



Art Review: Outdoor Installations at the Hamptons Art Fairs

July 14, 2013

by Gabrielle Selz

Inside the large white tents of the art fairs, glamour, decadence and fine art are on high display. But outside of artMRKT Hamptons—squatting along some of the most expensive real estate in the country—a group of installations focus instead on the underbelly of our consumerist society. Collectively, the works explore the question of how artists manage to create and survive the shark-infested waters of the high-stakes art market.

In one form or another, all artists are concerned with survival. Not only having enough money to pay their bills and put food on the table, but with the survival of their own free spirits and their ability to create timeless work. Time is the ultimate luxury, commodity, and necessity for an artist: time to work, to think, to talk, to paint and to create.

artMRKT Hamptons:

Artist Survival Shack: 96 Hour Test Run

Adam Stennett, 2013

Presented by Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, Inc. | Reception Entrance

Adam Stennett has found a unique way to give himself the gift of time. In *Artist Survival Shack: 96 Hour Test Run*, Stennett has set up his 6.5 x 9.5 foot off-the-grid artist survival shack on the grassy banks near artMRKT Hamptons's Main Street entrance. For the duration of the fair, Stennett installation/performance serves as a test run for an upcoming month-long stay in August (apparently on the estate of a wealthy collector).

Made out of aluminum and polycarbonate, Stennett's greenhouse skeleton includes everything an artist needs for survival "So," he said, "I can make my art." Stennett went on to explain that after coming to New York as a young man and working in a series of jobs, he no longer had time to paint. He began to wonder what was essential to his survival and decided to create an environment that reflected his distillation process.

In his installation, Stennett has a cot, a 55-gallon rainwater collection system, a portable toilet, solar rechargeable AA and AAA batteries, a pocket radio, a solar stove for cooking oatmeal, and couscous, and a grow wall that includes basil, tomatoes and spinach. Along the way, Stennett said he began to accumulate items that were essential to his spiritual survival: an easel; paints; a vintage typewriter; a Japanese bow and arrows to practice meditative Zen archery; a Tibetan Buddhist prayer flag; wind chimes; and a potato gun he made from PVC pipe which uses a barbecue ignition and Aquanet hairspray to ignite.

“It’s symbolic,” Stennett said. “It’s absurdly powerful.”



Artist Adam Stennett outside of “Artist Survival Shack: 96 Hour Test Run”

Visiting Stennett in the midst of the art fair extravaganza is a refreshing relief from the high-octane deal-making going on inside the tents. He’s alone in his shed painting images of some of the bric-a-brac that make up his world. One image caught my eye, an acrylic painting of (and titled) *A Field Guide to Psilocybin Mushrooms* done on his small and retro artist’s easel. In fact, his shed is full of strange books and rows of vials that once contained substances like Ephedrine, which Stennett says artists have used over the years in order to create.

At times, I felt Stennett’s statements endearingly naïve—that Japanese Zen bow—until I remembered some of the extremes the artists I knew growing up took, even after great success, to stay in touch with their creative edge. I thought of Mark Rothko who, though he was a wealthy man, preferred to live like a poor man in his studio at the end of his life—close to his art.

Stennett says we all have to choose what to sacrifice and what to hang onto in this life. If you wanted to see one man’s choices, visit Stennett in his *Artist Survival Shack*.

Bundle House

Nyugen Smith, 2013

Presented by QF Gallery | Reception Entrance

In comparison to *Bundle House*, Stennett’s abode seems like a mansion. This is Nyugen Smith’s fourth iteration of *Bundle House*. Smith says that each is site-specific and made from gathering found objects, urban detritus and a variety of other inspirational items making multiple references to history, archaeology, social issues, politics and race.

The dimensions are variable, but in reality, the one on the lawn of the Bridgehampton Historical Society is tiny, not much more than a pup-tent. Inside, a completely obscured Smith sits and waits to interact with visitors who approach the piece. A sign explains how the performance element of *Bundle House* works. A visitor is asked to fill out a slip, listing one of their Seven Deadly Sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. After the choice is made, the slip is placed in a cutout slot of the house. Inside the “Redeemer” Smith draws you a piece of art. He will also, if requested, take lashing for your sins.



“Bundle House” by Nyugen Smith

When I asked Smith about the lashing he told me that he often hears couples arguing outside the tent—the man insisting on lashing, the women arguing for sparing the whip. But the core of the work, Smith says, is to engage his audience in a dialogue about personal responsibility. A visitor is forced to spend time with the piece, a bit like they would in a confessional, thinking about sin. Inside Smith listens. He’s heard long discussions of parents to their children about the nature of sin. In the end, Smith collects all his sin slips and creates a collage of illuminated manuscripts and graphs that tally all the sins of his stay.

