

Album

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARTINE FOUGERON

Sugary, but Real

IF YOU GIVE A PHOTOGRAPHER coffee, she's going to want cake. And if she wants cake, she's going to Valencia. And if she goes to Valencia, she's going to stay and shoot. A lot.

That's how Martine Fougeron ended up in the sugar-frosted, pineapple-stuffed warm world of Valencia Bakery, a South Bronx institution that has made birthday, baptism and wedding cakes for generations of jubilant Latinos. She had been photographing a scrap recycling yard across the street, and needed a jolt of caffeine, which she found at the tiny counter of the Valencia cafe. As she stepped out of the cafe, she spied a plain door. Curious, she rang the bell and was ushered into a multicolored cake showroom. "It was a magical place," Ms. Fougeron said. "It was a huge bakery and factory. In the back they did everything from mixing the dough, baking and decorating the cakes, with workers who did things old-style."

Dazzled, she made it part of "Trades/Oficios/Metiers," her continuing project on the craftspeople and factories of the South Bronx. Behind closed doors, immigrants slice fresh fish for Manhattan restaurants, print banners, reclaim metal from garbage and cut steel to size. There is nothing ironically artisanal about this.

Granted, some photographers walk the same streets and persist in portraying areas like Hunts Point as grim landscapes of addicts and prostitutes. Ms. Fougeron, who moved to the nearby Port Morris neighborhood five years ago from the West Village, sees it as a hidden community abuzz with industry and skilled craftspeople.

"So much of New York is about finance and banking. It's people in offices. There's no charm to it. Here, it was back to reality where people do real, differentiating tasks. They're very involved in it, and there's a dignity to that." DAVID GONZALEZ



Longtime employees of Valencia Bakery include Nancy Reyes, top, a decorator who has worked there for 23 years; Osiris Delacruz, far right, a salesman (five years); and Rosina Delacruz, above, Osiris's mother, who is the head decorator (16 years).



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