

# A Bronx tale



## Exhibitors from the Winter Antiques Show tour

## East Side House Settlement, the show's beneficiary

By Elizabeth Pochoda

*"Take the work that you love, whatever it is, and angle it towards justice."* Ta-Nehisi Coates

### September 29, 2015:

On this beautiful Indian summer day two quite different communities came together for a few hours in the South Bronx: a group of exhibitors at January's Winter Antiques Show boarded a van bound for the Mott Haven neighborhood to visit the folks at East Side House Settlement, the charity that established the Winter show some sixty years ago.

Back then, in 1955, ESHS was still located on the city's Upper East Side, near

enough to the show's site in Manhattan to make the connection between programs for the disadvantaged and the buying and selling of Queen Anne high chests and antique diamond brooches slightly less remote.

In 1963 ESHS moved to the South Bronx, a world away from ours and one that in recent years we have wanted to bring closer. Thus this visit. It was, of course, gratifying to see where the revenues from the show's admission and events go (about \$800,000 last year, a significant contribution though a frac-

tion of ESHS's \$15 million-plus budget); but there was something more important for all of us and it is reflected in the dealers' comments excerpted here. In one way or another we each discovered how much two communities stand to lose from mutual ignorance and isolation.

Interestingly, the isolation of the disadvantaged was an overriding concern of the nineteenth-century settlement movement, which encouraged its affluent volunteers to live among the poor. That was then. Isolation is



Photographs by  
Ahron Foster

*"I have been aware of East Side House Settlement for twenty years but until we visited I had no idea of its scope or its impact. I went away feeling that we need to transmit our experience there to a wider audience of the sort that attends the Winter Show—and that doing so would create an outpouring of support among influential people for ESHS."*

Patrick Bell, Olde Hope Antiques



now the norm, and despite the impressive successes of ESHS, the settlement movement itself is, sadly, no longer a model for charitable engagement. And yet, eloquent voices like that of the best-selling author and inspirational speaker Bryan Stevenson (*Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*) have recently been raised to point out what should be obvious: walking away from the disadvantaged or hiding them from sight only ensures their continued disadvantage *and ours as well*.

And so we traveled to this country's poorest congressional district accompanied by Catherine Sweeney Singer and Michael Diaz-Griffith, Executive Director and Assistant

*"I truly had no idea. I was blown away by the educational and social services provided by ESHS. If I missed this maybe others have as well. We need an ESHS booth at the fair with great displays, audio, and video to get the story out there."*

Jonathan Boos,  
Jonathan Boos Fine Art



*"I came home and told my daughters about the day. They've grown up in the Winter Antiques Show and to make the connection between the prestigious show and the neighborhood their dad grew up in was powerful. They both want to get involved."*

Loie DeVore Acevedo, Alexander Gallery

Facing page:

East Side House Settlement (ESHS) Administrative Building, 337 Alexander Avenue, in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, New York.

Catherine Sweeney Singer, Winter Antiques Show (WAS) Executive Director; Caitlin Dooley, ESHS Department Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development; John A. Sanchez, ESHS Executive Director; and Michael Diaz-Griffith, WAS Assistant Director.

Sanchez greeting, from left to right, Jim McConaughy of S. J. Shrubsole; Jonathan Boos; Joan Mirviss; Mark Jacoby of Philip Colleck; and Tim Martin, president of S. J. Shrubsole.

This page:

LeAnn Wright, a graduate of the Youth and Adult Education Services Program (YAES), describing her life in a shelter while raising two children and going to college. Afterwards she hugged Alexander Acevedo, president of Alexander Gallery, who had been moved to describe his own life growing up in a nearby Bronx project.

YAES Literary Instructor Eric Thomas calling on one of his students in a YAES class, while Patrick Bell of Olde Hope Antiques and Tim Martin listen.



We began at the ESHS administrative headquarters on Alexander Avenue, where John A. Sanchez, Executive Director, gave a clear-headed account of the ESHS mission, the challenges faced, the successes and frustrations. He answered our questions and introduced staff members. If you have been around organizations of this sort, especially governmental ones, you know that the brio and candor at ESHS is exceptional. The classrooms, offices, and

hallways may be spare, the vibe in them is anything but.

None of us will soon forget LeAnn Wright, a graduate of the settlement's Youth and Adult Education Services program who is currently living in a shelter with her two children and attending Borough of Manhattan Community College. LeAnn has every expectation of surviving and thriving until she gives her children the life she wants for them and for herself. Her ef-

Director, respectively, of the Winter Antiques Show, and our photographer Ahron Foster.

What we found there was a vast hydra-headed undertaking of twenty-eight locations with six hundred staff members serving ten thousand people of every age, from tots to seniors—a city of care within our city. What we also found was not at all vast and bureaucratic but at every site and on each encounter intimate and welcoming, two words that go some way to describing the spirit of an enterprise focused on giving people the educational resources they need to succeed rather than the handouts that keep them in place.



“I have known of the organization for so long but really knew nothing about it. I was particularly taken by the courage of the young woman who spoke to us about raising two children in a shelter while going to college. She is the one making it happen but only because of the help and support of East Side. Wonderful!”

*Jim McConaughy, S.J. Shrubsole*

“My hope is that there might be, at long last, a stronger connection between the Winter Antiques Show and ESHS. Surely there must be a way that the art and antiques community can play a more visible and vital role in supporting such a worthwhile and impressive organization. It is a unique partnership and one that both constituencies could benefit from by closer, supportive ties.”

*Joan Mirviss, Joan B. Mirviss Ltd*

fortless eloquence reached all of us, none more so than Alex Acevedo who struggled for the words to explain that he too had grown up here, in the Soundview Houses nearby, and was returning for the first time to discover not despair, as he expected, but hope. It was a moving moment.

We went on from ESHS headquarters to the Mott Haven Early Childhood Center and from there by van to the School for Tourism and Hospitality, visiting classrooms and playgrounds, listening and talking to students, teachers, and adminis-

trators. What seemed at first the herculean task of serving the educational and vocational needs of this neighborhood began to look well within the reach of ESHS.

Even the world of fine art and antiques felt a little less distant as dealers discussed using the platform of the Winter Antiques Show to reach everyone who comes through its doors with the message that great good is being done in the Bronx: Get involved.

A beautiful day.



Facing page:

Winter Antiques Show exhibitors entering the ESHS's School for Tourism and Hospitality (STH) at 900 Tinton Avenue in the Bronx.

STH students Betty Nolasco, Doralis Sosa, Kareem Davis, and Omou Barry with Daniel Diaz, Associate Executive Director of STH, at far right and Arthur Liverant of Nathan Liverant and Son, seated.

Pre-K students and their teachers in the Mott Haven Early Childhood Center playground at 375 East 143 Street in the Bronx.

This page:

Teacher Julie Perkins reading to her students at the Mott Haven Early Childhood Center.

Dawn Heyward, Deputy Director of Early Childhood, with Hirsch and Adler's Managing Director Elizabeth Feld.

Risa Whipple, Department Director of Renewal Schools at STH.

Winter Antiques Show exhibitors outside ESHS's Mott Haven headquarters.

“I came away from our visit with total confidence in the educational and social programs of ESHS...so much so that I truly believe our support of East Side is the true measure of the Winter Antiques Show's importance and success.”

*Arthur Liverant, Nathan Liverant and Son*

