

Ken Okiishi at MATHEW Opening: February 9th

Tuesday, January 31, 2012 2:17 PM

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MATHEW



Ken Okiishi - Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com
09.02.2012 - 17.03.2012
Opening Reception: 09.02.2012 / 19.00 - 22.00 CET

Michael Sanchez has decided to stop writing press releases, so I guess we will have to write our own. There will be umbrellas and they will be spinning.

You may have seen this before at the art fair or on the internet. The presentation of the spinning umbrellas at Mathew* distills, like an email attachment or annoying gif animation, an essential quality that was perhaps lost in the manufactured glee of the art fair:

This is a plane of trauma that appears as if it could appear anywhere, any time.

Please note:

There may or may not be a performance of Pina Bausch's seminal dance work, Cafe Bravo.

One of the walls of the gallery will be painted in Chroma Green (which can be "knocked out" in digital video editing quite easily). If you would like to use this location for filming, please email the gallery at info@mathew-gal.de.

Streeteasy.com is a real estate meta-search engine, much like the Berlin favorite, Immobilienscout.de. The screen-shots on view in the gallery are recent real estate ads for a studio that Marcel Duchamp lived and worked in on Manhattan's Upper West Side from 1915 to 1918 in exchange for The Large Glass. That may have seemed like a good deal to him at the time, but it wasn't. You probably won't recognize the apartment from the hand-colored photographs included in the Boîte-en-valise. Photoshop offers hand-coloring possibilities that perfectly emulate the types of weird stains you used to get when the chemicals weren't mixed properly. Photoshop also offers possibilities beyond this.

MD's tiny "artist's studio" was in the back of the building, and the collectors who paid his rent lived in a lavish apartment in the front**: the building, called "The Atelier," had been developed with this sort of fantasia in mind. Artists more financially minded than Duchamp had been developing an entire block of buildings with artists studios on the back and deluxe accommodations on the front, and a few of these artist-developers became quite wealthy selling these lifestyle apartments. Duchamp's letters at the time contain affects that remind us of our lives now, as we also find ourselves, running out of plausible options, stuck in some alien bourgeois subjectivity: "The Picabias are in the catskills"; "I am extremely sorry, after having promised to help you decorate the tea room, to have to withdraw my promise"; and, of a fallout from socializing with artists and collectors, "it has probably been engineered that way by spiteful people." While living there, one evening in 1916 at "Cafe Des Artsites" down the block, MD tried to explain his developing notion of the readymade; perhaps out of frustration, he sprung from the table and signed an "old-fashioned" painting of a battleground that decorated the wall of the cafe, and declared it readymade.

This may have been the worst artwork MD ever made.

Here we go again, on the battleground, stuck in a feedback loop, spinning.

*This may or may not be misrecognized on this lovely West-Berlin street as a new home decorating store, Chateau Jalousie.

**In case you are interested, this lavish apartment is currently back on the market. After the Arensbergs, the restaurateur, George Lang, who made Cafe Des Artistes iconic in the 1980s, lived there. It is his renovation that could be yours:

<http://streeteasy.com/nyc/sale/637528-coop-33-west-67th-street-lincoln-square-new-york>

"The Picabias are in the catskills."

Grand Opening Pt. II on Contemporary Art Daily

MATHEW

Schaperstrasse 12
10719 Berlin, Germany
0049 / 30 / 21021921
www.mathew-gal.de
info@mathew-gal.de

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Artists Represented by MATHEW:

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Documentation of the exhibition *Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com* at Mathew, Berlin,
February 9 – March 17, 2012:

<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2012/03/ken-okiishi-at-mathew/>

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Ken Okiishi, „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“, Mathew Gallery, Berlin, 2012, Ausstellungsansicht



ROTO-ZEBRA-RELIEFS

Fiona McGovern über Ken Okiishi in der Mathew Gallery, Berlin

Nach zwei durchaus heterogenen „Grand Openings“ präsentierte die im Dezember letzten Jahres von Peter Kersten und David Lieske eröffnete Galerie Mathew in Berlin-Wilmersdorf mit Ken Okiishis „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“ nun ihre erste Einzelausstellung. Wie der Schrägstrich im Titel bereits andeutet, versucht der halb in Berlin, halb in New York lebende Künstler dabei zwei Dinge zusammenzubringen, die sich auf den ersten Blick nicht so leicht zusammenbringen lassen. Seine erste Referenz ist das Restaurant Gino in der New Yorker Upper East Side, das sowohl für seine Zebras auf der von Nobel-Innenausstatter Scalamandré entworfenen, rot grundierten Tapete als auch für sein immer

gleichbleibendes, simples Menü Berühmtheit erlangte. Von seiner Eröffnung 1945 an war das Lokal ein hochfrequentierter Ort der New Yorker Künstlerboheme und Intellektuellenkreise, bis es 2010 geschlossen und an seiner Stelle eine Filiale der Bäckereikette Sprinkles Cupcakes eröffnet wurde.

