

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

theguardian

KIDNAPPED. THEN CHARGED FOR THE PRIVILEGE (ARTIST BROCK ENRIGHT OFFERS 'EXECUTIVE ABDUCTIONS' WITH 'MAXIMUM TERROR' FOR \$1,500. AND DEMAND IS HIGH)

BRIAN LOGAN

SEPTEMBER 20, 2005

Want a thrill? Want to throw a special party or settle a grudge? Want your dishes washed? "Anything you want to have happen, we will try our best to make it happen," says Brock Enright, a 29-year-old New York artist and proprietor of Video and Adventure Services. Enright is notorious in the US as the man who performs "bespoke executive kidnappings" for \$1,500 a time. He's persona non grata with the NYPD, fantasy salesman to the stars, and now he's opened his first London exhibition with a performance-art extravaganza starring his own mother and the Easter bunny.

"In what I do," says Enright, "there is a lot of smoke and mirrors." He works at the edge of truth and fiction, and after an hour's conversation with him, I am losing sight of which one is which. We meet at the Vilma Gold gallery in east London, where Enright and sidekick Felix Paus are unloading packing cases full of Darth Vader masks, copies of Playboy, a giant rabbit suit and lots of cardboard knives. Art, in other words.

Enright is hard-pushed to explain his show, which will feature the detritus left over from a chaotic piece of art-performance in front of a private audience in the gallery. He doesn't, he says, use his art to make a point. "I just like to make as much of a mess as possible, and comb through it later."

Video and Adventure Services started as an art project, too, and that's how Enright still sees it. One day, he claims, it'll be finished, catalogued and the results displayed. But, for now, he admits, "it's turned into a kind of Frankenstein's monster. I created the demand for it, then the demand went out of control, and the project was misunderstood by the public. But I knew that that was going to happen."

While kidnapping dominates perceptions of his company, Enright is keen to establish that VAS offers a host of "customised reality adventures", or real-life video games. "Some people are lonely and want to make friends," says Enright. "There was a woman who wanted to lose weight," says Paus. (VAS incarcerated her in a basement for four weeks, with only an exercise bike for company.) Some people want to be stalked, others want "to feel like they're slowly going crazy". After drawing up legal contracts detailing what they can and can't get away with, Enright and Paus bring these fantasies to life, with the help of hired actors and locations. (The usual request of their celebrity clients, they say, is "to go to a place where no one knows them". Naturally, these clients insist on confidentiality.)

It's hard to tell if Enright and Paus are artists, hucksters, pranksters or all three. They're certainly diligent. Their encounter with customers begins with a rigorous psychological examination. Their kidnap package promises "maximum terror", tailored to the phobias of each "victim". I spoke to a client of theirs in the US named Margo Lawless, who describes Enright and Paus as "very good at figuring out your personality: what your fears are, what your desires are, what your sexual attractions are. Then they figure out a scenario which will best fit that. It can get weird. But I've always had a dark side, and for me that's kind of a sexual turn-on."

Lawless's latest "game" has been running for months, and is now indistinguishable from her life. This week it brings her to London - although she doesn't know why. "That's what's fascinating. At any moment, they'll call me and say, 'You need to find a man with a golden ring, ask why he's

TEL 212-352-9700 FAX 212-352-9704

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com

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wearing it, and call us back when you do.' You're never sure if your new best friend is actually involved in the game. It gets hard to figure out what's real and what's not." (Heaven help this woman if she's ever really kidnapped.)

Another client, David, paid for the pleasure of being blindfolded, locked in a box and driven to Massachusetts ("I am very surprised that I survived"). What was the attraction? "I am such a conservative individual," he says. "I don't do outlandish things. This is my bungee-jumping - which is something I would never do." He struggles to articulate what appeals about kidnap: "It's a very personal experience, very personal." But he will admit that, "I like the fear. I like rollercoasters and this was like a rollercoaster." Was there anything unpleasant about the kidnap? "Oh yeah," says David. "One time I got maple syrup thrown all over me. I was flipping out. You couldn't wash it off."

Unpleasant indeed - even if David's complaint tends to contradict the NYPD's anxiety that "something like this tends to desensitise people". Enright acknowledges that "a lot of people hate what I do. And they're cool. They're allowed to have that opinion. They're probably right."

His publicity claims that his kidnaps "expose the grotesque perversions found in advanced capitalism", yet he's happy to profit from his clients. "I'm going to contradict myself all the way through [this interview]," he tells me. "It's much more fun and I think more genuine to say one thing and then say another thing." It's part of his artistic method, he says, to both criticise and be complicit in "grotesque perversion". "You gotta take the money. It's like [the Orson Welles movie] Touch of Evil. Dirty cop and good cop, all in one. There's something about being as dirty and as wholesome as possible, all in one."

In any event, kidnapping-for-kicks "doesn't seem strange to me any more. There's other weird shit in the world. Why does someone want to do heroin? Why the hell would people want to go to church? I'm not in any position to judge these people or answer those questions. And anyway, I'm more interested in the questions than the answers." So does he take no moral stand on what his work says about the world we live in? "I'd rather live in a different world," he replies, "but I don't know what world that would be"

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