

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

NEW YORK OBSERVER

NADA HUDSON SENT THE ART WORLD UP THE RIVER

MICHAEL H. MILLER

AUGUST 2, 2011

Last Saturday, in the thick afternoon heat, *The Observer* was standing in the entrance of an old glue factory on the outskirts of Hudson, N.Y. The 19th-century building was made of brick and had dusty, cracked window panes. It was by the train station and the road leading up to it was broken up by train tracks. A modest white sign hung over the entrance that said, “NADA Hudson.”

More than 50 members and friends of the New Art Dealers Alliance had taken over the abandoned factory for the weekend. Artwork was scattered around like industrial equipment on the lawn out front and on the dusty floor. Over at Christopher Crescent Gallery, a piece by Dan Shaw-Towns had to be moved because guests were stepping on it. There were no booths. Joel Mesler, co-owner of the Lower East Side gallery Untitled, stood in a dim corner next to three woodcuts, leaning against the wall, by Graham Collins, incidentally Untitled’s preparator. He was telling *The Observer* about a script he had written several years ago called *Farming for Dummies*.

“It takes place essentially in a town like this,” Mr. Mesler said. “These two guys buy this house and have these dreams of opening a commune but they realize they’re actually just urban assholes. So they try to resell their property and nobody wants it. Everybody just says, ‘It’s a shit town. Nobody wants your property because you overpaid for it anyway.’ They say, ‘O.K., we’re gonna do an art fair in the town and get all these art people and then invite bands. Because the only way we’re gonna sell the property is to gentrify the town.’ So they get all these people and they have this amazing weekend and everyone starts buying property. They end up selling the house but then they realize all their friends are now living in this town! When they go to try to rebuy it, they’ve been priced out of the fucking market.”

Hudson is a community that has resisted gentrification for years. It is filled with New York expatriates and artists who left the city and never looked back. The town is a mix of beautiful stone mansions, high-end antique stores and blown-out houses with boarded-up windows and yards overgrown with weeds. The town’s preservation board has tried to mark the less privileged parts of town as historical districts to maintain the city’s unique character. Hudson is in flux, though, and NADA’s presence there with a clever, quasi-commercial twist on an art fair exemplifies this. Marina Abramovic purchased an old theater in town to build her Foundation for the Preservation of Performance Art. Two collectors recently bought an abandoned school with the intention of turning it into a Kunsthalle. NADA Hudson, however, was less an invasion of the New York art world into an unsuspecting country town. It felt more like an extension of Hudson’s charming quirks.

“It’s kind of an experiment,” said NADA director Heather Hubbs, sitting down with *The Observer* in the makeshift theater designated for performances. “Obviously the work here is for sale just like the work in an art fair is for sale. But I guess just thinking of it in the way it’s laid out, there’s no walls or these little cubicles that people are selling work out of.”

The dealer James Fuentes brought Ms. Hubbs’s attention to the old factory, now called Basilica Hudson. Mr. Fuentes used to visit the space when he was a student at Bard. A group of industrialists were going to buy the building and turn it into a functioning factory again, much to the chagrin of the town. One of Mr. Fuentes’s artists, William Stone, purchased the building in 2010 for the humble price \$450,000, according to public records. Mr. Stone’s son had just moved to Hudson with his girlfriend.

“They ended up buying the space instead of the evil industrialists,” Mr. Fuentes said. “It was for the price of a two-bedroom apartment in Manhattan.”

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

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

The space was dim and hot, with huge windows letting in beams of sunlight. Despite the fact that artworks were for sale—and were selling; Zach Feuer parted with several driftwood snake sculptures by Johannes Vanderbeek for \$500 to \$1,000 each—Ms. Hubbs insisted this was not a fair. It didn't look like one, and it wasn't priced like one. Booths at NADA's annual fair in Miami run around \$9,000 apiece; the cost to exhibit in Hudson wasn't much higher than a train ticket from Manhattan: \$1.00 a square foot outside and \$2.00 inside. There weren't the usual art fair amenities. Ms. Hubbs did not provide extra lights. People were told that they couldn't nail into the walls. This kept dealers on their toes and forced them to improvise. Graham Gallery built a large crate to hang paintings on. West Street Gallery placed a series of small-scale sculptures by Sam Anderson in tidy rows on the floor. Istanbul's NON Gallery had taken over a cubbyhole of a room (there was a big black curtain hanging over the entryway) for an untitled piece by Conrad Ventur. The artist projected a performance of Amy Winehouse singing "Back to Black" while a Janis Joplin performance from 1969 on the Tom Jones show played on a loop. The projector had a prism over it so that the image was distorted, seeming to respond to the room's own imperfections. Jack Hanley found pre-existing holes in the wall (there were plenty) to hang two paintings by Amy Yao.

