



ART REVIEW: VSOP Projects's Debut Show Brings Unexpected Aesthetic to Greenport

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by Charles A. Riley II

The best thing to land in Greenport since bootleggers crossed the rum-line to deliver forbidden spirits at Claudio's dock is VSOP Projects, an audacious new gallery for cutting-edge art and design. Founder and director [Jonathan Weiskopf](#) has a stable of 31 emerging talents and, judging from the superb inaugural group show, a prodigious eye.

Weiskopf is an artist who is parlaying his formidable art school connections into a strong circle of young artists—many of whom earned their MFA degrees alongside him at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts—whose work is on the cusp of international recognition. Most of their names will be new to even the seasoned gallery-goer, and [VSOP Projects](#) will offer a number of debuts. My advice for lovers of contemporary art: visit soon and then watch this space closely. It has the potential to alter the East End gallery landscape.

The "Very Special One-Time Performance" exhibition blends art and design in three rooms on two floors. I was climbing the stairs to the second floor when I encountered the work that convinced me that VSOP Projects has something to say. Best viewed from the landing, [Justin Horne's](#) brilliant 9 (red) *Boomerang* is a suite of small oil on cardboard paintings using an unmistakable red, L-shaped gesture on a white ground.



"9 (red) Boomerang" by Justin Horne. Courtesy of VSOP Projects.

I loved everything about the piece, from its scale and rhythm to the way the nine pieces simultaneously pair up and nod to one another down the jaunty line, which dips and rises in the same irregular fashion that the red borders thicken and thin. The ninety-degree angles reminded me of the way [Robert Ryman](#) would secure a corner of his small white paintings with an angle bracket-shaped border of orange paint, and it also resembles the corners of [Andy Warhol's](#) *Shadow* series at Dia Beacon.

The nine pieces, like fragments of a bas relief, are perfectly hung in the stairwell even if the viewer has to do a bit of work to find it. I was already enthusiastically praising the work when, with a

conspiratorial grin, Weiskopf related to me its fantastic secret: The fragments are painted in the scarce, now well-nigh impossible to procure, original [Calder](#) red oil paint, his signature tone.

Horne, who lives and works in Brooklyn and studied painting at Ohio University under [Guy Goodwin](#), is unashamedly brazen. The genuine Calder red is legendary. The artist once said, “I love red so much, I almost want to paint everything red.” He died in 1976, and the estate has been beset with problems over what to do about the deterioration of the surfaces of the red sculpture, often originally painted over unprimed steel using a thin mixture that gave [Calder](#) the matte surface he wanted.

The original Signcraft Red paint he used in the 1960s was from the Japan Colors line of Ronan, a company that has been out of business for decades. The estate had to enlist Tnemec, a new manufacturer, to match the tone and introduce a safe replacement for lead, which was the toxic ingredient that gave the artist the flattening effect he sought. When I realized that Horne had laid his hands on the real stuff and splurged on this marvelous foray into sculptural painting, I was hooked.

There are many other highlights to pick out in the exhibition. With two galleries on the first floor, an upstairs gallery and a garden, there is plenty of room for both profundity and whimsy. For painterly power, I recommend [Morgan R. Hobbs](#)’s luminous *Hypnic Jerk*, which is physically and optically too much for the wall on which it hangs, in part because of the sheer optical energy of its central white passage. The subject of this passage is a bed that is offered with some of the transcendent weightlessness of a [Mark Rothko](#), together with the psychological depth of a [Lucian Freud](#) (whose white bed sheets immediately come to mind) or [Edvard Munch](#) (another painterly novelist of the bedroom).



“Hypnic Jerk” by Morgan R. Hobbs, 2013. Oil on canvas, 69 x 74 inches. Courtesy of VSOP Projects.

