

## Robin Graubard

'The Hold Up'

*Participant*

*253 East Houston Street*

*Lower East Side*

*Through Feb. 14*

When you first see Robin Graubard's "Crash Pad," a slide-show installation of 1980s photographs just inside the door at Participant, you might think: Nan Goldin. Then you notice that the squatter-kids depicted look unromantically wasted. And that the scenes are racially mixed. And when a paparazzo-type shot of Elizabeth Taylor flashes across the screen, you know you're not in Ms. Goldin's insular, all-white, self-adoring boho world.

Where, exactly, are you? In many places, all at once. And Ms. Graubard — former teenage runaway, professional news photographer (she has worked on staff at The New York Post) and committed wanderer — keeps you moving. In the show's salon-style groupings of undated color and black-and-white images, documentary and autobiography run together.

In one picture she's facing gun-toting soldiers as part of an Eastern European crowd. In another she's curbside in Manhattan as Bernard Madoff steps from a car. In a third she's in the communal kitchen of a bucolic Zen center near Salinas, Calif. A more recent slide show in the gallery office finds her traveling even farther afield, to China, India, Africa and back to New York.

Ms. Graubard obviously has a gift for making people feel at ease in her presence. How else to explain her gaining access to a family of tunnel-dwelling homeless children, or Mafia confabulation, or a Sarajevo hospital, where an injured girl has just had most of her long dark hair shaved off? Many of the people in these pictures are badly damaged: literally scarred or shackled, or beaten down by poverty, neglect and lovelessness.

These days we don't get much art that deals with class without turning into sociology. Ms. Graubard strikes that balance. She looks at life with the eyes of both a journalist and an insider.

HOLLAND COTTER