Den zweiten Bezugspunkt der Ausstellung bildet ein Eintrag auf der Immobilienwebsite Streeteasy.com, auf der eine Wohnung aus dem Studiokomplex „The Ateliers“ in der West 67th Street komplett möbliert zum Verkauf angeboten wird, in der Marcel Duchamp von 1916 bis 1918 gewohnt hat. Die Hinterhauswohnung, die dem Sammlerpaar Arensberg gehörte, durfte Duchamp im Gegenzug für die Produktion von „Großes Glas (La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même)“ mietfrei bewohnen – aus heutiger Sicht

Ken Okiishi

Review of "Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com" by Fiona McGovern in Texte Zur Kunst, 2012

ein denkbar schlechter Deal für den Künstler und seine Erben.

In Ken Okiishis Ausstellung werden auf der rechten Wand des einzigen Ausstellungsraums nun sechs schwarz-weiße gerahmte und mit einer Fotoshopanwendung nachträglich auf alt getrimmte Screenshots dieser Anzeige auf der – wohlgemerkt kopfüber angebrachten – Zebra Tapete gezeigt. Halb verdeckt wird die Sicht hierauf von fünf sich langsam drehenden schwarzen Golfschirmen mit den ikonischen Scalamantré-Zebras aus dem Sortiment der hier auch als Sponsor auftretenden Designerfirma, die zwischen den Fotos an der Wand in einer Reihe angebracht sind. Der/die Betrachter/in muss daher erst hinter diese Revue von zweckentfremdeten und bearbeiteten Alltagsgegenständen schauen, um die klassisch gerahmte „Kunst“ überhaupt betrachten zu können. Dabei wird die Referenz auf Duchamp neben dieser losen Anlehnung an das Readymade auch in den Titeln der Fotos wieder aufgegriffen. Sätze wie „The Picabias are in the catskills“ entstammen seinerzeit von dem Künstler verfassten Briefen, wodurch ihm eine persönliche Präsenz verschafft wird. Auf der gegenüberliegenden, in Chroma-Grün gestrichenen Wand hängt als Kontrast zu diesem dichten Arrangement nur ein einzelnes Bild der Anzeige. Es zeigt den Wohnungsflur. Die leuchtend grüne Farbe, wie sie in der Regel vor allem als Hintergrund für nachträgliche Bildfreistellungen beim Film eingesetzt wird, reagiert hierbei komplementär auf das flirrende Farb- und Musterspektrum auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite. Zwischen beiden Wänden entspannt sich ein loses Narrativ sozialer Räume der New Yorker Künstlerboheme des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, denen Ken Okiishi im Vorwege der Ausstellung zwar in einer Art psychogeografischer Studie nachgegangen ist,

deren tatsächliche Beziehungen sich für den/die uneingeweihte/n Betrachter/in jedoch nur schwer erschließen. Indirekt eröffnet dieses höchstheistische Arrangement, dessen Perfektion durch die unterschiedlichen Farbschattierungen der handgedruckten Tapete, die ungeordneten Kabelstränge und die mit der Zeit etwas wackelig gewordenen Schirme durchbrochen wird, einen Einblick in den eklatanten urbanen Wandel einer Künstlermetropole wie New York, in dem Traditionsbetriebe in einem angespannten Immobilienmarkt von Ketten verdrängt werden – eine Entwicklung, die trotz anderer Geschichte zunehmend auch in Berlin zu spüren ist.

Bezeichnenderweise wurde die Arbeit nicht in Berlin zum ersten Mal gezeigt, sondern im Rahmen des Stands des New Yorker Galeristen Alex Zachary auf der Frieze Art Fair im Oktober letzten Jahres. Hier funktionierte die tapezierte Ecke im hinteren Teil der Messehalle als Hingucker mit hohem Wiedererkennungswert beim Publikum, das sich der nostalgischen „Gino!“-Ausrufe kaum enthalten konnte. Bei Mathew geben dem/der Betrachter/in gleich drei mit dem selbst sehr fragmentarisch gehaltenen Presstext mitgelieferte Artikel weiteren Aufschluss über die Zusammenhänge des hier Gezeigten: Ken Okiishis im letzten November in Artforum erschienene Restaurantkritik, die sich der Wiedereröffnung des von Duchamp regelmäßig frequentierten Cafés des Artistes im Frühjahr 2011 widmete, ein Text, der angesichts der Tatsache, dass es diese Rubrik in der Zeitschrift normalerweise gar nicht gibt, selbst als künstlerischer Beitrag erscheint, sowie der darauf wiederum Bezug nehmende Eintrag auf der Website Gallerist NY und schließlich ein Artikel über das Gino aus dem New York Times Magazine. Diese eigentlich supplementären Elemente

