In the Evening: Nights among Artists in Los Angeles

BY ANDREW BERARDINI

MARCH 10, 2016

Andrew Berardini considers the drive to blend nightlife and art in Los Angeles and remembers several recent artist projects.

INSTALLATION VIEW OF MICHAEL DOPP AND ISAAC RESNIKOFF'S TICKLES, 2015, AT 356 S MISSION ROAD, LOS ANGELES. COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND 356 S MISSION ROAD, LOS ANGELES. PHOTO BY BRICA WILCOX.

Los Angeles is a lonesome town.

Late at night along shabby stretches of the city, dayjobs shifted out, studio work drying, deadlines filed, we meet in darkling storefronts, barely converted warehouses, and strange installations made as artworks and employed as speakeasies.

Without these gatherings, we might never see anyone. Though some can walk in their neighborhoods to the liquor store and taco truck on the corner, for most, this sprawl's damn near impossible to move across without a car. We drive by each other without noticing, alone in our boxes, heading to studios and offices with only the radio to break the voiceless silence. Los Angeles poet Maggie Nelson wrote in her 2009 book *Bluets*: "Loneliness is solitude with a problem." True, but even then, most of us need to break our solitudinous regimens and find a little company in the long night. Charles Bukowski wrote in his introduction to the *Anthology of L.A. Poets* in 1972: "I think it's important to know that a man or woman, writer or not, can find more isolation in Los Angeles than in Boise, Idaho. Or, all things being fair, he can with a telephone (if he has a telephone) have 19 people over drinking and talking with him within an hour and a half." L.A.'s Women's Center for Creative Work, a public engagement community center founded in 2013, gives a tote bag to its members that reads: "We're All in This Together." The only way to believe it is when we are literally, physically together.

Jason Rhoades started his invite-only *Black Pussy Soirée Cabaret Macramé* the year before his death in 2006 to improve his social life. When asked about why he opened the Chalet, Piero Golia told *Wallpaper* in 2013: "I wanted to open a place where I could invite all my friends. Los Angeles has been built for people not to meet in reality, but I think meeting is always a good idea. I wanted a place for special people to meet hoping great things will happen." Liz Glynn's temporary Black Box during the Pacific Standard Time Performance and Public Art Festival in 2012 felt like a hot, short amalgamation of everything that was happening in L.A. for 11 days. For its inaugural exhibition in February 2010, Night Gallery issued a press release that read, "Inspired by the shift that Los Angeles undergoes each night, Night Gallery values soulfulness, danger, and breath. She provides a nocturnal platform, distanced from routine and attuned to temperature." This past December, belly to the bar at Tickles, a piano bar conceived by artists Michael Dopp and Isaac Resnikoff, I listened to the pianist

play a rendition of Wham!'s "Careless Whisper," drinking a cocktail filled with weird pills in a handmade ceramic cup on an artist-designed napkin. A few drinks on a rainy night makes it easy to ruminate on why artists in Los Angeles make so many night clubs.

February 2016 marked the 100th anniversary of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings' Cabaret Voltaire, the first late-night gathering for the most modern of artists. Founded in Zurich by expatriates fleeing World War I, the Cabaret birthed Dada and (many people argue) contemporary art as we know it. Joseph Beuys coined the term "social sculpture" in the 1960s to describe art's ability to transform society, suggesting that we can all be conscious contributors to the collective artwork we make together. Nicolas Bourriaud in his 1997 book called the social undertone to a specific group of artists "relational aesthetics." Artists everywhere found the social form for themselves. Long have vanguardists and cultural workers gathered for drinks and exchange, but with an expanded field these nexuses of aesthetic energy took on the title of art. Sometimes sold, mostly they exist in a space of communal generosity. And even when less than generous, these spaces keep things lively. As Rhoades told Icelandic journalist Heimir Björgúlfsson in the spring before his death (available online as a reprint (http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/bjorgulfsson/bjorgulfsson8-23-06.asp) by *artnet*), "I'm uncomfortable with actually finishing something. This feeds into that and that feeds into this—I am trying to keep it in flux somehow."

Of all the projects listed, Rhoades' was the only one I missed. I had friends who went and I was softly invited to what would be the last.

