a common background in city planning and historic preservation will reveal their attempt to get closer to the truth of Manhattan’s perimeter, with the

multi-media installation, “Circumanhattanation,” running through April 1st.

The project, which consists of paintings, photographs, projected slides, film and maps, was inspired by the events of May 8, 1999. Before dawn on that day, artists James Banta, Evan Kopelson, Marshall Mintz and Jay Platt met in Battery Park with the intention of walking around the island counterclockwise on foot. The trek took 17 hours.

“It was conceived as an adventure to explore parts of New York that we have never seen before,” said Banta, 32, a Jackson Heights resident who grew up on the Upper West Side. “Our goal was to stay as close to

the perimeter of Manhattan as possible.”

Much of what makes the project interesting is that this goal proved impossible to achieve. The artists were still on the first leg of their journey along FDR Drive when a police officer stopped and told them to walk on the residential streets to the west. So they wound through Sutton Place before returning to the perimeter. They were forced inland again when they reached Gracie Mansion.

As the group’s cartographer, Banta meticulously documented each step the group took, both on and off course. He then translated these maps into paintings.

“Circumanhattanation was about making a self-defined boundary,” he said.

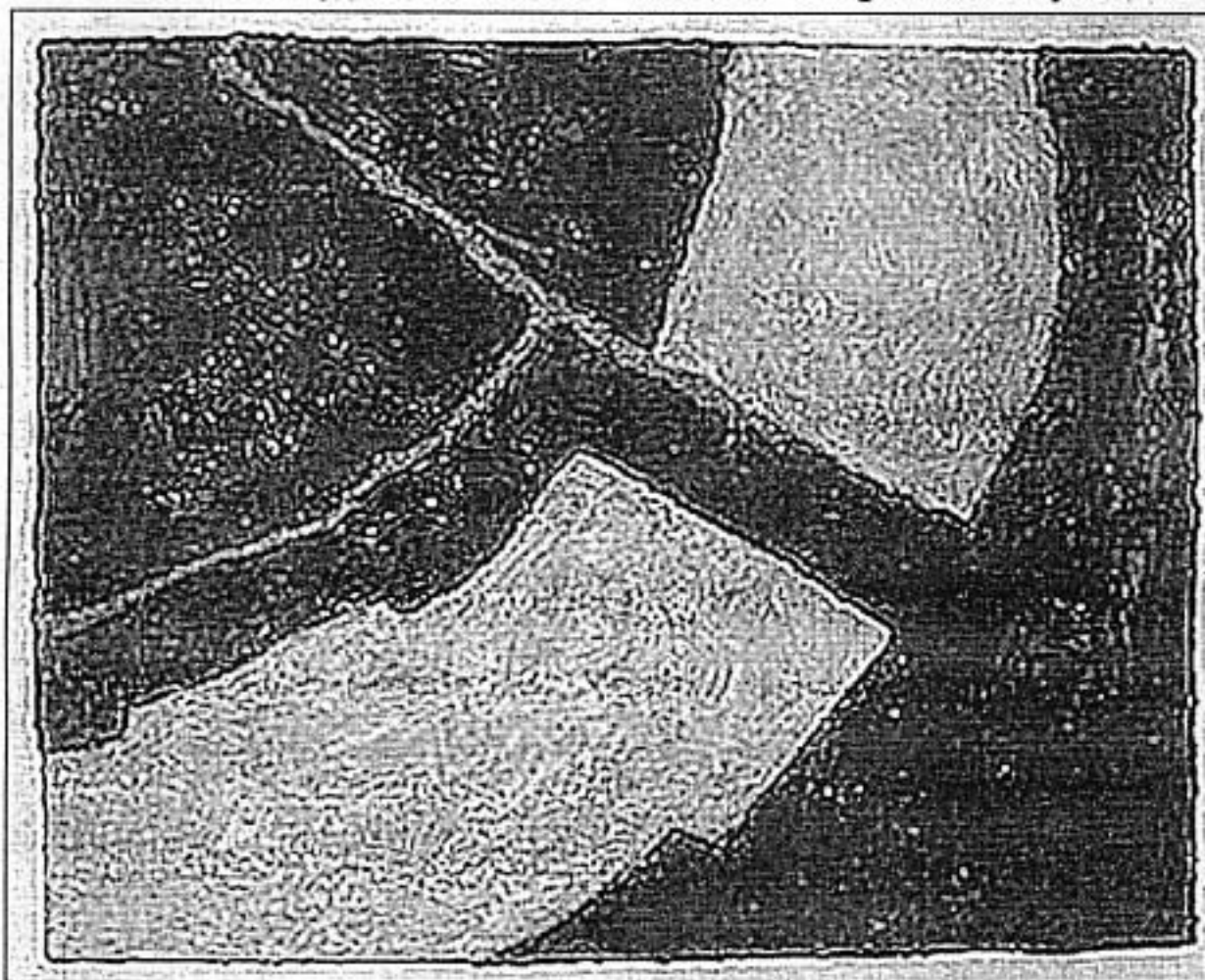
The often precarious way boundaries are defined has been a longstanding interest of Banta’s. He currently has series of map paintings inspired by the border disputes between India and Pakistan on view at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland, through March 26th.

A three-month trip to India five years ago, along with a large collection of old National Geographic maps handed down from his father and his mother-in-law, provides the basis for these sometimes abstract, sometimes map-like paintings.

By day, Banta works at Vertical Access, a Manhattan company that uses rope and rock-climbing techniques to inspect large, historic buildings. He met the other artists in the Circumanhattanation project while earning his master’s degree in historic preservation in Philadelphia.

Their installation uses the long hallway space at Local Project for a large canvas painting of Manhattan that visitors can walk on. Photographs and paintings hung on the walls adjacent to the floor map will be related and connected to the corresponding areas from which the images were taken.

The Local Project is located at 21-36 44th Road in Long Island City. For more information, call 718-433-2779.



“Broadway,” by James Banta, will be one of the paintings on view at the Local Project in Long Island City as part of the “Circumanhattanation” installation.