

Tiny Artists Create Underwater Wonderland for Art Exhibit

By [Smriti Rao](#) | June 14, 2012

The four-day spring arts festival "Queens Art Express" features an art show "Octopus's Garden" by Jackson Heights kids aged 5-12. **View Full Caption**

JACKSON HEIGHTS—When 6-year-old Naia Ballman gets bored, she doesn't reach for the television remote or throw a tantrum. Instead, the first-grader grabs a plain sheet of paper, some crayons and starts drawing. "I make mermaids, sea-urchins, starfish, jelly fish, dolphins, sharks..." she said, rattling off an impressive list of sea creatures.



This week, Naia, a first grader at P.S. 69 in Jackson Heights, joins other tiny artists like herself to display her creations in an exhibit titled "Octopus's Garden."

Inspired by the Beatles song by the [same title](#), the art is the handiwork of kids aged 5-13 and explores underwater life.

This is the first time the kids' exhibit will be featured as part of a larger series of art installations, all created by adults, in the four-day [Queens Art Express](#).

The fourth-annual Queens Art Express, a project by the Queens Council on the Arts, runs June 14-18 and will feature performances, art exhibitions and events in different locations in [Queens](#), including Flushing and Long Island City.

The spring arts festival will tackle weighty problems in America's health care, economic issues and housing market.

Brian Tate, the co-developer and producer of the Queens Art Express, said he was excited to have the kids on board because of the "constantly evolving nature of cultural traditions."

"We want kids to be part of it [art]," he said. "Because they are the ones who can tell us what art will look like, what the world will look like, in the future."

"Octopus's Garden" is on display at [Table Wine](#) restaurant in Jackson Heights, where friends, neighbors and fellow artists can have a closer look at Ballman's work and ponder the deeper meaning driving the art.

Ballman's enthusiasm for drawing is shared by 9-year-old fellow artist and aspiring marine biologist, Aurora Karney, whose creation — a snake made of recyclable materials — is also on display at the exhibit.

Karney said her "magic touch" with animals is what inspires her when she puts crayon to paper. "I found out I have a good way with animals," the third-grader at P.S. 69 said knowingly. "I'm the only one in my family that can get our cat to take its vitamins."

For a month this year, Karney, Ballman and about a dozen other kids toiled diligently to create the paintings and dioramas that are part of the exhibit. Attending the after-school art class held once or twice a week in Jackson Heights helped them discover and free their inner artists.

"Kids really understand on a deep level about art they are producing and they are proud to show it to their community," said [Deborah Wasserman](#), an independent professional artist from Jackson Heights who coaches the kids through her arts classes — [Art for a Start](#).

"It's a really great process," she added. "Kids can show their friends, their parents, their grandparents."

The creative spirit is not the only thing that drives the tiny painters. It's also the ability to yuck it up with pals that draws them to the after-school program.

"You get to interact with people," said Karney, who added that she was not allowed to talk in class. "You have to work in school."

"Octopus's Garden" will be on view through June 18.

For a full list of exhibitions and showings at the Queens Art Express, go [here](#).