

JR

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JR: Chronicles tells the personal stories of 1,128 New Yorkers

For each person in the Chronicles of New York City, the artist’s new work at the Brooklyn Museum, there’s accompanying audio in which they tell their story

Adrian Horton *in New York*

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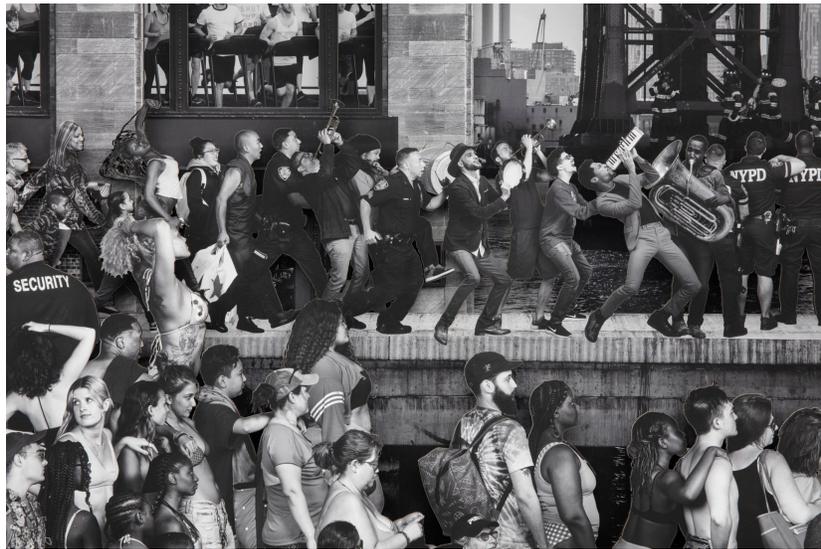


The Chronicles of New York City, 2018. Photograph: Artwork by JR. Photograph by Guillaume Zicarelli./Courtesy of Perrotin and the artist JR-ART.NET

You can start with the train, hurtling beneath a Manhattan street, full of people – arms bent toward the ceiling handle, necks bent to phones. Or you could start on the street level, on the group of people dancing, or a woman holding the perfect angle for a selfie.

No matter where you start on The Chronicles of New York City, a nearly 21 by 32ft mural housed at the Brooklyn Museum it's easy to get a different reading of the mural each time. There are 1,128 faces looking up, down, straight ahead or turned away. One thousand, one hundred twenty-eight distinct New Yorkers, each with their own story and relationship to the city.

And in The Chronicles of New York City, created by the acclaimed artist JR, all 1,128 people that make up the mural get to tell their story – there's life beyond their images. JR wanted to take the mural form a step further – to be able to hear from the subjects themselves. “I wish you could click on a painting at the Louvre or in Mexico and hear what the people had to say. Imagine!” he told the Guardian. Here, you can do just that. For each person in the Chronicles of New York City, there's accompanying audio, housed in an app, in which they tell their story, be it their to-do list for one day in mid-2018 or their life's journey.



The Chronicles of New York City, Close up, Work in progress #1, USA, 2018 (detail) Photograph: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Artwork by JR/Courtesy of Perrotin and the artist JR-ART.NET

A former graffiti artist in his native Paris, JR often embeds his work in community – under JR's direction, women's eyes watch from the walls of a Brazilian favela, a child looks over the border wall from Mexico into California, elders loom over their neighborhoods wrenched by change.

In recent years, JR's mural projects have increased in scale; for Time, he photographed and recorded 245 people of all ideological stripes on the issue of gun control. The Chronicles of San Francisco, a mural preceding New York's, includes over 1,200 people. Chronicles of New York City translates the same process to the US's largest city, where JR has lived for the past nine years.



Top (left): The Chronicles of New York City, composition #5, USA, 2018 (detail). Top (right): The Chronicles of New York City, composition #6, USA, 2018 (detail). Bottom (left): The Chronicles of New York City, composition #4, USA, 2018 (detail). Bottom (right): The Chronicles of New York City, composition #3, USA, 2018 (detail). Artwork by JR. Photograph by Guillaume Ziccarelli/Courtesy of Perrotin and the artist JR-ART.NET

The photography shoots for Chronicles occurred over six weeks in May and June 2018. JR and his team of 15 people drove their mobile studio, housed in a tractor-trailer, through all five boroughs of New York City, approaching potential subjects on the street. Soliciting participants was "completely random – there's no selection or casting, audition," JR said.

Once they've agreed to a photo, it's essential to the spirit of the project that each subject make it into the final mural. "I have to do everything I can to make sure that the photo and the video and the audio will be good enough to make it into a mural so that no one is left behind," he said. "That's important. People come, and they know they'll find themselves in the museum."

They'll find themselves photographed, according to JR, in the position of their choosing; the photoshoots are not so much staged as giving a stage to each person's whim. Each subject is encouraged to act spontaneously, in a way that best encapsulates who they are or what they would normally be doing. Hence the mural's dynamism, in which people dance, play the saxophone, check their phone, or stare ahead, seemingly unposed.

The photos are printed on-site, the figure then cut out around the body so JR and his team can arrange them in small "sketches" – pinned arrangements on a bulletin-board size scale. (These sketches, as well as smaller "light box" mini-murals and a behind-the-scenes short film, are now on exhibition as *The Chronicles of New York City - Sketches* at the Perrotin gallery in Manhattan – which acts as a complement to the mural exhibit.) From this bulletin-sized model, JR can begin envisioning the mural at large, arranging and rearranging cut-outs first in print, then digitally, to achieve the larger tableau.

The interviews are similar to the photography, open to individual interpretation. They are "not interviews – that is really important", JR gently corrected me when I ask about his method. "We tell the people: 'Whatever you record here, will stay forever, embedded in the

mural. Don't think of the Brooklyn Museum, don't think of next year, don't think of today. Think of your grandchildren [who] might hear this one day. What do you want to say?"



The Chronicles of New York City, Close up, Work in progress #2, USA, 2018 Photograph: Guillaume Zicarelli. Artwork by JR/Courtesy of Perrotin and the artist JR-ART.NET

Some start at the beginning – where they grew up, how they came to New York. Some define themselves – dentist, football coach, parent, teacher, cop, firefighter, New York native Robert De Niro (presumably not found at random on the street). Others react more to the moment and talk about their day, what they're up to, where they're going.

"My base is that I want people to go there physically and hear a story together," he said. "But then I'm always surprised at what might happen." I ask: like the miracles of what could happen when you bring people together, when you meet someone new with whom you share a space but no connection? He shrugs, already taking that as a given.

"Well of course magical things happen all the time," he said. "It's common sense."

JR: Chronicles open 4 October 2019 at the Brooklyn Museum

The Chronicles of New York City - Sketches runs until 26 October 2019 at Perrotin.