Ken Okishi, „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“, Mathew Gallery, Berlin, 2012, Ausstellungsansicht



treten somit an eben genau die Stelle des Schrägstrichs im Titel als einer Angabe von verschiedenen Möglichkeiten der Verbindung zwischen Duchamp und einem legendären New Yorker Künstlerrestaurant. Somit wirft dieses Verharren im Potenziellen und gleichzeitig das für das Verständnis der Zusammenhänge Angewiesen-Sein auf diese Quellen zum einen die Frage nach dem eigentlichen „Rahmen“ und zum anderen nach dem idealen Rezeptionszusammenhang eines derart referenziellen und dadurch letztendlich zugleich wiederum in sich geschlossenen künstlerischen Konstrukts auf. Denn auch in anderer Hinsicht ist die Berliner Präsentation mehr als nur ein zweiter Aufguss des Messeauftritts: In der hier um das Chroma-Grün ergänzten Präsentationsform in dem modernistischen Flachbau mit großer Fensterfront erscheint die ganze Ausstellung nun, und das ist für die Gegend von Wilmersdorf durchaus typisch, selbst wie ein etwas obskures Schaufensterdisplay – ein Thema, dessen Ken Okishi sich schon in früheren Arbeiten wie „Depuis“ (2010, gemeinsam mit Nick Mauss) angenommen hat.

Besonders angesichts der Tatsache, dass das Haus Scalamandré zunächst seine Palette um Mer-

chandising-Produkte wie Golfschirme ergänzt hat und statt exklusiv bei Zwischenhändlern bald ihre Artikel auch über ihre Website vertreibt, rücken hier die Vermarktungsstrategien des Ausgestellten auf zweifache Weise selbst in den Blick. Einerseits wird so der Showroom-Charakter der Galerie hervorgekehrt, deren administrativer Bereich sich im Keller befindet. Andererseits erscheint die ausgestellte Kunst ungeachtet ihres skurrilen Erscheinungsbilds als (käuflicher) Dekor, das sich nicht ganz nostalgiefrei und wohldurchdacht über die Duchamp-Referenzen selbst eines bestimmten Künstlermythos bedient. Am Ende drehen sich also die Anspielungen genauso im Kreis wie die rotierenden Schirme.

Ken Okishi, „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“, Mathew Gallery, Berlin, 9. Februar bis 17. März 2012.

ANNUAL

Magazine

GO ABOVE THE MOON
THE MOON

Ken Okiishi

ROTO-ZEBRA-RELIEFS

FIONA MCGOVERN ON KEN OKIISHI

AT MATHEW, BERLIN

After two rather heterogeneous ‘Grand Openings’, Mathew – opened by Peter Kersten and David Lieske in December of last year in Berlin-Wilmersdorf – is presenting Ken Okiishi’s ‘Gino / Marcel Duchamp on streeteasy.com’ as their first solo exhibition. As the slash in the title indicates, the artist, who splits his time between New York and Berlin, is attempting to bring two things together that at first glance seem difficult to unite. His first reference is the restaurant Gino on the Upper East Side of New York, which is as famous for its consistent and simple menu as for the zebras on the red-primed wallpaper by posh interior designer Scalamandr . Since its opening in 1945, Gino was frequented by New York’s art bohemia until it closed in 2010, when a franchise of the bakery chain Sprinkles Cupcakes was opened in its place.

The exhibition’s second reference point is composed of an entry on the real-estate website Streeteasy.com, in which an apartment in the studio complex “The Atelier,” on West 67th Street, where Marcel Duchamp resided from 1916 to 1918, is being put up for sale, fully furnished. Duchamp was allowed to live in an apartment in the rear of the building – with the rent paid by the collector couple, the Arensbergs, who lived in a lavish apartment in the front – in exchange for the *The Large Glass* (*La Mari e mise   nu par ses c libataires, m me*), which from today’s perspective was conceivably a bad deal for the artist and his descendants.

