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Rain or Shine, Residing Outdoors

By HOLLAND COTTER

From monumental to playful, open-air sculpture in New York, Page 31.

Snug Harbor Cultural Center

Perhaps the most intimate — certainly the most extensive — match of indoor and outdoor sculpture to its site can be found in and around the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug Harbor on Staten Island. The Newhouse's director of visual arts, Olivia Georgia, invited more than two dozen artists from around the world to create art that relates in some way to the island's picturesque north shore, which lies in the shadow of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and has sweeping views of New York Harbor.

Most of the art is on view in the Snug Harbor galleries, which are well worth a visit. (Be sure to see the poetic, historically erudite "Shoe Museum" by Ann Marie MacDonnell.) Other pieces, including those by Eliza Proctor and Suzy Sureck, are on the grounds outside, while still others can be found a car drive away. The St. George Ferry Terminal, for example, has text pieces by Aisling O'Beirn. The Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences is host to a gorgeous installation by Zsuzsa Dardai and Janos Saxon. The stout walls of venerable Fort Wadsworth are ornamented with a shimmering abstract piece by Martina Galvin.

Best of all, though, is Amy Hotch's indoor work at the Alice Austen House, a museum of unusual interest on its own. Austen (1866-1952), a self-trained amateur photographer who left behind an extraordinary pictorial legacy, lived in this harbor-facing house — an 18th-century Dutch homestead turned into a Victorian mansion — for most of her life, until poverty forced her into the Staten Island poor house, where she died.

The building is now a public historic site, though Austen is still very much in evidence in Ms. Hotch's tender, spirit-summoning work, which consists mostly of nearly inconspicuous video installations. Look through a keyhole and you see figures climbing stairs or moving about a room; at the bottom of a sugar bowl two women in 18th-century gowns sip tea. (Austen shared the house with her longtime partner, Gertrude Tate.) In the parlor, waves of harbor water splash across the walls, turning Austen's house — which she called Clear Comfort — into a piece of living sculpture where outside and inside are one.