



Auto Body Extends Parrish's Reach into Long Island through Public Art Project

August 31, 2017

by Pat Rogers

Looking for a sign? If it's a quirky one that you seek, then you're in luck. The Long Island-based art collective, [Auto Body](#), took to Montauk Highway to transform an ordinary drive to an experience more artful by installing a series of unexpected road signs in six spots located from Brookhaven to Water Mill on Long Island, NY.

Set along a 35-mile span of Montauk Highway, the works create a quiet adventure with around 40 minutes needed (without traffic) to discover the art from start to finish when driven continuously. The public art project is on view from August 1 to September 4, 2017.

The signs are easily identifiable as something unique (even when spied from a LIRR train or by car while driving 35 miles per hour). This is due, in part, to their presentation in a single color per installation using the same bolded font in capital letters for the text in all the signs. With the signs positioned in a near uniform height and located near the entrance to a business or cultural organization, it is the written message that is the strongest indicator these are not advertisements or business names but represent something different.



"HOLD YOUR HORSES" by Auto Body. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Each installation features well-known quips set on multiple signs that can be quickly enjoyed (and identified as something unique). Well-known phrases include "Happy as a Clam," "Hold Your Horses," "High and Dry," and "Reap What You Sow." More unusual are the phrases "It Takes Two to Canoe" and "Red Right Return," both referencing boating activities.

To encourage viewers to leave their cars and get up close and personal with the signs (and explore the location), each road sign is accompanied by smaller plaque with a quote by someone related to the location. They also point out a nearby natural site for further exploring. By locating the signs along Montauk Highway, one of the oldest and most scenic roadways on Long Island, Auto Body also hopes to change the perception of a road with only a utilitarian purpose to a transportation passageway where art can be found and the natural views noted while moving from place to place.

Signs can be found in Brookhaven at Varney's Restaurant, Ronnie Bush Farm and Museum and

Carman's River Canoe and Kayak. In Center Moriches, an installation is located at Mustard Seed Café. In Southampton, art can be found at Easterner Motel. In Water Mill, look to the Parrish Art Museum for the most easterly installation.



"HAPPY AS A CLAM" by Auto Body. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Auto Body is an artist curatorial collective made of up eight artists who lived in or have a connection to Bellport Village on Long Island, located west of The Hamptons in Brookhaven Town. Each member is an active professional artist. They are [Johnny Knapp](#), [Tyler Healy](#), [Aria McManus](#), Claire Read, Georgia Read, [Will Rose](#), Quinn Sherman and Charlie Stravinsky.

As curators, the group has presented pop up exhibitions and site-specific installations for the last four years. All aim to reveal art in conjunction with its setting to re-contextualize the space and draw attention to art by installing work in unconventional and overlooked spaces, according to the group. A perfect match for the mission of the Parrish Road Show—which presents site-specific work in alternative places that are not located on the [Parrish Art Museum's](#) campus or museum—Auto Body has created a series of roadside signs installed in six locations along Montauk Highway in both Southampton and Brookhaven Towns. In line with Auto Body's mission, each sign relates to the business or organization where the work is installed and encourages viewers to experience the location in a new way.



"IT TAKES TWO TO CANOE" by Auto Body. Photo by Pat Rogers.

Auto Body formed in 2014 after securing a space in a former Auto Body shop with the intent to hold shows and give art a visible presence in their home town of Bellport Village, which has many creatives as full-time or part-time residents, the artists said. Filmmakers, NYC gallerists, actresses and artists are among the residents, including Malcolm Morley, whose art was featured in a solo exhibition that launched the Parrish's [new Herzog & de Meuron designed building](#) in Water Mill in 2012.

Adopting the name Auto Body, the gallery was unusual for the village which historically hasn't offered a gallery scene. Their shows attracted visitors from a diverse cross-section of the community, many who knew the artists as children or as teens who graduated from the area high school, said Johnny Knapp, an artist and Auto Body member. Eventually, the space was transferred to a long-term tenant, Knapp said, and they decided to continue curating pop up shows in unusual

places.



“RED RIGHT RETURN,” Auto Body installation featured at Parrish Art Museum. Photo: Parrish Art Museum.