In Ken Okiishi’s exhibition, six black and white framed screenshots of this ad (photoshopped to look old) are mounted on the zebra wallpaper on the right wall of the gallery space. They are half covered by five slowly turning black golf umbrellas, set in a row between the photos and the wall. The umbrellas are also printed with the iconic Scalamandr  zebras; the design firm Scalamandr , which here also acts as a sponsor, provided these products for the exhibition. The viewer must therefore look behind this revue of repurposed,





everyday objects in order to be able to see the classically framed “art.” Besides the slack allusion to the readymade, a second reference to Duchamp is made in the title of the photos. Sentences like “The Picabias are in the Catskills” are drawn from the artist’s letters, which achieves Duchamp’s personal presence there. On the opposing wall (painted chroma green), in contrast to the dense arrangement, hangs a single image of the advertisement. It shows the apartment’s corridor. The bright color, which normally is used to silhouette figures as a green screen for films, reacts here as a compliment to the flitting color and pattern spectrum on the opposite side of the room. Between the two walls a slack narrative concerning social spaces of the New York art bohemia in the early 20th Century emerges, which Ken Okiishi traced as a kind of psycho-geographic study before the exhibition – the actual correlations of which are difficult to unlock for the unversed viewer. This highly aesthetic arrangement, whose perfection through the various hues of the hand-printed wallpaper is penetrated by the disorderly cable strands and the somewhat tottery, spinning umbrellas, indirectly opens a look into the striking urban shift of an art metropolis like New York, in which cherished establishments are displaced by chains in a fierce real-estate market – a development, that in spite of a different history, can also be sensed in Berlin.

Significantly, the work was not shown for the first time in Berlin, but rather at the stand of New York gallerist Alex Zachary at the Frieze Art Fair in October of last year. Here the wallpapered corner in the back part of the convention hall functioned as an eye-catcher with high recognition value for a public that could hardly



resist the nostalgic exclamation “Gino!” At Mathew, three articles provided with the quite fragmentary press text give the viewer further exposure to the context of what’s shown here: Ken Okiishi’s restaurant critique from last November’s *Art Forum*, which is devoted to the reopening of Café de Artistes – often frequented by Duchamp – in early 2011. The text in itself appears as artistic, given the fact that normally the restaurant review format doesn’t exist in the magazine. It’s similarly the case in a text for the website Gallerist NY, which refers to the *Art Forum* piece, as well as an article about Gino in *The New York Times Magazine*. These supplementary elements function in exactly the same way as the slash in the title – as an indication of the various possibilities of a connection between Duchamp and a legendary New York artist hangout. Consequently this persistence of potentials and simultaneously the persistence to understanding the context relying on these sources raises the question of the actual “frame” of the exhibition. Additionally, one could ask what the ideal context of reception for such a referential and thus ultimately again closed artistic construct would be. Because, in another respect, the Berlin presentation is more than a second incarnation of what was shown at the fair: Here the presentation, supplemented by the chroma green in a modern building with big, storefront windows, gives the exhibition the appearance – and it’s quite typical for the Wilmersdorf neighborhood – of a somewhat obscure window display, a topic that Ken Okiishi already treated in earlier works such as *Depuis* (2010, together with Nick Mauss).

Considering the fact that the house Scalmandré has supplemented its offerings with merchandising products such as the golf umbrellas, and that instead of selling them exclusively through distributors they will also be available to buy directly on their website, the marketing strategy of the exhibited products comes back into view twofold. On the one hand the showroom character of the gallery is accentuated, whose administrative area is in the cellar. On the other hand, the exhibited art, its whimsical appearance notwithstanding, could be seen as décor for sale, where the deliberate (and not entirely free of nostalgia) references to Duchamp serve a certain artist mythos. In the end, the allusions spin in the same circles as the rotating umbrellas.

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GINO / “THINKING ABOUT MOVING UPTOWN” / MARCEL DUCHAMP ON STREETEASY.COM, 2011 — installation view, Frieze Art Fair, London, October 2011 • Courtesy of the artist and Alex Zachary Peter Currie, New York

GINO / MARCEL DUCHAMP ON STREETEASY.COM, 2012 — installation view, Mathew, Berlin, February 2012 • Courtesy of the artist and Mathew, Berlin.



