

The New York Times

5 DAYS IN JULY BENDING THE GRID REBUILDING NEWARK

By: HOLLAND COTTER
Published: December 28, 2007

Through Feb. 23

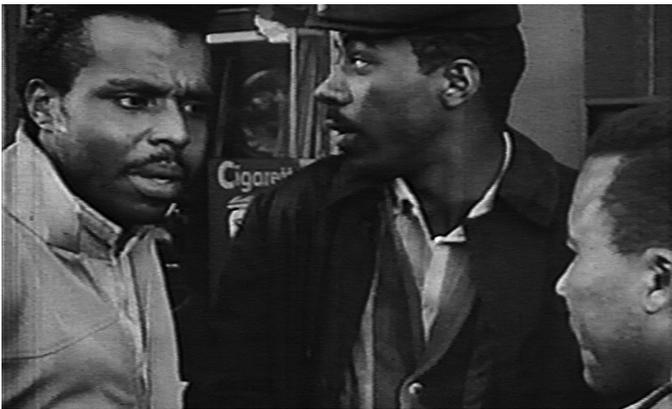
Forty years ago last summer, Newark experienced an explosion of racial violence from which it has still not recovered. In a sense, Aljira, a lively nonprofit art space, sits right in the middle of its wake, on a once bustling stretch of a main shopping street, flanked by decaying office buildings and empty lots. And this is an ideal perspective for contemplating the city's past, present and future—which is what three small, powerful exhibitions do.

The centerpiece is the video component of the installation "5 Days in July" by Chuck Schultz and Esther Podemski. A short, skillfully edited montage of television news reels and archival films, it is a startling distillation of the events of that summer, with images of the world right outside Aljira's doors going up in flames, people running in panic from sniper fire, and government leaders casting blame every which way. You come away feeling that no terrorists could have done anything worse to this American city than what America itself did.

Although the installation has other elements, including a recorded radio play by Tracey Scott Wilson (available at prx.org), the video is the crucial, shattering component. And repercussions from the social disaster it captures are the subject of "Bending the Grid: Rest in Peace," photographs by Helen M. Stummer, a Newark native who in 1998 began documenting street memorials dedicated to young residents, children of the 1967 generation, who died violent deaths. The styles of the memorials, with their wall paintings and ritual objects, are familiar now. The most interesting pictures are portraits of friends and relatives of the deceased and the printed interviews that accompany them.

As to the future, "Rebuilding Newark," assembled by Bonnie Yochelson, offers a modest but heartening survey of community development organizations that have materialized over the last 40 years. Many are local, generated by specific neighborhoods, schools or churches. But the point is, there are a lot of them, and I would say that Aljira, which does extraordinary work in the Newark public schools, is definitely one.

Almost 25 years old, Aljira has weathered changes, maintained its roots, kept growing and put new art where it belongs, in the center of town. With a new director, Edwin Ramoran, who made Longwood Art Gallery in the South Bronx such a jumping place, its prospects are looking especially bright right now.



Top left and right: Stills from *5 Days in July: a Video Installation* by Chuck Schultz & Esther Podemski

Bottom left: Helen M. Stummer; *Geneva, Janet, and Kas, Jr., Sanford Avenue*, 1999; Gelatin silver print on masonite, 30"x 45"; Courtesy the artist
Bottom right: Helen M. Stummer; *O.C.O.D. Memorial, William and 14th Streets, East Orange*, 1999; Gelatin silver print on masonite, 45" x 30"; Courtesy the artist

aljira A CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART