



Home: News & Events:

Library Exhibit of Alumnus' Art Spotlights Refugees

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- ▶ About Brooklyn College
- ▶ Admissions
- ▶ Academics
- ▶ International Education
- ▶ Honors and Special Programs
- ▶ Our Faculty
- ▶ Campus Life
- ▼ News & Events
- ▶ Alumni
- ▶ Brooklyn College Library

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What makes the art that is now on exhibit in the Brooklyn College Library so emotionally charged is its connection to everyday life. The exhibit, *Crossing Borders*, is the work of artist Lenny Silverberg, '62, and depicts the urban homeless and international refugees. The subjects are the very reason why curator Miriam Deutch became interested Silverberg's work. "Many of our students are immigrants or from immigrant families. I believe they will be able to relate to these works," she says.



Silverberg roamed about after he received his degree from Brooklyn College, but he was always refining his artistic skills. He went to Mexico to check out the work of Diego Rivera and other muralists, then landed in San Francisco where he worked on lighting for rock shows and taught at various California colleges. Along the way, his work was bought by museums and the Library of Congress.

It was when he came back to New York in 1984 that Silverberg got the idea to create the pieces now featured in *Crossing Borders*. "Across the street from me, there were a lot of homeless people, and I just started to draw them."

At the same time Silverberg began a series of paintings about steerage, the common mode of passage for American immigrants. While working through the series, he contacted his fellow Brooklyn College alumnus Steve Kowitz, '64, about teaming up for a book featuring his refugee sequence. Kowitz, a poet, best known for *In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet's Portable Workshop* (Tilbury House), writes many politically charged poems, and his words complemented Silverberg's art perfectly.

"I let Lenny choose which of my poems to put in. He has this sense of compassion in his work; he's an absolutely brilliant craftsman," Kowitz says of the collaboration.

Nava Renek, the program coordinator at the college's Women's Center and the editor of their book, *Crossing Borders* (Spuyten Duyvil Press), brought the book to Miriam Deutch's attention. Deutch found Silverberg's work "timely and wonderfully expressive. His images bring a great humanity to suffering individuals." The exhibit, which will continue until May 6, joins the earlier homeless portraits with the refugee images featured in the book.

Suffering is a subject many look away from. But Silverberg has always been drawn to the dark side of life and feels responsible for carrying a message to his audience. "I don't believe that art changes anything, but I think you have to do what you can, and I want my art to have relevance."