The New York Times Magazine

Frieze Frame | Ken Okiishi's Manhattan Transfer

By [KEVIN MCGARRY](#)

October 18, 2011



The [Frame](#) section of the Frieze Art Fair, curated by Cecilia Alemani and Rodrigo Moura, made space for experimentation on the fair's fringes in the form of 25 solo artist presentations presented by a younger batch of international galleries. Among them was [Alex Zachary](#), one of New York's most idiosyncratic galleries both in terms of space and location. (It has been operating out of a multilevel, formerly residential condominium a couple of blocks from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.) Fittingly, the artist Ken Okiishi's project at Zachary's Frame booth was a curious meditation on the psychogeography of Manhattan real estate and mythologies of uptown bohemia. Eulogizing the recently shuttered Lexington Avenue establishment Gino as a point of departure (which over time has hosted luminaries as diverse as Sophia Loren, I. M. Pei and Robin Byrd), Okiishi began by outfitting the booth in the iconic Scalamandré-designed zebra wallpaper that made its debut in the restaurant's dining room circa 1930. He applied the same print to parasols bolted to the walls, whose slow and steady motorized twirling evoked bygone pageantry and ritziness. Faux-antique photographs of an early-20th-century apartment were hung beside the umbrellas; in actuality these were digital images lifted from the present-day [Streeteasy.com](#) listing for a unit on West 67th Street that was once home to Marcel Duchamp, from 1916 to 1918. East Side, West Side, Depression era, recession era: Okiishi's project drew foggy connections between places and times that are factually disparate but psychically proximate. These artifacts repurposed as ready-mades contribute to a meandering mental map of the city that relies on legends like Duchamp (and Gino's) as its compass.

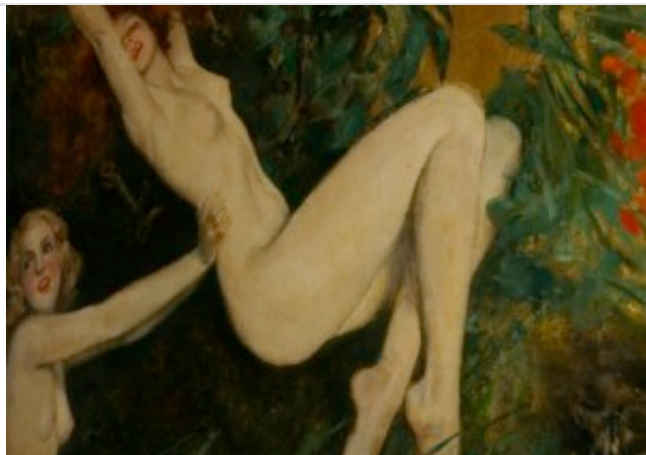
In Artforum, Artist Ken Okiishi Becomes a Restaurant Critic

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By Andrew Russeth 10/25 9:56am



A detail of the Leopard's Howard Chandler Christy murals.

As we continue to mourn the end of Sam Sifton's tenure as *New York Times* dining critic over here at the *Gallerist* office, we were pleased to see that *Artforum* has entered the restaurant reviewing game, with artist Ken Okiishi penning a superb article in the November issue of the magazine on the Upper West Side's Leopard at Des Artistes, the new Italian restaurant housed in the former home of Café des Artistes, which ran from 1917 through 2009.

Mr. Sifton, **you may recall**, spotted a bevy of art world elites during **his visits to the Leopard**: Museum of Modern Art director Glenn Lowry and Whitney director Adam Weinberg were dining together, not far from former New Jersey governor Jon Corzine. Metropolitan Museum of Art vice president Harold Holzer was in attendance, as well as Sotheby's auctioneer Jamie Niven. He awarded it a solid two stars.

Mr. Okiishi finds less to like in the restaurant, though he does praise its iconic Howard Chandler Christy murals as “[c]risp, clean, flawlessly buffed kitsch.” In slamming the restaurant, the artist breaks not only with Mr. Sifton, but also *The New Yorker's* Lizzie Widdicombe, who, by thrilling coincidence, also **happened to review the restaurant** this week.

“It's worth a trip just to sit at one of the candle-lit tables, sipping a goblet of Tintore and watching the tastefully blinged-out clientele file past,” Ms. Widdicombe writes. “It's the kind of convivial, unpretentious place that, in the end, is practically un-hatable.”

Apparently she has not met Mr. Okiishi.

“The overwhelming design nonidentity of the new interior surrounding the murals stages a disjunction in eras that wobbles between novelty and lifelessness,” Mr. Okiishi declares, and he

reports that his dining companion told him, “You could also say the place looks a bit like a pizza parlor trying to be fancy.” Mr. Sifton, on the other hand, was a fan, and declared the Leopard “an airy and cheerful southern Italian clubhouse.”