In the comical category, a bench worthy of Edmund Lear or Rudyard Kipling made by Alexandra Borovsky takes the shape of a toothy alligator named Katy. The reptile, in loud green with gaping red mouth, greets visitors who venture into the inner sanctum on the ground floor. Shelves are lined with archly original examples of design, from soaps in a spectrum of colors created by [Wary Myers](#) in Maine to a captivating group of stoneware table-top sculptures by [John Brickels](#). [Charley Friedman](#)’s eye-grabbing arrows (gouache on wood) twist their points toward the sunlight pouring through the windows.



Installation view: Sculptural glass bottles by Vermont artist John Chiles, paintings by Stephen St. Francis Decky, and “Katy,” a 10 foot-long, hand-stitched, velvet-upholstered child’s bench by Alexandra Borovski. Courtesy of VSOP Projects.



Artwork by Charley Friedman. Solid poplar and gouache, 23 x 23 x 5 inches. Courtesy of VSOP Projects.

The gallery occupies a little white house, built in 1868, that has been completely renovated. In the front room, right where you’d expect to find the watercolor of a lighthouse or a sculpture made by buoys that might have aligned with the building’s former incarnation as a seaside home, Weiskopf has hung a giant DayGlo orange life vest. Surrounding the pop art sculpture is a group of buoys on the floor with a painting of a sinking ship, with orange life vests dotting the grisaille water like John Baldessari dots, installed on the wall.



“MVRena,” 2017. Oil, flashe, fluorescent pigment on canvas, PFD; “Type II Mega,” 2016, Nylon, polyester, cotton, and “Buoy,” 2017, Flashe and fluorescent pigment on expanded polystyrene. Artwork by Mea Duke. Courtesy of VSOP Projects.

These works are by artist [Mea Duke](#), and they address the serious environmental and political issues posed by what the artist calls the “unregulated spaces” where maritime disasters occur (reminding me of [Thomas Hirschhorn](#)’s shambolic installation *Concordia, Concordia* at Gladstone Gallery in 2012). Beyond that worthy and earnest message, I relished Weiskopf’s pushing back against the clichés that might be expected in a Greenport gallery on the North Fork.

One of the many benefits of starting with a group show is the opportunity to test the waters. Where the paintings of Duke and Hobbs ran hot downstairs, in the upstairs space the sleek paintings of Copenhagen-based [Line Busch](#) are super cool. These elegant oil on raw linen works hum with an oscillating pattern of stark white and electric blues or pinks that accentuate slits made in the linen. The slits are twisted like fan blades, as though Busch had tightened the spatial concept of [Lucio Fontana](#) with surgical precision.



"Untitled" by Line Busch, 2017. Oil on raw linen, 63 x 47 1/4 inches.
Courtesy of VSOP Projects.

VSOP Projects opened in May, and many people stopped in for the first time during Greenport Village's monthly [Gallery Walk](#), which launched on the first Friday of June. Writers and artists I met who had visited then all had the same response: A little bit of the hipper parts of Brooklyn had come to Greenport. With its edgier urban aesthetic it recalls memories of two earlier North Fork experiments in contemporary art, the Ice House (in a terrific second-floor space in Greenport not far from VSOP Projects) and Art Sites, which began in Greenport and moved later to Riverhead. Both had loyalists and terrific art, but they struggled to gain the support they needed and left the scene, having arrived too early.

VSOP Projects has better timing. Weiskopf reminds me of Leo Castelli, planting his flag (an iconic work by the then-obscure Jasper Johns) at 420 West Broadway in 1971 when Soho was nobody's idea of an arts neighborhood. The curatorial, educational and entrepreneurial challenges of breaking ground with a contemporary art gallery can be daunting. Still, based on the opening salvo, I'm hoping and betting that this is not a one-time performance, but the start of a good, long run.

BASIC FACTS: "Very Special One-Time Performance" is on view May 25 through July 16, 2017 at VSOP Art + Design Projects, 311 Front Street, Greenport NY 11944. www.vsopprojects.com

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