

<http://www.sunnysidesoundproject.org/?p=615>

Written by Sabine Heinlein

“People don’t move to Sunnyside because it’s cool. This is the New York New Yorkers live in.”

A native New Yorker, Stephanie Theodore moved from Brooklyn to Rego Park right after college. She hated it there and swore herself that she would never live in Queens again.

“I’ll live in Manhattan from now,” she told herself. “This is where it’s at!”

What followed were 17 years on Mott Street, where she lived in a six-floor-walkup and only communicated with her neighbors over disagreements and at co-op meetings. Slowly bankers, lawyers, brokers and trustafarians descended on the old Soho. When Stephanie fell in love with a man who owned a house in Sunnyside Gardens it wasn’t hard for her to leave. The relationship soon broke apart but her love for Sunnyside continued to grow. Its architecture, pubs and tight community structure reminded her of London, where she studied at Christie’s Education. In 2007 Stephanie bought an apartment on 46<sup>th</sup> Street.

On the weekends, Stephanie still returns to Soho, where she owns a gallery.

THEODORE:Art represents primarily British artists with whom she has fostered long and growing relationships. Stephanie describes her artists’ work as “aesthetically mature, well-crafted and appealing” but with a “conceptual and subversive agenda.” She shudders at the hype within the contemporary art scene and laments that many gallerists are more concerned with “packaging” and “surface” than with the work itself.

The idealism with which Stephanie approaches her work as an art dealer mirrors her attitude toward her Sunnyside community. She does not want to live in a neighborhood submerged by (wannabe) hipsters and is happy to return to Sunnyside at the end of the day. “I have the best of both worlds,” she says. “It’s nice to get away and not have black-clad hipsters all around or business people or tourists. People don’t move to Sunnyside because it’s cool. This is the New York New Yorkers live in.”

But Stephanie worries that Sunnyside’s Starbucks—a neighborhood’s “signifier of acceptability”—is the beginning of the end. Maybe real estate agents will invent a gimmicky name for Sunnyside (like when they dubbed her part of Soho “Nolita”)? And maybe wannabe hipsters will follow, clogging the streets with their “hipster babies in Sonic Youth t-shirts... Gag!” But Stephanie hopes that the existing nuclei of world cultures will continue to attract a steady stream of diverse immigrants with equally diverse professions and with people who appreciate this “neighborly neighborhood” for what it is.