A Metal-Gate Makeover

On Lower East Side, an Unusual Festival, Fair and Artwork

By JAMES BARRON

Doreen Remen was explaining why this was not going to be just another New York street fair. And then Henry Sierra punched a couple of buttons, and down went the shutter-like metal gates on the plumbing-fixtures store where he is the manager.

“Finished yesterday,” he said, looking at the yellow, black and white abstract painting by the artist Jacqueline Humphries from the sidewalk outside the store, on the Bowery at Broome Street on the Lower East Side. “I really like it, but the first time I saw it, I said, ‘Huh’?”

Ms. Remen is hoping there will be a lot of double-takers on the Bowery this week, but they will happen only at night and on Sunday, when the stores are closed and the shutters are down. The wide metal gates provide an appealing canvas and more than 15 have been painted for “After Hours: Murals on the Bowery.” The installation coincides with the Festival of Ideas for the New City, which begins on Wednesday at the New Museum, a couple of blocks from Mr. Sierra’s store.

The festival’s two and a half days of workshops and speeches will be followed on Saturday and Sunday by something called StreetFest along the Bowery and in Sara D. Roosevelt Park nearby Chrystie Street. In preparation the New Museum has drawn in dozens of downtown groups to reimagine what the city is, and

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