

Art Space

The building worked itself out of the static of the forest like a giant brick crystal. As I saw it appear around the bend, from a spot where logically I ought to have seen it already but hadn't, my heart rate neither quickened nor slowed, it seemed to keep but a steadier rhythm. Despite not being set back far behind the main stretch of town, maybe a five minute walk through progressively more overgrown vacant lots and their progressively more frayed and warped cyclone fences laying claim to progressively more hectically abraded cement, the sight of the building still shocked with its sense of civilisation. Its somber, squat magnitude blaring the false suggestion towards me that it was the only thing humanity had ever created. It was 20 metres tall and 300 metres wide, its depth obscured by the trees framing it on either side. Completely fashioned in clean sharp bricks of a uniform rich cinnamon patina, barring the windows of course, which almost spanned the whole height of the structure, a metre's margin above and below. Their white-painted, wooden frames maybe two metres wide, their panes designed to rotate and fold. There were eight at even intervals on the face of the building. I had the hope that

the studio space I was here to view would get enough light and consciously memo'd myself to consider that when inside.

Rudolfo met me at another curve in the road, stamping a cigarette out and whipping back his long dark bangs to reveal a groomed stache. His big eyes smiled as he extended his arm to usher me towards the building,

“Sup, Hank. Still can't believe you haven't been here before.”

“Legit has always sounded like an exclusive little club, never have been invited yknow.”

We were walking in sight of it for almost ten minutes before we got to the front doors, two huge golden doors almost reaching the top of the building, like the windows, but definitely reaching the floor, like some henge or mysterious vertical equals sign obelisk. All the while we had been talking about where we were. Like where we were where we were. I had been telling Rudolfo about the work I had been doing with my sculpture practice, and he had spoken about a show he recently had where “*you* were the sushi,” whatever that means. We both at various points had nodded reference to ‘the b list’, the local art scene’s register of suspect people. It had recently been released as an app by some anonymous developer. Whether the b stood for banned or barred people we weren’t quite sure.

“Look at those doors,” Rudolfo cantilevered his whole body to look up at the seeming canopy of the great entryway, his neck not turning an angle frontwards or back, “mock Florentine I think.”

“Mega.” I said while testing the elastic dexterity of my neck, cricking it way back and swinging my head in a nod. They were mega. Like that of a church; huge and brass, or is it bronze? Gilded or hammered to precision with the finest renaissance representation, puffed out

cheeks, fabric billow. There must've been some sixty panels on each door, each slightly bigger than a record sleeve, the top ones invisible to a neck crane up close and from far so burnished by the sun as to seem blank and defying form. Working through the panels, down and then up from eye-level, I spied a weaver working a loom, looking almost angrily back over her shoulder, then a man in torn jeans squatting while clutching a DSLR to his face. The panel the lens seemed to desire held a painter suspended upside down from their feet, painting a flat canvas at a full stretch while swinging. There was a singer screaming into a microphone with a large windscreen on it, the delicacy around the teeth on this one was astounding, I think I could spot intentional tartare.

"So what it's like a these are the arts thing?" I guess I was trying to come off as less impressed than I was, some bargaining tactic instinct dictates since this is a business meeting after all.

"Yes, look up there, if you can see," he raised his hand up almost above his head, as though to point out a plane or some sort of incoming meteor. I tried to follow this line he'd cast for me and recognise something glaring, and there it was there, the title of this piece, jutting just right that the shadows cast by the sun amplified it's 3Dness like a secret Wordart I always yearned for as a kid. Spanned over the two doors it read, "Thy temple rejoice, autonomy's flourish." I immediately let out a chuckle that I feathered with inquisition, so as not to seem dismissive. It's not that I didn't like the sentiment, just that I somewhat maybe not resented but didn't *believe* I guess that individual artistic practices could be grouped under the same umbrella. Also I blush when faced with other people's profundities because words have a dilute meaning in the fathoms of conscious experience.

“Little flowery, no? For such a minimal building.”