The food also provokes disagreements. While Mr. Okiishi’s partner’s grilled chicken is “acceptable though unremarkable,” his porchetta “is shockingly dry” and its gravy “almost instantly develops a gloppy, gelatinous crust.” The restaurant, he says, is in “competition with the late grandes dames of spooky cuisine.”

Mr. Sifton had championed the offerings as “a testament to the rustic joys of Sardinia and Sicily: simple food, apparently simply prepared.” Ms. Widdicombe falls somewhere in between the two gentlemen, arguing that, unlike many restaurants of the Leopard’s ilk, “the food . . . is far from an afterthought.” She orders carefully and finds a lot to like: pasta alla Norma, trofie and dorado, among them.

Mr. Okiishi’s review is not yet online, but it is worth a read for the rich history he offers of the restaurant, which involves Marcel Duchamp; his panegyric to the city’s aging restaurants, which feature “freaky food and forgotten décor”; and for his rightful slamming of “the endless feedback loops of social media” that guide our dining habits these days.

At the risk of sounding too boosterish (that has not stopped us before), we would like to lobby for a restaurant review column in *Artforum*, and nominate Mr. Okiishi for the role, since he is clearly a natural. For more of Mr. Okiishi’s restaurant criticism, pick up the Dec. 2010 *Artforum*, in which he highlighted the closing of Upper East Side haunt Gino as one of the best events of the year. “Tradition chokes reality, and now we can move on,” he wrote at the time. “Thank God.”

If you would prefer to see some of Mr. Okiishi’s art, you can watch his very beautiful film (*Goodbye to Manhattan* (2010), which screened at Alex Zachary in 2010, [over on Ubuweb](#)).

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topics: **restaurants**, **ken okiishi**, **lizzie widdicombe**, **new yorker**, **sam sifton**, **art**

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ARTFORUM

Fancy Feast

KEN OKIISHI ON THE LEOPARD AT DES ARTISTES

PART OF THE AESTHETIC SINGULARITY of dining uptown, until very recently, included zebras prancing on bright red wallpaper, drop ceilings with weird stains, dirty pink carpets and matching tablecloths, fake flowers mixed with real ones, that weird moldy smell, bartenders who were probably actually vampires, a very large display of fresh but unremarkable supermarket vegetables in a basically empty restaurant, and extraordinary prices for terrible food. All of this seemed like it would soon be over when New York's Café des Artistes (located, since it opened in 1917, at One West Sixty-Seventh Street) closed in 2009, followed by Gino (2010), Elaine's (2011), and, the most macabre of them all, Bravo Gianni (2011). For those of us from a generation that thinks it is a culinary revolution to track the itinerary of produce, these realms of freaky food and forgotten decor were as riveting as they were revolting, and the perverse glee felt when entering the private realm of our wealthy, geriatric style icons—of the unknowingly antihip—made us feel alive.

These places offered opportunities to digest our cinematic nostalgia with distaste and delicious laughter, so the news that Café des Artistes was going to be resurrected piqued interest in a way similar to catching wind that a forgotten artist is about to have a big comeback (Gasp! Really?). Would it be awful, wonderful, or, even better, a marvelous disaster?

Would it be everyday Italian? was not the first thought to come to mind, and the current renovation does much to erase middling aesthetic questions. This glistening

At first I find the restaurant's blahmbiance charming—a semi-nostalgic rendering of a possible future New York. And then our food arrives.

new restaurant, the Leopard at des Artistes, adheres dutifully to contemporary notions of “modern” good taste: The churchiness of the dark, wood-paneled room has been painstakingly lightened; most of the original Tudor-style detailing has been surgically excised and the rest covered with either white paint, drywall, or touches of unadorned walnut paneling. The floor is now terrazzo, with classic modernist circular metal inlays, and

the old seating has been replaced with Thonet Era Round Armchairs (available at your nearest Design Within Reach). At first I find this blahmbiance charming, like stepping into a virtual, seminostalgic rendering of a possible future New York—one where we don't cling to our secret spots so vehemently and where we are open to general pleasantness. And then our food arrives.

