

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

The New York Times

Glimpses of the Past and a High-Tech Future

A Critic's Gallery Crawl Through SoHo and TriBeCa

Karen Rosenberg and Pete Wells

April 3, 2014

Walking around SoHo on a sunny weekend, when the shoppers are out, you may find it hard to remember that the neighborhood once belonged to artists. But between the boutiques are little oases of contemporary art and reservoirs of local history. Artists Space and the Drawing Center, two nonprofit sites, have been renovated and revitalized; Walter de Maria's "New York Earth Room," at 141 Wooster Street, and his "Broken Kilometer," at 393 West Broadway, are still under Dia's meticulous care. Best of all, last year's transformation of Donald Judd's home and studio at 101 Spring Street into a public museum has given us a time machine to the SoHo of the 1970s.

SoHo is also getting a boost of energy from the east, as the fast-expanding Lower East Side gallery district balloons toward Broadway, and the south, where dealers are finding cast-iron character at more reasonable rents (and feeding off the energy of local start-ups).

The following sampling of galleries with spring shows begins in southern SoHo (mainly along Grand Street, between Crosby and Wooster Streets) and winds up on TriBeCa's western edge.

SOHO

SWISS INSTITUTE If you want to be haunted by architecture, in a way that feels especially appropriate to SoHo, start with the institute's mini-retrospective of work by Heidi Bucher (1926-1993), on Wooster Street. It centers on Bucher's monumental but ethereal "room skins," made by covering whole walls with a thick coating of latex and then peeling it away. In the installation "Herrenzimmer" (1977-79), which dominates the cavernous main gallery, hanging, rubbery husks recreate the master bedroom of Bucher's parents' house in Winterthur, Switzerland. Elsewhere, leathery strips pinned to the wall represent the heavily ornamented doors of a storied Swiss hotel on Lake Maggiore, the Grande Albergo Brissago.

These works anticipate other architectural ghosts, such as Rachel Whiteread's plaster casts of interior volumes and the translucent-fabric rooms of Do Ho Suh. But this show encourages you to think of them as body art, relating them to the wearable foam sculptures, or "Bodyshells," Bucher made earlier in her career, with Carl Bucher, then her husband. These bulbous creations can be seen in archival photographs and a short film.

Other films and videos show Bucher at her work, gathering giant, stretchy fistfuls of latex. It's an arduous, visceral and deeply unsettling process. As Bucher once described it: "Slowly we loosen the layers of rubber, the skin, and drag yesterday into today."

ARTISTS SPACE With literary flair and overtures to online gaming, Sam Pulitzer's first American solo turns one of SoHo's oldest alternative spaces into a dystopian artists' colony. Visitors move through a dense labyrinth of texts, murals and installations, immersed in what Mr. Pulitzer and his collaborators call the "Athos sub-aerian human logistics network."

Within the colony, sophisticated electronic systems link humans to all sorts of objects — everything, it seems, but one another. A map "regurgitates its days and weeks of geo-location data directly into your visor"; cars are "instanced to your singular presence." (The texts are by the poet Jeff Nagy, who has quite an ear for tech jargon.) The art in this environment tends to be

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coded and hermetic, to judge from illustrations Mr. Pulitzer has commissioned from graphic artists. Glimpses of Greene and Grand Streets from Artists Space's third-story windows bring in just enough of the present to make you wonder just how distant Mr. Pulitzer's fictional world is from our own.

TEAM The seamless abstract paintings by the Belgian artist Pieter Vermeersch look like computer-generated color gradients, but are the result of good old hand-mixing and -shading. Based on his photographs of skies and interiors, they are firmly anchored in the real world. Photo-realistic perfection can be a bore, and Mr. Vermeersch seems to intuit this. His show complicates the paintings' illusionism with sculptural materials. It includes an airy blue-gray mural that could be mistaken for a light-and-space installation, were it not interrupted by a concrete wall. Also on view are four paintings that fade from purple to gray, and a gorgeous slab of marble with a similar palette.