As curators, the intent is to draw attention to contemporary art and the location its installed to encourage viewers to consider both in a new light. In most cases, Auto Body doesn’t include art by its own members and focuses on other artists instead, said Auto Body member and architect Georgia Read. In the last five years, Auto Body has curated installations or exhibitions on Long Island, New York City and Miami during Art Basel Week. Click [here](#) for a list of projects. Currently on view are “[Barrier Island Birds](#)” by [Kyle Kusa](#) at Fire Island National Seashore (through Labor Day Weekend) and “[Ida Badal: POTHOLE](#)” at the Bellport-Brookhaven Historical Society (through September 17, 2017).

The Parrish Road Show is the first time Auto Body collaborated with an organization as partners, touching off a new direction for the group. Since beginning working with the Parrish, Auto Body has formed creative alliances with the Bellport-Brookhaven Historical Society, Post-Morrow Foundation and Ronnie Bush Farm and Museum, Knapp said. The experience with the Parrish brought Auto Body’s curation to a new level, said Knapp, one they plan to carry forward for future projects.

Auto Body was selected for this year’s Road Show by new Parrish Art Museum Curator of Special Projects Corinne Erni after being introduced to the group by writer and art consultant András Szántó, Erni said. The group was no stranger to the Parrish and has been active with the museum for several years, Knapp said. The most visible appearances may have Auto Body’s presentation at the Parrish’s popular [PechaKucha](#) evenings. They frequently attend opening receptions for new exhibitions as well, Knapp said.

Impressed with the group’s continuity and seriousness of purpose, Erni invited the group to be the Road Show’s sole artist. Recent past editions of the Parrish Road Show have featured two artists annually with art installed in spots on the East End, located from Montauk to Riverhead. Since 2012, there have been 12 artists selected. They include [Alice Hope](#), [Jill Musnicki](#), [Michael Combs](#), [Sydney Albertini](#), [Almond Zigmund](#), [Bastienne Schmidt](#), [Toni Ross](#) and others. Click [here](#) for details.



Members of Auto Body with Parrish Art Museum Special Curator Corinne Erni, fourth from left, near one of their roadside signs installed in Brookhaven, during the Opening Reception of the Parrish Road Show. Photo by Pat Rogers.

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For Auto Body, the idea for a series of roadside signs with unexpected messages, without commercial or public service intent, was inspired by drives in the South where religious or self-improvement signs are installed along highways, McManus said. In the South, as well as other parts of the United States, non-commercial messages are presented, through a delay, by using parts of sentences on a series of billboards until a complete message is formed. Merging inspiration with Auto Body's mission, each Parrish Road Show art project is designed to draw attention to art and the businesses or cultural organizations hosting the signs and surrounding natural locations, she said.

The project has received positive responses from viewers and businesses involved, who report people examining the signs up close as well as an uptick in business, said Knapp and Erni separately.

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"HIGH AND DRY" by Auto Body. Photo by Pat Rogers.

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Erni considers the project a successful one that has helped to link the Parrish with its neighbors to the west and expand awareness of the Parrish's programming into Long Island, she said. In addition, the project helped introduce her to artists from the East End and beyond, an experience she aims to translate into continued innovation for the Parrish Road Show and other programming initiatives, she said.

What the next Parrish Road Show could entail is in process and under wraps, she said. Like this year, she hopes the site-specific project will continue to expand art in the community in unexpected ways and allow the Parrish to reach both existing fans and new ones.

Parrish Road Show is presented annually in August and features temporary projects by artists from the region. Artist projects are designed to bring creativity to everyday life by presenting art in unexpected places.

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"REAP WHAT YOU SOW" by Auto Body. Photo by Pat Rogers.

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BASIC FACTS: The Parrish Road Show and Auto Body's public art project is on view from August 1

to September 4, 2017. Click [here](#) for details and information. To discover more about the collective, visit www.autobodybellport.com. The Parrish Art Museum is located at 279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, NY 11976. www.parrishart.org.

If you're going to view Auto Body's Road Show in either Southampton or Brookhaven Towns (or both), get the skinny on other art shows in the area by reading "[Parrish Road Show Bound? The Villages of Southampton & Bellport Offer Art Shows To See.](#)"

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