Rooted Across Borders: Sonja John Reimagines Home Through Memory and Migration

EXHIBITION

At the Katonah Museum of Art in New York, Sonja John's 'Balikbayan' explores Caribbean and Filipino heritage, immigrant resourcefulness and the relationship between cultural memory and the natural environment.

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How do we construct a sense of home across different geographies and generations? In 'Balikbayan', artist Sonja John explores the intersections of migration, family history and cultural identity through a site-specific installation at the Katonah Museum of Art.

Drawing on her experiences in New York City and her family's connections to Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Philippines, John examines how personal memories and inherited histories shape our understanding of place. Combining collage, stencils and light, her work brings architectural structures into dialogue with botanical forms, questioning how representations of the Caribbean are constructed through memory, history and family archives.

Presented in the museum's Pollack Family Learning Centre, 'Balikbayan' celebrates the ingenuity of immigrant communities and how cultural knowledge travels across borders. The installation also considers the relationship between migration, agricultural practices and environmental change, revealing how landscapes carry traces of displacement and belonging.

Visitors are invited to engage directly with the exhibition through mixed-media activities and a collaborative light installation, extending John's exploration of creativity and cultural exchange. Through these encounters, 'Balikbayan' encourages audiences to reconsider home as an evolving relationship between memory, environment and identity.

This exhibition is on view at the Katonah Museum of Art in New York until 24 January 2027.

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