



August 2, 2012

Check Out the Gallery in the Freezer

By KAREN ROSENBERG

BRIDGEHAMPTON, N.Y. — In July and August, Chelsea art dealers typically set off to Europe and the Hamptons while leaving their galleries in the hands of the junior staff. Often these are working vacations, with business conducted on the dinner-party circuit. But Jose Martos has gone a step further, establishing a seasonal branch of his Martos Gallery right in his summer residence. For the last three years he has enlisted the independent curator and critic Bob Nickas to organize lively group shows at a rented 1860s farmhouse here.

There the enterprise of summer living goes on around the art. The kitchen, porch and living room are heavily trafficked, and Mr. Martos and his staff slip from shoptalk to discussion of the week's fishing expeditions. Opening weekend is a kind of summer camp for artists, with concerts and occasionally pitched tents on the lawn. The vibe is more Hudson Valley or North Fork than Hamptons.

As it happens, the Bridgehampton house has been sold — meaning that this year's show, "Creature From the Blue Lagoon," is the last in the space. Mr. Martos is planning to rent in East Marion, on the North Fork, next year, and word is that Mr. Nickas might organize a show out there. But go see this one, if you're on the East End; like the best summer rentals, the kind you return to year after year, it brims with accumulated knowledge and experience.

Last year Mr. Nickas mischievously titled his event "Bridgehampton Biennial." This year's name is also a bit of a joke, a mash-up of the 1954 horror flick "Creature From the Black Lagoon" and the 1980 Brooke Shields movie "The Blue Lagoon," although the gallery's news release says that any resemblance to Ms. Shields's film is "entirely coincidental."

In its high camp aesthetic the exhibition makes a slightly less glib reference to the underground filmmaker and performance artist Jack Smith. Mr. Smith was also the source for 2010's "Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool," the first of Mr. Nickas's Bridgehampton ventures, so it seems fitting to bring him back for the close of the cycle.

The Pop artist Ray Johnson may be another spirit in residence; no less than five of his mail-art

collages are scattered through the house. (Several are from the collection of the writer William S. Wilson, a friend and correspondent of the artist's.)

The show's vibe hasn't changed much from one summer to the next. Nor has the artist list, which includes Davina Semo, Darren Bader, Virginia Overton and Ryan Foerster among the repeat participants. But this final edition is the most ambitious, with two large-scale installations (in the attic and pool house) joining the usual smattering of smaller, site-specific works.

In the attic Ms. Semo has placed her signature squares of spray-painted concrete and safety glass at regular intervals around the floor; her work echoes the roughness and gloominess of the space, which is dimly lighted and has patches of exposed insulation. The interior of the pool house looks almost as sinister, thanks to Servane Mary's shimmering silk screens on mirrored plexiglass. They're haunted by a black cat, or rather a Catwoman (a costumed Julie Newmar, from the "Batman" television series).

Mr. Nickas is known as a connoisseur of contemporary abstraction, and you'll find plenty of examples among the works in the main rooms of the house. Dotted and cratered papier-mâché reliefs by Bill Komoski, in the den, suggest a more sci-fi-oriented Yayoi Kusama. In the living room a canvas spray-painted with rainbow stripes and a pattern of black lace by Tamara Gonzales is as eye-catching as a Goth at a rave. Cheerful and resourceful geometric compositions by B. Wurtz, painted on the bottoms of aluminum-foil pans, adorn the kitchen walls.

But there's no shortage of figuration, most of it in the gender-bending and theatrical mold of Mr. Smith. Collages of panspiritual, pansexual deities by E'wao Kagoshima grace a bedroom; sculptures of hats and pants adorned with artificial hair, by Jiyeon Park, lend Surrealist sensuality to the dining room.

Also here are works that require a bit of poking around, which in the context of a private house feels transgressive. (Be careful to obey the "Do not enter — baby sleeping" sign on an upstairs bedroom.) Keep an eye out for a tiny stainless-steel-lined crevice in the upstairs hallway by Ms. Semo, and don't be afraid to check the freezer if you're looking for Mr. Bader's mysterious ready-made in the kitchen.

The outdoor pieces are easier to spot — even those that are attached to trees, as are Ms. Overton's log-and-ratchet-strap contraptions and Josh Tonsfeldt's life-size photo-print of a giraffe. Sometimes they are too obvious, like the two Donald Baechler bronzes that are the

closest thing to typical Hamptons lawn trophies that this show has to offer.

More often, though, Mr. Nickas serves up clever little works like Andra Ursuta's "Worm's Dream Home" — a dollhouse-size concrete shelter for earthworms — in what is, until summer ends, a dream house for art and artists.

"Creature From the Blue Lagoon" continues through Sept. 3 at Martos Gallery Summer Location, 112 Sagaponack Road, Bridgehampton, N.Y.; (631) 613-6698, martosgallery.com.