Earlier, Mr. Mesler was telling us stories about Mr. Hanley. He wanted to spread the rumor that Mr. Hanley, a former roadie for the Grateful Dead, played all of Jerry Garcia's guitar tracks on the band's final records. The Observer was happy to oblige. Mr. Hanley did not look so different from Garcia, with long, floppy, white hair and a bushy, white beard. It was his first time in Hudson.

"Kind of a funny town, huh?" he said.

"John Ashbery lives here," *The Observer* said.

"You're kidding me. He's, like, my favorite poet. That pretty much exemplifies the feeling that people here are a little tweaked." Mr. Hanley said he was staying at a bed and breakfast over on Allen Street.

"The guy who rented me a room, I came in and said, 'Hi, I'm Jack Hanley. I just called about the room' and the first thing he said was, 'So, you have the cash?' I was like, what is this, a drug deal? I literally hadn't gotten my bag into the door. But this morning, on the other hand, he made these amazing buttermilk waffles with fresh peaches."

Mr. Feuer stood next to a black and white two-dimensional sculpture by artist Jim Krewson of a bearded man retching onto a laptop. The man had the haggard look of some of Hudson's more colorful inhabitants. A stream of yellow liquid came out of his mouth like a fountain and collected in a pool at the bottom of the piece. Mr. Feuer has had a house in Hudson for eight years. He brought work by Mr. Krewson because the artist lives nearby in Catskill.

"This is a really arts-friendly community," Mr. Feuer said. "And it's been that way for longer than I've been here. I don't know if it's changed so much. It's just a different group." He paused and gestured to the work we were standing in front of.

"This is a vomiting hippie," he said evenly.

The light outside was harsh. It was in the 90s, but the air was still refreshing compared with the stuffy heat in the factory. The artist Matt Siegle was sitting beneath the shade of a tent in a lawn chair. He had on white sunglasses. He was giving away shirts he had made with the Live Aid logo on them. The logo was painted on T-shirts for different charities that he had turned inside out and used as a canvas. He had 200 of them stashed in a big, brown paper bag that he had painted to look like the bag for Pirate Booty.

"You want a shirt?" he asked.

"Sure."

"You want me to cut out the collar?"

"Uh, sure."

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

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

“What about the sleeves?”

“No, I’ll keep the sleeves.”

Mr. Siegle was accepting donations in exchange for the artwork. So far he had received three Band-Aids and an unripe tomato. *The Observer* joined him in drinking a Miller Highlife. We listened to the Grateful Dead.

We were caught off guard by the appearance of an S.U.V. stretch limo across the lawn. It looked out of place not only in the context of the installation, but also in the entirety of Hudson. The press materials had warned of its presence with a noted lack of irony.

“On Saturday July 30th, **Rancourt/Yatsuk** (courtesy of Kate Werble) will present Dynasty VIP, an exclusive VIP lounge within a luxury SUV parked outside the entrance of Hudson Basilica. VIP Patrons can look forward to enjoying ice cold AC, a complimentary full service bar, supple leather seating, and special programming throughout the day. Security detail will be present to regulate access and ensure safety. Patrons are encouraged to register in advance as space is limited in the lounge.”

It was one of the event’s most subversive pieces: a genuine item one would expect to find at a typical art fair in a major city. The artist duo Rancourt/Yatsuk had a more sarcastic explanation.

“Rancourt/Yatsuk feel NADA Hudson, despite not being an art fair, could greatly benefit from the presence of a designated zone for the discerning VIP patron,” the artists wrote in a statement about the piece.

In front of the limo, several dealers wearing unimpressed frowns were smoking cigarettes.

Back by the front entrance, there was a small piece of loose-leaf paper taped to the wall with the words “EVIL FREAKS II” scrawled on it in thin, black letters with a ballpoint pen. There were several strange looking objects clustered in the corner.

“We invited people to make chairs,” said Andy Meerow, who organized the works with Rose Marcus. “We were thinking about how this is a social thing mixed up with a weird market thing. We wanted to lend a little bit of humor to the situation.”

There were chairs of all kinds, painted in rough patterns, crossing legs with other chairs in a humorously sexual suggestion. One chair was bulky and awkward—it was covered in foam—but still retained a vaguely functional shape.

“I think we both felt kind of weird about the dynamic of bringing all this art to this barn,” Mr. Meerow said. “Kind of like rural gentrification. But we’re doing it. So.”

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

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com