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# 'Benjamin Faga: Authentic Syracuse' is one take on the essence of Syracuse



(Gallery by Gary Walts | gwalts@syracuse.com)



(<http://connect.syracuse.com/user/mjohnson/index.html>) By Melinda Johnson |

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Syracuse -- If you feel you can't put your finger on the true Syracuse, multimedia artist **Benjamin Faga** (<http://www.benfaga.com/?/cv/>) has planted his notion of the city in "Authentic Syracuse." The installation at **The Warehouse Gallery** (<http://thewarehousegallery.syr.edu/about.html>) takes a market approach, as in food markets.

Faga, who is an American living in London, relied on research from Syracuse University students, Dennis Connors, curator of history at Onondaga Historical Association, and the internet to understand the city of Syracuse. He also read "From a Forest to a City: Personal Reminiscences About Syracuse, New York," by Marcus Christian Hand (1889).

As an artist, Faga explores how people express their culture. "This show has elements of that, but it's also about how a place and culture is perceived. So, if you see a city as a culture of people who inhabit it, this show is about how I perceive that city from a distance. Then I'm expressing that to everyone while they're here or while this show is up."

Faga (pronounced FAY G Uh) embraced several aspects of Syracuse life -- its history, interest in sports, diversity from its immigrant population, and its serendipitous connection to his surroundings in London. All this informs "Authentic Syracuse."

The early research served as a framework, but there's nothing like pounding the pavement to bring more elements together. The morning after his arrival from London, Faga crisscrossed the city, visiting and photographing grocery and convenience stores and ethnic markets.

For his installation, he has assembled:

- Two TV screens each featuring a video of Syracuse Crunch players, Vladislav Namestnikov (18) and Dmitry Korobov (44), striking poses.
- An illuminated wall-size photograph of the Arethusa Fountain in London's Bushy Park.
- A grid of 24 photographs of food stores in Syracuse.
- A shelf with books on Syracuse's history and three Syracuse China plates.
- A rack with an assortment of brochures on local tourist sights.

This assortment all amounts to Faga's take on the essence of Syracuse.

The artist also offers a side trip to his Hackney neighborhood's outdoor food market on **Ridley Road** (<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/ridley-road-market.htm>). In the gallery's "The Vault," a small room off the main gallery, the walls are papered over with black-and-white, life size scene from the ethnic market. It is created from photocopies of Faga's photograph pieced together. A long table holds five cones painted and scented to resemble piles of spices and herbs, such as curry, turmeric, cinnamon and paprika.

Entertainment

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Sounds of vendors, shoppers speaking in several languages and bustling through the marketplace fill the small space.

### THE INCLUSION OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF FOOD MARKETS:

“You find especially with immigrant communities that there’s grocery stores that then come around that reflect the communities and cultures where they come from and kind of provide for that. For some reason, that becomes almost one of the most visible aspects of immigration in the city, the variety of grocery stores, and you can walk in and suddenly be immersed in another culture.

### THE GRID LAYOUT:

“You see culture in the city as well as class. You see how they change.”

### THE SHELF OF BOOKS AND SYRACUSE CHINA PLATES:

“I hope that they all speak for themselves in the sense you have that sense of pride both in your city and its rich history.”

### SYRACUSE CONNECTION TO ARETHUSA FOUNTAIN IN LONDON:

The city of Syracuse was first called Corinth. But, a name change was in order when it was discovered another Corinth existed in the state. In the early 1800s, civic leader **John Wilkinson** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Wilkinson\\_%28Syracuse\\_pioneer%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wilkinson_%28Syracuse_pioneer%29)) read a poem about the goddess Arethusa who turns into a fountain and the fountain has brine streams that flow into a lake. He thought this was a metaphor for the city’s salt industry and its nearby lakes, says Faga. The poem was set in Syracuse, Sicily.

And the rest is ancient history, except Faga recently discovered the Arethusa Fountain near his home in London.

“So this fountain represents that story and it’s located where I live. So it’s all kind of all over the place in time and space and everywhere. But there’s a strange connection between me, between that fountain, between this city, this land and that’s what this piece represents. It’s not physical, it’s linked to the story.”

### FAGA’S EXPECTATION VERSUS REALITY OF SYRACUSE:

“It’s not so much expectation, reality, it’s something I overlooked. There’s like a really friendly culture here, at least in my experience, especially in contrast to where I’m living now in London where people are more shut off. But I’ve had probably longer conversations with strangers than I’ve ever had before. People have been so helpful and friendly. And that was something I just didn’t think about. I didn’t think about that sort of aspect of the city and how that changes it. So, that’s been, I think, the most, in my

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mind, the thing I didn't expect, and I'm very happy that it's here. "

## THE DETAILS

**WHAT:** "Benjamin Faga: Authentic Syracuse."

**WHERE:** The Warehouse Gallery at Syracuse University, 350 W. Fayette St., Syracuse.

**WHEN:** Through May 11. Gallery hours are noon to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and noon to 8 p.m. for Th3, the third Thursday of the month when Syracuse galleries extend their hours.

**ADMISSION:** Free.

**ALSO:** **Video of Syracuse Crunch** ([http://blog.syracuse.com/crunch/2013/02/syracuse\\_crunch\\_at\\_art\\_gallery.html](http://blog.syracuse.com/crunch/2013/02/syracuse_crunch_at_art_gallery.html)) players posing for Ben Faga video installation.

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**StickToIt** (<http://connect.syracuse.com/user/Havisham/index.html>)

Ok, I have to smile. But maybe it's the specific items shown on the first page of the story. What I do appreciate is looking at the city through someone else's eyes.

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