

# “WE ARE ALL TOURISTS”

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If you walk under the Queensboro Bridge in Long Island City, you will likely spot the artwork of local artist Cristian Pietrapiana.

Pietrapiana was selected by the city's Department of Transportation Art Program to display his work on a fence surrounding the bridge. His work was chosen because it “raises questions of identity, change, technology, environment and immigration.”

The piece, titled “We Are All Tourists,” consists of six panels depicting 600 years of travelers passing through the city. Pietrapiana started with the “pre-Columbian period” and then highlighted the following centuries.

Scenes highlighting Columbus, Native Americans, pilgrims, the industrial revolution and present-day New York City are created with intricate lines.

“I started with the pre-Columbian period and then showcased each of the following centuries,” he said. “Whether we settle here or just visit, at the end of the day we are all ‘passing by’ in this life.”

Though Pietrapiana works with different mediums, this style of drawing with lines began a few years ago while he was on vacation, he said.

“I travel light, and all I had was paper and a marker. I liked the results I got and developed it,” he said.

“We Are All Tourists” originally started out much smaller but Pietrapiana had them digitally reproduced and enlarged by local professionals. The pieces are displayed using a chronological order so that passersby could more easily digest his message.

“I consider these drawings more than paintings,” he said. “Since the DOT Art Program had this public site here in Long Island City, I considered that something more lineal would tell a story more effectively to the constant

audience of vehicle passengers driving by and pedestrians.”

The DOT partnered with Local Project, a Long Island City-based art studio, to bring students from Middle College High School to the scene. They discussed the piece with Pietrapiana and were encouraged to draw scenes they felt may have been missing or provide their reactions through drawing.

Their reactions as well as the original pieces will be displayed at Local Project in April 2018, when they are removed from the Queensboro Bridge site.

Pietrapiana, who grew up in Argentina, was inspired to pursue art while watching his artist grandfather “paint, clean his brushes, and stretch his canvases.”

His father was also involved in design and construction. But Pietrapiana's family encouraged him to follow a more viable career path.

“I was persuaded not to study art because of the typical notion that I would not find a good job to survive in my country, so I do not have an academic background in art,” he said. “I studied social communication instead, and worked in advertising.”

But when he moved to New York City in 1992, he decided to pursue art full time. Currently, Pietrapiana is working on project with the New York Times where he will “interpret the news in a playful manner” using art.

Pietrapiana is also speaking with other art institutions in the city to display “We Are All Tourists” in other locations.

“This will create more opportunities for public discourse with this project — interactions that will raise questions on the environment, immigration technology and change as a constant variable,” he said. “Raising questions and consciousness makes us all better citizens of this great city.”