“Celebrates the blank canvas that such a simple building is.” The blank smelted bronze, more, I thought. “Look. Come.” He took a loaded keyring out of his pocket and plucked a regular little key from the bouquet. It opened a smaller door neatly cut into the bronze, or fashioned separately, then attached. We stepped in over the sill, maybe four inches thick.

“Who made it? The door?”

“A sculptor, Liza Levandow, one of the founders of this co-op.” The word co-op gave me pause, I didn’t like the sound of working together with people, even sharing a coffee pot.

“Hmm hmm, yes, does she still have a space here?” I was now looking up at her signature standing out on the flat rear side of the huge metal slabs, it looked as though it had been scrawled in with a miracle of modern science laser only the hyper rich-and-evil know about.

“Quite the piece of work,” I slapped the thing and it made a much more disappointing sound than anticipated, like a cold spank in the morning.

“Welcome,” his word stereoed my ears as I turned to look into the vast interior before me. It was a huge hallway, about ten metres across and probably about as long as the building was wide. The glossed treacle of the herringbone floor lay ahead endless unfocusable chevrons pointing away from and towards me. The walls were painted maybe a thousand times over it would seem, in thick white drippy paint exaggerating the shape of the bricks underneath over the years. A shiny memory of a lost topology. It was empty apart from us, but I could imagine it bustling with people walking in every direction, though there weren’t that many doors, a set of double doors on either side of us painted dark red, some in the middle, a mustard yellow, and

some it looked like just before the glass doors at the end where watching us was a verdant garden. [[[Without anybody moving, the eye was drawn to the neons hung from the ceiling, all obeying a 90 degree rule, but not much else, they were at different altitudes, all within two foot of one another, and spaced in groups and zigzagged or stacked according to no pattern I could discern. They cast a good light in the room, just enough to really make the view from the window at the end pop.]]]probably not on now]

A final whispered echo of a welcome ricocheted back to me and we were in silence now. “Do you want a short tour or a b-line to your space?” The doors on either side of us did hold a heady sense of potential, but I wanted to get to the business portion and get through it. The thought of seeing something awesome both intrigued me and made me worry that my judgment could be clouded.

“Perhaps let’s just get to the spot, I’m antsy to see it. A tour after.”

“Beaut.” Rudolfo locked the door with the flourish of a craps player, and made down the hallway as though he were trying to divot turf with his heel, then tap a gofer playfully on the head with his toes. The clomp clomps murmured pleasantly around our feet as though we were disturbing heavy clouds of fog in a marsh. The walls were completely bare all the way along, but as we progressed shapes danced on them with a progressively brighter lustre, long green feathered sabres wisped in and out of subject. They were near impossible to see if you tried to focus on them. By sidling up a bit more next to the wall to see both better, I realised they would sway with the same regularity as the trees and plants outside, and as I raised my hand to them in a soft cold stroke of the gloss white I realised we were walking down the chamber of a huge pinhole camera. I made to turn my head but Rud put his hand on my arm to stop me, “Wait,” he

said with a point and a nod ahead. I returned my gaze to the wall next to me as the shapes brightened and elongated.

“The whole building is functional para-human, such that in the absence of humans it is still capable of creating its own art. Independently.”

“But it’s just an object. I thought it was not the building that’s autonomous, but the artists within it.”

“Yes, but once there are no more artists, as one day there will not be, the building will still create image and effect, shape and sound and sense.”

“Yeah, hopefully.”

“As the gardens rehabilitate themselves, the shapes on the walls will change anew. Even now they are never the same twice. And you’ll see, the building influences your art, as though a collaborator.” I didn’t really like the sound of that, as much as I did. Sounds good to be an autonomous building, not so great to be inside. I was getting anxious to turn my head and see the work but we were getting towards the final set of doors, painted racing green, and I figured soon I’d get the go-ahead. Sure enough within ten steps we came across two alcoves in the walls, empty and painted in the same thick white gloss.

