

ARTFORUM

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Diary, Low Relief, L.E.S Summer Night
By Domenick Ammirati

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, dear reader, but I really have not been getting out much. I hunkered down the second week in March, resurfaced briefly for some protests, and then resumed the shadowy, unproductive, vaguely counterfactual Covid-era life—a weird, slowdripped speedball of paranoia and complacency topped off with knifing hangovers of despair. It's gotten a little old. Therefore, when asked by the editors to report back from Thursday's "L.E.S. Summer Night"—an evening of gently extended hours among some thirty-odd Lower East Side pandemic-parched galleries waiting open-mouthed for a quenching stream of pedestrians—reader, I said yes.

What kind of loons would go out to see art in a heat wave, during a pandemic and incipient economic collapse, with social ferment against white supremacy and police violence demanding one's attention? Low-end art advisers. Straight couples on weird dates. Gallerists' roommates and relatives. Fortunately, these groups constitute a high percentage of all gallerygoers, and so Delancey, Allen, and Grand Streets were relatively lively with people making the rounds. A line had formed outside Magenta Plains, showing a body of work by the oft-overlooked L.A. photoconceptualist Jennifer Bolande based on stacking old newspapers and cutting into them to produce random juxtapositions from the excavated strata. A queue had also formed outside the building on Eldridge that houses Miguel Abreu, Company, and David Lewis to wait for the elevator, limited to two people at a time, until Katherine Pickard, director of the Abreu affiliate Sequence Press, materialized to offer ingress via a back stairway accessible through a parking lot—the most VIP thing I've done in a long time. The haunted Rochelle Goldberg show at Abreu arrays fragmentary sculptures of a fifth-century Christian saint alongside formations of glass bowls and hunks of sourdough bread (an incidental blast from the distant past, c. early lockdown). I swung by David Lewis for a second look at the John Boskovich show, which recreates the late Angeleno's lowkey des Esseintes studio and living quarters, and moreover to see if the proprietor was wearing a mask, since he had let it all hang out on my visit a few days earlier. *As if he knew I was coming*, the gallery was completely empty when I entered. Someone or thing rustled behind a red curtain, but I did not wait for it to reveal itself and join me in Boskovich's sad and compelling reconstituted salon.

(If I may digress, I don't like to speak ill of the dead, but Herman Cain was a money-grubbing ding-dong who got what was coming to him. His deregulatory impulse did extend to a defense of smoking in bars, however, so I would grant him purgatory, if Saint Peter is listening.)

The most surprising thing about the L.E.S. Summer Night was that I enjoyed it. Art: I like seeing it in person, apparently, which is easy to forget. Bodega was hosting the last few days of its phenomenal mini-retrospective of wry, reclusive, art-into-life conceptualist Gene Beery, organized with Nick Irvin and Jordan Stein. At Bridget Donahue, artist and musician Lisa Alvarado's vivid paintings hung from the ceiling, breathily partitioning the space with synesthetic waveforms. Reena Spaulings has gathered works by some twenty artists associated with the gallery over the years—Ei Arakawa, Juliana Huxtable, Klara Liden, Ken Okiishi, Henrik Olesen, Josephine Pryde, among others. A Josh Smith mirror painting dates back to one of the gallery's earliest shows, in 2005. A twenty-seven-panel work by Jutta Koether, titled *Mad Garland (version: Grand Openings at MoMA)*, 2011, hangs high along the room's perimeter like somber, deconstructed crown molding, but lowered like one's expectations. The show's summarizing touch gave it a portentous tone at what seems like a moment of transition both in history and in art.

That moment unfolds most powerfully in Park McArthur's "Edition One and Two Fantasies" at Essex Street. Eminently uninflected, the show features a single sculpture composed of the artist's used ventilator filters and

multiple copies of a two-sheet editioned print framed and hung at wide distances around the room. The print represents the markings on a device called an incentive spirometer, which measures the volume of one's inhalations. The gallery's website displays the objects in an exceptionally thorough fashion, so much so that, rather than represent the in-person experience, it doubles or supplants it. The emphasis on accessibility is especially pointed at the moment, in a way that might get through to those of us who typically glide through the world effortlessly but currently find ourselves inconvenienced by things like capacity limitations, odd hours of operation for businesses, and, god forbid, mask wearing. As for the emphasis on breathing, its pertinence goes without saying. In the summer of 2020, trying to white-cube any experience, even and especially artwork, is impossible, and McArthur incisively leverages the moment in a form you can experience without breaking quarantine, if you prefer or if you must.

— Domenick Ammirati