Guy Debord (guillotine)

Trong Gia Nguyen, 2013

Presented by QF Gallery | Reception Entrance

Directly across from *Bundle House*, there’s Trong Gia Nguyen’s *Guy Debord (guillotine)*—a wooden shed where a visitor can stick their head in a round hole at their own risk. Inside the shed, a screen shows a video of a double image. The top depicts Andy Warhol’s screen test shots, the bottom half presents a figure who appears to be Trong, sitting on a toilet reading.

For a short period of time, Trong was part of Bravo’s reality TV show *Work of Art*— a competition pitting 12 artists against each other to create something in a matter of hours. This installation is a blatant example of what that encounter must have been like: cameras everywhere, fame, (and Trong’s 15 minutes of it), perhaps coming at an inopportune moment.

But there’s a further element to the *guillotine* shed and the destructive power of fame. Looking down the viewer is confronted with a rather macabre image. A large basket that holds a tilted mirror reflecting the knife blade of a guillotine suspended above the viewers head. For not only does fame come at the wrong moments (on the toilet) but at a price. That price, Trong seems to be telling us, may be your life.



Detail of “Guy Debord (guillotine)” by Trong Gia Nguyen

Supply and Demand

Coby Kennedy

Presented by QF Gallery | Reception Entrance

Perhaps the most controversial installation at artMRKT Hamptons is Coby Kennedy’s *Supply and Demand*. Two full-scale vending machines are displayed side-by-side. Inside is everything a purchaser might need for a weekend of genocide: from Wild Irish whisky to assault rifles. From

inside a video screen, alongside the purchase choices, a naked virtual woman speaks. Like a demented tinker-bell of destruction, she coos: “Damn that’s Gangster. Uses for robbery, car jacking, 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree murder.” Taking the gun in her mouth, she purrs, “I love these guns.”



Detail of “Supply and Demand” by Coby Kennedy.

Kennedy insists that *Supply and Demand* depicts the role of corporate business in the practice of social genocide. He says the sexy virtual girl often uses the “N” word because she is speaking to individuals in the language they understand. (The virtual girl is white. Kennedy is African American).

Though *Supply and Demand* is not an easy piece, it is a fascinating one. Dark rust oozes out of the bottom of these machines because, as Kennedy told me, no matter how Corporate America glosses over their images, death and nastiness seep through. And like corporations, Kennedy’s machines are failure machines, forever perpetuating urban violence for profit.



“Supply and Demand” by Coby Kennedy.

There are other installations on view at artMRKT Hamptons. This includes Jim Osman’s *Structure, Balance, Leisure II* presented by Lesley Heller Workspace. Osman has installed framed beach chairs and beach balls in plywood, stacking them as if for transportation. And though the idea of framing the bric-a-brac of his childhood memories is interesting, next to the more socially-engaged installations of his neighbors, *Structure, Balance, Leisure II* practically vanishes like a faded recollection.



“Structure, Balance, Leisure II” by Jim Osman

ArtHamptons

Located on the grounds of Nova’s Ark Sculpture Park, the opulent Art Hamptons Fair has relied in large part, on the formally massive structures by the artist Mihai Popa for their outdoor installation

contribution. Popa, who died in 2009, had the ambitious and self-glorifying dream of setting his work amongst 95 magnificent acres of Hampton's potato fields, but the work itself is highly derivative and self-aggrandizing.

However, straddling the entranceway to the ArtHamptons art fair, visitors are treated to the thrill of walking between Legs. Legs is a famous sculpture of a pair of sexy 16-foot lady's legs by the Hampton's satirical, brilliant, scandalous, hometown hero Larry Rivers.



Larry River's Legs at ArtHamptons.

Next to River's installation and waving around like circus clown gloves, the artist Esmeralda Kosmatopoulous has positioned *The Palm Authority Project*. The installation is a series of five inflatable hands ranging from 8 to 14 feet tall. The piece originally premiered in Miami Bayfront Park during Art Basel 2011 and was presented in New York City and Toronto during Nuit Blanche 2012.

I'm sure in a different location, Kosmatopoulous's cartoonish blowups might have been more fully realized. But stuck outside the ArtHamptons pavilion, they beckon like some giant carnival hawker, enticing visitors inside.



"The Palm Authority Project" by Esmeralda Kosmatopoulous at ArtHamptons.

BASIC FACTS: artMRKT Hamptons will be presented from July 11 to 14, 2013 at the Bridgehampton Historical Society grounds, 2368 Montauk Hwy (Rt. 27), Bridgehampton, NY 11932. www.art-mrkt.com/hamptons.

ArtHamptons will be presented from July 11 - 14, 2013 at Nova's Ark Project, 60 Millstone Rd at Scuttle Hole Rd, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. www.arthamptons.com.

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