Dinner starts off nicely enough, with a *primo piatto* of pasta prepared as perfectly as the beloved Howard Chandler Christy murals have been restored. Crisp, clean, flawlessly buffed kitsch. But with the main course, the renovation's weaknesses grow more palpable. My dining partner receives an acceptable though unremarkable grilled chicken, served with a vaguely creative corn relish; my porchetta, on the other hand, is shockingly dry and has the kind of gravy I have grown accustomed to in old-school restaurants worldwide—the kind of gravy that almost instantly develops a gloppy, gelatinous crust. (Whether the persistence of this phenomenon is attributable to mistiming in the kitchen or some sort of weird WASP thing, I've never been able to figure out.) This dip into the more arcane eating habits of those ossified by pretense immediately brings the Leopard at des Artistes into competition with the late grandes dames of spooky cuisine. Granted, the restaurant's name is eccentric enough to warrant some praise. But, as my distressed taste buds prompted my eyes to register gruesome detail everywhere, my dining partner, also unhappy with our banal experience so far, said, “You could also say the place looks a bit like a pizza parlor trying to be fancy.”

Strangely, the Leopard's souped-up bland chic makes the Christy murals (1934 and 1942) look out of place; strange, indeed, since we know that the restaurant was painstakingly renovated around them. The overwhelming design nonidentity of the new interior surrounding the

murals stages a disjunction in eras that wobbles between novelty and lifelessness—it is utterly unclear which set of nostalgic frameworks you are to bring to this place and which fantasies you are supposed to leave behind. That the murals hark back to the friskier days of the Upper West Side seems to have been completely eclipsed.

A listing from the *New York Times* in 1919, two years after the Hotel des Artistes (the cooperative apartment building that housed the café and that, while never a real hotel, featured comparable amenities and staff) was completed, captures the spirit of that forgotten scene:

Fifty New York artists are to give a ball on Friday next, the eve of Washington's Birthday, at the Hotel des Artistes, the entertainment including a “A Dream of Fair Women,” in which models for Howard Chandler Christy . . . and others, will pose. Another feature will be hoops of paper upon which six artists will draw sketches of leading actresses, each drawing to be



From top: Interior views of Café des Artistes, New York, ca. 1984. Photos: Mick Hales. Interior of the Leopard at des Artistes, New York, 2011. Photo: Melissa Hom.



Howard Chandler Christy in his studio during the filming of a newsreel, Hotel des Artistes, New York, ca. 1924.
Photo: Howard Chandler Christy Papers, Skillman Library, Lafayette College.

destroyed by the actress herself, who will step through the hoop. In a large tank, fed from the hotel's swimming pool, Madeline Gildersleeve will appear in a water fantasy, "The Fountain of Youth."

One of the restaurant's frothiest panels bears the same title as this wet and wild *tableau vivant*: Christy's *The Fountain of Youth* features naked women cavorting in what looks more like a wading pool than a mythic pond. In fact, the historical details surrounding the production of the entire set of decorative paintings may help to explain why the nymphs seem so folksy, so real, so much more like models performing for an audience than mythological creatures discovering the mysteries of nature.

Howard Chandler Christy, who was one of the first people to buy an apartment in the building and who lived there until his death in 1952 at the age of 79, is most notable as an illustrator (he created the "Christy Girl") and also as the judge of the first Miss America pageant. In many ways, he typified the kind of visual artists who lived in the Hotel des Artistes when it was first built—those working in kooky simulations of nineteenth-century academic tropes, equally at home producing "fine art" paintings, *Life* magazine covers, or illustrations for US war propaganda. In fact, the entire block had been developed by establishment artists who had realized that, by banding together financially, they could not only build "dream homes" for themselves but also, with their bohemian cachet, make a profit. According to the *New York Times*, the 1920 census listed the initial occupants of the Hotel des Artistes as fourteen artists, musicians, or writers; eleven actors or movie

executives; twenty-two stockbrokers, engineers, or other businesspeople; and twenty-six household servants.

One notable exception is Marcel Duchamp, who lived there from 1915 to 1918. He had been brought to the "artists' block" by collectors Louise and Walter Arensberg, who lived in a lavish apartment in a building called the Atelier, a few doors down from the Hotel des Artistes, and paid for the artist to live and work in a small studio in their building in exchange for the *Large Glass*, 1915–23. The Arensberg home was a legendary meeting point for the Paris and New York avant-gardes, or, as Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia described it, "an inconceivable orgy of sexuality, jazz and alcohol." This is the period during which the readymade was coming into being, and Café des Artistes was not an insignificant backdrop to that development. Before the current murals, other paintings by Christy decorated the walls, in particular a "huge old-fashioned painting" of a battleground, as Duchamp later recalled in an interview with Dore Ashton in the late 1960s. The artist went on to tell how, one evening in 1916, he "jumped up and signed" the grand *tableau*, thereby creating "a ready-made which had everything except taste. And no system." Some years later, *The Battle Scene* (readymade) disappeared under a new Christy painting featuring the frolicking, naked nymphs that undress the walls today.