“Step in and peek out.” I did as such and the piece came into focus. By no means a sharp image of the garden outside, the vision seemed a more perfect representation of the greenery than any HD. The individual parts all moved with the same passive expression as plants. The colour palette could have been every shade of green, dappled and dotted. The sharp green spears I’d looked at on the walls were now small circular dots, each a composite part of a bush or a tree or bigger ones I’d not noticed in transit, huge leaves of a fern. Nothing was credibly discernible and

yet the image was clearly what it was, it swayed and rippled constantly and the slightest adjustment of your head would alter the entire aspect of it, distorting things while pulling others into cognisant focus. The perspective from the alcove completely blew out the sense of the hallway as a hallway as 3D space at all, it became a mottled window.

“Designed in mind, or a happy accident?”

“A bit of both, perhaps. Either way, quite something.”

“Seems like something I shoulda read or heard about. It’s not like anything I’ve seen before.”

“It’s an open secret. No-one here talks about it. If you know the building you know. It’s by the building, for the building. The alcoves are simply charity for us.” I jumped out into the middle of the hallway and the image dimmed dramatically and lost its resonance, there was a tall hazy blob with soft ambiguous edges obscuring the middle. It was me. Another one formed as Rudolfo left his alcove. “Let’s go, this’ll always be here. I’ve seen it better as well. Come spring time.”

“Oh, I’m sure.”

We both rose to relevé and swivelled whereupon landing Rudolfo directed me to our left to the green swing doors. The rolled plate windows and the slowly shifting flares upon them gave only the vaguest of hints as to what was on the other side. Rud pushed on one, and I on the other on the double hinges. There was some heft to them.

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I was glad to have worn heeled shoes that day. The sharp taps from my feet resounded around the palatial hall, giving me an alternately sensory indication of its size. It was slightly colder than the hallway. Slightly, but markedly. The huge windows may have been letting in grand shafts of light fattening towards the concrete floor brushed softly into a dark nacre, but these aspects probably contributed to heat escaping despite the best efforts of the proud little victorian era radiators.

I could see the far wall's top, but not bottom half, for the movable drywall partitions and stretches of linen that demarcated peoples' or groups' open concept sections. Barring the brick ones of the room, spanned about 100 metres apart, no four walls ever completed, giving the art space the vague shape of both a quaint town market and corporate hobby convention. Thinking back now, I recall hearing the faintest sound of water, not running, but lapping.

A few people looked our way, either because of the tattooing of my entrance on the floor or the loud continuing swing of the two doors behind us. I nodded and smiled, nodded and smiled as I looked at them. They seemed neither welcoming nor hostile, and promptly got back to their respective works: one of them pasting down a huge photograph on plywood; two others shearing the fringe of a tapestry, finding the perfect balance of unstraight.

“This way, over here.”

Following Rudolfo the meagre right we had at our disposal, the doors being a mere two metres from the back wall, we walked along a wideish aisle and just as we passed the first of the four great windows there was a desk sitting at a 45 degree angle. It was covered in splatters of paint and had small holes dug out of it from haphazard drilling. There was a shelf at its back, also

somehow covered in paint, that still held a couple of pencils and a brush. It was in a dirth of space; there being almost an avoidant bubble of emptiness formed by other people's rinkydink walls, easels, and seats.

"Here we go, this is you. We can source a chair pretty no problem I think."

I flattened both my hands on the desktop and pressed on it with my weight to gauge its stability. To see if it would wobble. It didn't, it merely compressed the slightest amount. I ran my hand along its corner, smoothly chipped wood, from seemingly thousands of people bumping into its disproportional size.

"Yea, I like it, it's big. Is there any chance I could wall the zone in a bit? How big is the zone anyway? Like how much of this space is mine? I tend to spread out. And I have some equipment."

"Well it's up to your discretion y'know. There's no property line or anything. The desk is yours, and the access. And we'll source you a chair no problem. You can move the desk anywhere in the room. Within reason. Anywhere within reason. Not into space that is already being utilised." He hit the pronunciation of 'utilised' a little too sharp for my liking of this system. I liked to know what was up with where I could be, where I could step. Freeform liberty like this actually stresses me out. I'm not gonna mention if someone infringes into my space, merely resent, and yet I'm also going to stress resentment should I be doing the same.