SPENCER BROWNSTONE Jane South's intricate paper sculptures have been getting more and more ambitious. For a 2013 installation at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut, she pieced together a realistic-looking lighting grid laden with little pieces of technical "equipment" (mostly cut-and-glued paper, with some actual lights and cables).

"Raked," her new piece at this Wooster Street gallery, also takes its cues from theatrical infrastructure; it's a slanted stage that supports a vast array of black, machinelike forms. It all looks so dynamic that you assume, at first, that the parts are actually moving: a set awaiting its actors. They're static, but that precurltain excitement lingers.

PETER FREEMAN The messy but magical nature of early photography fascinates the French artist Dove Allouche, whose first American solo has been beautifully installed in this gently renovated former factory, on Grand. The show centers on lightly printed photographs of Angel Falls in Venezuela, enhanced with hand-applied chemicals and metallic powders to maximize the frothy effects.

In another series, Mr. Allouche revives the physautotype, a photographic process that predates the daguerreotype and involves dissolving lavender oil in alcohol on silver plates. These small, shimmering images, based on 19th-century photographs of the sun from a Parisian observatory, could look a little too precious on their own. But teamed with the waterfall photo-drawings, they're enchantingly atmospheric.

TRIBECA

APEXART Across Canal Street, TriBeCa is now home to many start-up businesses, and the tech-heavy group show "Coding the Body," at this longstanding nonprofit space on Church Street, reflects the new demographic. Organized by the former M.I.T. Media Lab professor Leah Buechley, it explores "how code is being used to understand, control, decorate and replicate us."

Late adopters should prepare to do some reading, or to pepper the obliging gallery staff with questions. A pleasing abstract print by Ben Fry corresponds to letters of genetic code from Chromosome 21. Printed silk dresses by Cait and Casey Reas — designers who synthesize fashion and digital art into customized apparel — incorporate patterns generated by an algorithm, a process that unfolds on a nearby computer monitor. Meanwhile, an unsettling photograph taken in a Chinese robotics lab by the French photographer Yves Gellie shows a man with his robot doppelgänger. (Can you guess which is which?)

POSTMASTERS Known for lists, maps and charts that needle art world power structures and personalities, William Powhida delivers a sort of fatigued manifesto in his latest solo at this

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Franklin Street gallery. “Overculture” describes an insidious, market-based discourse as the dominant force in contemporary art. As the show progresses, exasperated litanies like “How to Try and Be OK with the Contemporary Art Market” give way to partly redacted text-paintings. Those, in turn, morph into abstract color charts and sculptures of crumpled sheets of loose-leaf paper. All of this suggests that resistance to “overculture,” whether in art or in writing, is noble but ultimately futile.

KATE WERBLE Luke Stettner’s shows often consist of a scattering of projects in different mediums, linked by a poet’s appreciation of the fleeting moment. In his February solo at the Kitchen in Chelsea, he exhibited, among other things, paintings on white Ultrasuede and excerpts from the letters of William Carlos Williams. At Kate Werble, on Vandam Street, he is showing works that range from the slight (serial photographs of wedges of light in darkened rooms) to the substantial (his grandfather’s leather-bound diaries). The diaries, 1959 to 2006, are laid end-to-end in chronological order. The page for Nov. 22, 1963, reads simply, “Kennedy shot.” Mr. Stettner’s light touch is all that’s needed to draw out the journals’ delicate dance of the momentous and the mundane.

DON'T MISS

THE DRAWING CENTER Reopens at 35 Wooster Street, between Grand and Broome Streets on April 17 with a retrospective of the architect Lebbeus Woods.

SUZANNE GEISS COMPANY “Particular Pictures,” a group show, opens Saturday at 76 Grand Street, between Wooster and Greene Streets, in a gallery run by a former director of Deitch Projects.

RECESS At this artists’ open work space at 41 Grand, between Thompson Street and West Broadway, Takashi Horisaki and Nina Horisaki-Christens are casting pieces of nearby buildings in colorful latex and plastic.

OK HARRIS Its founder, Ivan Karp, who died in 2012, was one of SoHo’s pioneering art dealers; the gallery, at 383 West Broadway, between Broome and Spring Streets, will close after the current exhibition of seven painters, which runs through April 19.

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