As the original residents started to pass away in the 1950s, the hotel's largest communal spaces—including its theater and ballroom, where such memorably frilly parties had once been thrown—were leased to commercial tenants (ABC used the ballroom as a television

studio). But the original concept of a "hotel for artists" had already begun to fade in other ways. One of the most spectacular original amenities—an arrangement in which residents could supply the kitchen with ingredients and then receive their "food cooked free," delivered directly into their apartments via electronic dumbwaiters—had been discontinued early on.

In 1975, the remnants of the original kitchen and café space at the front of the building were taken over by restaurateur extraordinaire George Lang, and it is his renovation of Café des Artistes that most of us call to mind when thinking of the "original" today. Reviews at the time, like reviews of the newly opened iteration, tended to focus on the rejuvenated murals, the face-lift aspect, the "reborn classic." But if this venue was already a nostalgia production in 1975—described by journalistic gems such as "Very pink within their very green copses, like peppermint mousse on beds of spinach, [the mural girls] were daring in their youth and are touchingly innocent in their reincarnation"—the tone this summer was quite different. Reviewers now celebrated the "extensive cleaning," the pedigree of the new restaurateurs (Gianfranco and Paula Bolla Sorrentino), the celebrity clientele, the "particular subset of Manhattan society" that reserves its tables nightly—the positionings that make this place "a hit."

In a city where geographies of consumption currently have more to do with the fickleness of Google's PageRank algorithm and endless feedback loops of social media than where we physically live, we have all become tourists of each other's neighborhoods. That this effect could be felt less dramatically in parts of the city with large swaths of very elderly populations—in the land the Internet forgot—was a glitch in the system that I had naively hoped would remain unnoticed and unrepaired. The current version of Café des Artistes (the Leopard @) is what happens when dynamos of yesteryear die, and I hope it is not a blueprint for what's to come. I would much rather take a cab to the Seagram Building's Brasserie and reflect on the "new" Lincoln Center through the lens of "How quaint early-2000s surveillance chic has become!" In some ways, Diller + Scofidio's Y2K take on Brasserie is a model of "renovation"—a destruction of the original that thinks about the past but does not represent or attempt to preserve it; that creates something that can age in unexpected ways for another eighty years. Something that can develop a completely unforced, nostalgic patina.

But where, then, do we go when we happen to crave that special uptown frisson of dying decor and pricey fare? Luckily, there's always Shun Lee. □

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Numéro

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, tilted slightly upwards. Her eyes are closed, and her hair is blowing in the wind, creating a sense of motion. The background is a solid, vibrant blue. The word "Numéro" is overlaid in a large, gold, sans-serif font across the top half of the image.



Installation de Ken Okishi (2011) sur le stand du galeriste Alex Zachary.

Happy Galleries par Nicolas Trembley

La troisième édition de Frame, dont COS est partenaire, a fait souffler un vent de fraîcheur sur la Frieze Art Fair. La section des galeries émergentes de la foire londonienne s'impose comme *the place to be* du renouveau artistique.

Frame devient incontournable. L'événement créé au sein de la Frieze Art Fair, la foire internationale d'art contemporain, a été lancé en 2009 pour encourager la fréquentation des galeries, soutenir les marchands et donner un regain de créativité au marché. Le concept est simple : les "jeunes" galeries (fondées il y a moins de six ans) présentent des expositions personnelles d'artistes émergents. Les œuvres sont, la plupart du temps, créées pour les lieux et doivent être validées par des critiques et des commissaires d'exposition.

La manifestation connaît un succès grandissant. La marque de vêtements COS vient d'ailleurs de renouveler sa collaboration avec Frame. Jusqu'en 2010, Daniel Baumann, parti rejoindre le Carnegie Museum of Art de Pittsburgh, et Sarah McCrory, commissaire de *Frieze Projects*, sélectionnaient les galeries. Ils ont été remplacés cette année par Cecilia Alemani et Rodrigo Moura. Parmi les intervenants, la galerie Anant & Zoo s'est fait remarquer avec la présentation des dessins de Channa Horwitz – une vieille camarade de Sol LeWitt – tout comme la Revolver Galería de Lima qui y participait pour la première fois, avec une œuvre de Ximena Garrido-Lecca. Aucun prix n'est décerné, mais c'est sans aucun doute l'artiste Ken Okishi, chez Alex Zachary, de New York, qui aurait remporté la palme avec la récréation du restaurant Gino, lieu mythique de Manhattan fermé récemment. Un joli rayonnement d'artistes et de galeristes du monde entier.

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