I glanced through the window and caught a parallax view of the same part of garden that the hallway captured. I also saw a cement fountain similarly splattered as the desk, but in lichen. The sky ranged above like it always does, but it was good to be reminded of. The radiator by me radiated an aura of heat while the window an aura of cold. Was liminality good or bad for

workflow?

“Who’s like the renting body? Y’know like who would I be paying?”

“Agnes takes the rent pays the rent. Paid in cash every month to her spot, she’s easy to find. We could go find her.”

“I don’t have cash on me right now.” Who does anymore? I looked down and I looked around. Potential attracted me like the urge to jump when perched way up high, but the haughty angle of the desk and that it was coloured in fallout that wasn’t mine made it seem like an inheritance, gave it the must of an old coat you’d get in a thrift store.

“Whose was it before?”

Rudolfo didn’t immediately reply but looked at me with concern before looking down and walking from the back of the desk to the front. He surveyed it quickly and then leant in close and then ran his hand along a spot with the lightness of brushing dust from a relic. The spot had been sanded down to smooth out a blotch of spackling. It took a couple of seconds of various turns of my mind around the borders and the negative space within to fashion the carving that must’ve been filled.

“M.W.?”

“Yea, Marco, you know Marco? Marco Winnemaker.” He seemed jumpy like a realtor in a haunted house.

“No.” I let this fall from my mouth like oil to accelerate his point.

“Well he’s on the list, y’know, like recently featured, got kicked out, none a’ that.”

“Fair play,” so much of gossip seems almost religious in its gravitas, “Some shoes to fill..”

“Hardly,” my poor sense of irony had slipped him. “A painter. Small works. Cheesy. Coffee shop trash.” Ouch.

“Doesn’t matter anymore I guess.” I wondered what he had done but felt like an icky voyeur, so I left it. I wondered where he was and realised I didn’t care. I too stroked the sanded spackling, trying to discern its edges with my fingers alone, and thought of the other things in this massive building that may be covered up or filled in. These people around me who now became loaded with secrets—which people always are, but you don’t notice until someone’s secret explodes all over everyone. I listened to the other artists whose murmurs bounced off the ceiling at me and thought back to their welcome. Standoffish, like a dog quietly apprehensive you’re dangerous while also worried it’ll be caught for this or that.

“True. It ain’t haunted or anything if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“Nah nah nah.” I pulled the top right drawer open and a loupe made an arcing roll towards the front. I picked it up and held it to my eye. It made the situation blurry. “This come with it?”

“Sure.”

I made one more swat at the white patch on the table top as though it might disappear, but yea of course it didn’t.

“Yea, go on then, I’ll take it.” Gotta plunge sometimes. My main apprehensions in these things are fear of forward movement. Gotta shake that.

“Cool, dude, cool. Yea it’s a good spot. I’m just in the front room over there. He pointed to the central wall that I only now realised didn’t reach all the way to the ceiling. I strained my ears and heard more sound. “You feel to take a little walk around? See the folks? Maybe find

Agnes and lock it in? Also there's like a party tonight. Art sale open house party type thing."

"Ahahaha, so access isn't all that privileged."

"A rarity." He slapped me on the shoulder, one of the greatest sales moves of all time.

"Yea let's see more of this place. Check where I may shift this thing," I transferred the slap to the desktop to include it in our little gang. Before we left to continue walking, I heaved the desk, on its small brass wheels, rotating it that it was perfectly parallel to the window. A full 225 degrees. Artists within listening distance paused what they were doing to take note, leaning back from their minute brushings or slicings or diligent note-taking to exercise their social curiosity. See what fresh remodelling of the room they now had to contend with. I worried that it would seem like I was turning my back on them by facing away from the little erstwhile town, instead of seeming as though I wanted direct vision of the outside, the swaying trees and the sun trying to burn off cloud.

"The window," I vaguely beckoned and spoke this to the middle distance.

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