Björgúlfsson*: So, this show, or cabaret, is viewed by invitation only. Is that to exclude the anonymous viewer?*
Rhoades*: It's to exclude a certain art public that's nosy and critical.*

This sense of exclusivity counteracts a trend amongst artists (and society as a whole) towards inclusivity. People wonder what powers are at play that exclude them, but ultimately I've found these scenes to be self-selecting. In all those listed, I was sometimes only invited as a volunteer, others more loosely as a contributing member of a broader community, and to some everyone who wanted to come was welcome. I was never in any circumstance, even as a stranger snuck in, asked to leave. Less closed social clubs with strict rules for membership, more nightclubs that gather up the orphans looking for shelter. Piero Golia's Chalet was most like Rhoades' as a salon, a cabaret, a place where

things happened in constant flux. Golia endeavored to play out dreams, to welcome friends traveling from afar, to create a place not of desire exactly but of specialness and all that meant to him. A wandering monk in white robes would quietly give succor in dark corners, a magician might pull a card from the tangle of your hair, a dominatrix publicly spanked a famously reviled art speculator. Numerous artworks filled its rooms with a long hallway clad in jutting beams of white-oak heartwood designed by Edwin Chan: a painting by Mark Grotjahn, a famous piano imported from a Dusseldorf art school once played by Beuys and organized by Christopher Williams, a photograph by Jeff Wall, a giant aquarium by Pierre Huyghe. When the latter arrived one evening, Golia welcomed him with a full marching band, the uniformed musicians banging and booming through the intimate chambers with a clamor that could only be called glorious.

On the other side of town, Davida Nemeroff and Mieke Marple founded Night Gallery making a different kind of space than Rhoades' or Golia's cabarets—just as immersive but a softer form of darkness enveloped the storefront gallery in a rugged strip mall just east of the river in Lincoln Heights. Drawn at first from Nemeroff's communities gathered from her time in Toronto and New York including Eli Langer, Paul Heyer, Samara Golden, and Mira Dancy and increasingly from her new one in Los Angeles such as JPW3 and Sean Townley, the shows felt inclusive. Any given night from 10 pm to 2 am, Tuesday through Thursday, you could come in to see the shows, share a beer, goof with the characters on hand. Openings pulled hundreds, packing the tiny gallery with its black painted walls, but off-nights it might just be Marple and Nemeroff or a whole rabble drinking cheap beers and chain smoking on its wheezing office sofas.

Eve Fowler designed the sign near the end of its tenure in Lincoln Heights, after which Night Gallery operated still under its own distinct ethos but closer to a daytime showroom than a late-night gathering. As a part of her ongoing project pulling quotes from the poetry of Gertrude Stein to make into dayglo placards around the city, Fowler's work with the serifed letters on a black field read what I'd always felt in my trawls in midnight Los Angeles looking for art, companionship, and meaning. I'd drive by it often at night and always find comfort in its words:

in the evening there is feeling.

CATEGORY:
Essay (http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/category/essay)

RELATED:

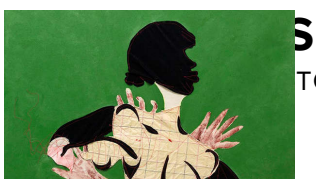
< NEWER (HTTP://PELICANBOMB.COM/ART-REVIEW/2016/JOSEF-ALBERS-SWEET-POTATO-LATKES-A-RECIPE-FROM-JELLO-AND-CASSEROLES)

OLDER (HTTP://PELICANBOMB.COM/ART-REVIEW/2016/EXHIBITION-PICK-MITCHELL-LONAS)

Josef Albers Sweet Potato Latkes: A Recipe from Jello and Casseroles

EMILY MARSHALL

(http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2016/josef-albers-sweet-potato-latkes-a-recipe-from-jello-and-casseroles)



Space to Dance: An Interview with Tschabalala Self

TON COOPER

INTERVIEW (http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2016/a-space-to-dance-an-interview-with-tschabalala-self)

hibition Pick: Mitchell Lonas

JAMIN MORRIS

IEW (http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2016/exhibition-pick-mitchell-lonas)

WHAT WE DO

Pelican Bomb builds the infrastructure to support local artists and connect people with their work.

ART REVIEW (HTTP://PELICANBOMB.COM/ART-REVIEW)

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ART (HTTP://PELICANBOMB.COM/PROGRAMS/COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED-ART)

EXHIBITIONS (HTTP://PELICANBOMB.COM/PROGRAMS/ROVING-EXHIBITIONS)

CRITIC IN RESIDENCE (HTTP://PELICANBOMB.COM/PROGRAMS/CRITIC-IN-RESIDENCE)

GET INVOLVED

Lend a hand. Write a review. Make a donation. There are multiple ways you can make an impact on contemporary art in New Orleans.

GET INVOLVED! (/SUPPORT)

RECENT NEWS

Pelican Bomb Announces the Opening of Pelican Bomb Gallery X (http://pelicanbomb.com/news/2016/pelican-bomb-announces-the-opening-of-pelican-bomb-gallery-x)

Pelican Bomb's new exhibition space opens February 13, 2016, at 1612 Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Read more...

(http://pelicanbomb.com/news/2016/pelican-bomb-announces-the-opening-of-pelican-bomb-gallery-x)

MORE NEWS (/NEWS)

STAY INFORMED

Stay in the know by signing up for our weekly newsletter.

Your email address SUBMIT

Branding and Web Design by Line 58 (http://line58.com)