

The New York Times

August 7, 2011

All Nooks, Crannies, Bedrooms and Trees Are Backdrops for Art



Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times
“These V (curving)” (2011), stainless-steel balls, by Lisa Beck.

BRIDGEHAMPTON, N.Y. — Forgive the title, a shameless ploy for attention. “The 2011 Bridgehampton Biennial” is not actually a biennial; it’s just the second installment of an annual summer group show done under the auspices of a commercial gallery in a private home. But it’s a highly entertaining one, with a refreshingly casual attitude.

Organized by Bob Nickas, the writer and independent curator, the exhibition makes you a houseguest in the summer residence of the dealer Jose Martos. Despite its south-of-the-highway address, this is not your standard shingle-style, privet-guarded Hamptons abode; it’s a quaint, slightly musty 1860s farmhouse with an art-world history. (Prior tenants include Richard Serra.) It’s the sort of place where you needn’t be afraid to track sand into the house or pluck a weathered paperback from the bookshelf.

Mr. Nickas was given the run of the house and its grounds, with the exceptions of the bathrooms and the kitchen (which, as in any summer home with a steady rotation of guests, are in heavy use). The afternoon I visited, a friend of Mr. Martos’s was making lunch — a large and aromatic bouillabaisse — for Mr. Nickas, the gallery staff, assorted friends and family members, and six of the show’s artists who had camped overnight on the lawn.

The artist list overlaps considerably with last year’s. (That show, also organized by Mr. Nickas, was titled “Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool” after a quotation from the filmmaker Jack Smith.) But much of the art is site-specific (like Lisa Beck’s mural in an upstairs bedroom) or was made expressly for the exhibition (a small text painting by Jules de Balincourt that reads “Endless Bummer”). And the rest of it looks as though it could have been; Mary Heillmann’s webbed porch chairs, for instance, or Aaron Suggs’s immaculate white dinghy afloat on the pool.

Entering through the front door, you hear Louise Lawler’s “Birdcalls” (1972-81), a recording of her chirping and cooing the names of some of her male contemporaries. Its subtly feminist warblings are amplified by Anne Collier’s photograph “Valerie,” hanging over the living-room sofa; it shows stacked copies of the would-be Warhol assassin Valerie Solanas’s “SCUM Manifesto.”

Greenberg Van Doren Gallery

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In the dining room Guyton/Walker's hanging lamp made from coconut shells and Ms. Heilmann's shaped, candy-colored canvas "Malevich Spin" project a sort of Gilligan's Island modernism. But there's a pest in paradise: the voracious mosquito in a pen-and-ink drawing by Andra Ursuta.

In the blue-walled den Amy O'Neill's video "Joe's," a quirky elegy to a Pennsylvania dive bar and taxidermist's haunt, plays on the television. Nearby a framed book page by Matthew Higgs reads, "Nostalgia Isn't What It Used To Be."

Ascending a staircase illuminated by Keith Sonnier's aluminum-and-neon wall relief "Bodo Junction Series II" brings you face to face with the abstracted cobweb of David Malek's "Spider Star," one of the many muted abstractions scattered throughout the show. On the upstairs hall table is a mock-Brancusi by the resurgent bricoleur B. Wurtz, a "bird in space" made by stretching a white sock over a wire armature.

The children's bedroom has a summer-camp vibe, thanks to Mai-Thu Perret's appliquéd fabric wall hanging and Ryan Foerster's wistfully outdoorsy photographs. (The insect collection on the desk is just a household accessory.) And the grown-ups' room embraces a different sort of camp, with Rachel Harrison's high-low photo-collages.

Few of the house's nooks and crannies have been overlooked. Even the attic has been pressed into service, as the backdrop for a video by Trisha Donnelly. The enigmatic four-minute loop includes images of an electrified flower, a woman in uniform and a cluster of pixelated clouds.

It would be hard to replicate the thrill of discovery (read: snooping) in an ordinary gallery. That furtive feeling doesn't extend to the outdoor part of the show, but the largely site-specific works around the lawn and pool intrigue in other ways.

Virginia Overton's sculptures "Convex" and "Concave," sheets of mirrored acrylic that bend under pressure from ratchet straps, share the front lawn along with a 1964 Ford Galaxy. The car, the gallery says, awaits an "artist's renovation" by Servane Mary, Jacob Kassay and Olivier Mosset.

The backyard is appropriately playful, with Ms. Beck's croquet-esque scatterings of stainless-steel balls and Wayne Gonzales's "Slingshot Boy," a cutout figure firing rocks into an area of overgrowth. (It wasn't made for this site, but the placement is ideal.) In the shady areas to the side of the house one tree has been festooned with brightly colored glass beads in an update of a 1970 work by Alan Shields. Another one has been heaped with quartz crystals and mirrors in a kind of glittery pagan offering by Stefan Gunn.

Not everything is bright and shiny. Davina Semo's "X Marks the Rot," spray-painted concrete squares, lend a frisson of danger to the pool area, where Mr. Suggs's watercraft drifts back and forth like a ghost ship.

Even paintings are part of the indoor-outdoor lifestyle. Chris Martin's "Web," a bright yellow skein studded with collaged photos, occupies the kitchen porch. And Mr. Kassay's sheet of high chromium steel covered by a breezy jute panel has a less-sheltered perch in the side yard. Affixed directly to the house's siding, it seems to create an extra window.

A biennial it's not, but this show is perfectly seasonal. **KAREN ROSENBERG**

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