

Sunset Park

El Dorado – The New Forty Niners

By **Zainab Iqbal** - August 15, 2017

The artist, Cecile Chong, with her sculptures. (Photo: Cecile Chong)

SUNSET PARK – One hundred beautiful sculptures popped up in Sunset Park in June, with an equally beautiful message.

El Dorado – The New Forty Niners by **Cecile Chong** is a tribute to the New York’s immigration population. The 100 guagua sculptures represent community and transformation in a city filled with people from all over the world.

El Dorado means “the golden.” When Chong was in the third grade in Ecuador, she was taught a story about Spanish conquistadores who arrived in South America and demanded gold from the natives. Legend goes that though the natives turned in tons of gold, it somehow it disappeared in a lake, never to be found again.

Until now.



Photo: Cecile Chong

According to the last census, 49 percent of New Yorkers speak languages other than English; hence the second part of the name, "The New Forty Niners." Forty nine of the sculptures are also painted gold.

"Gold represents treasure," Chong said, "highlighting the fact that all these cultural influences make this country stronger."

Photo: Cecile Chong

"At the beginning, I wanted to have a South American component to my work. Swaddled babies, a tradition from the sierra region in Ecuador, where they swaddled their babies really tight and carried them on their backs," Chong said. "Then they evolved into a universal symbol of humanity in my work."

People have been making their own interpretations of exactly what the sculptures are.

"Some say it's women in burkas," Chong said. "And others say the sculptures represent refugees. They have different meanings for everyone, and I love that."

Chong spent four months creating her sculptures using plastic bottles, plaster, encaustic, fiberglass reinforced resin, and paint. This beautiful exhibit isn't permanent, but Chong is planning to have it installed in all five boroughs. Next spring, it might be in Queens.

"This site in Sunset Park turned out so much better than what I could have imagined," Chong said.

El Dorado – The New Forty Niners by [Cecile Chong](#) will be in Sunset Park until the end of September. It is located at the North East corner of the terrace at the Sunset Park, closest to 5th Avenue and 41st Street corner. Go view it while you can!

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