

The NYCHA JOURNAL

These Are Our Beautiful Stories: Photographer Destiny Mata Portrays Life at Wald Houses

WALD HOUSES RESIDENT Destiny Mata is a professional freelance photographer who's capturing the lives and stories of her neighbors through her camera's lens. She spoke with the *Journal* about her path to becoming a photographer and what inspires her as a documentarian and artist.

Why did you decide to take portraits of your neighbors?

Growing up in Wald Houses, I developed an extended family with my neighbors. Watching the neighborhood change and gentrify reminded me of the importance of documenting and capturing the community I live in. I began taking portraits of my neighbors in their homes, then started using NYCHA's symbolic brick buildings as the backdrop to my portraits. This photography project has been in the making for the past five years, and as long as I'm alive, I will continue shooting and preserving the stories of the people who make up Wald. Residents who want to participate can email me at destiny.mata@gmail.com; in return, I'll give them a print of their photo.

What motivated you to become a photographer?

I come from a family of photographers. My grandpa is a wedding photographer.

My biggest influence was my aunt, fashion photographer Chayo Mata. I grew up in studios watching her at work. And now it's my turn. I've been taking photos since high school but didn't take it seriously until I went to LaGuardia Community College and majored in photography.

What inspires you?

My life experiences. My photography is a product of the environment I grew up in, New York City. Finding my voice as a photographer was clear: I knew I wanted to tell stories through my photographs, stories of culture, struggle, strength, and community.

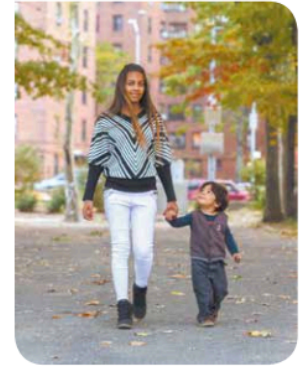
Where has your photography been published or exhibited?

My work has been published in *The Source* magazine, *Vice*, the *Daily News*, *Frank151*, and as an album cover for DJ AraabMuzik. The Museum of the City of New York exhibited photos I took of the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. My photography was recently exhibited by the City of San Antonio



Keith Baker with his son Kayden.

as well as the Mexic-Arte Museum there. **You were recently selected to be a community organizer for the Design Trust for Public Space's "Opening the Edge" project, which will work with residents to reimagine the development's green space to encourage socializing and promote public health [more on this in a future issue of the Journal]. How will you help accomplish this?** As a community organizer, I will engage



Tatiana Akram with her son Jeremiah J. Matos.

with residents and do outreach with the help of the other Design Trust Fellows to find out what residents would like to see in a potential green space, whether it's a small park, a series of temporary public art, or seating. I'll also photograph the process. Wald residents who want to participate can email openingtheedge@designtrust.org or visit www.designtrust.org/projects/opening-edge for more information.