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ARTNEWS

La Vie en Vaped Rosé: Bushwick's Signal Gallery Takes Over the Surf Lodge in Montauk

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*The Surf Lodge, with paintings by the artist Aidan Koch on the awnings.
PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM*

For years, the Surf Lodge in Montauk has been trying to get the artist Richard Phillips to show work in its gallery space. The pairing would make sense: Phillips is a surfer, and artists often agree to shows at the Surf Lodge, where a small chapel-shaped white cube shares space with a compound of a half-dozen bars, a chill beach zone, a concert venue, indoor and outdoor dance floors dotted with DJ booths, a phalanx of hotel rooms, VIP bungalows, and a sprawling restaurant on a porch by the water.

This year, Phillips agreed—but decided not to show his own work. He came up with an idea instead that deviated from the usual Chelsea-on-the-Jitney summertime side-hustle of simply selling familiar art to the billionaires out East. Rather than show his own work, he would choose three young galleries to take over the space and turn the Hamptons bacchanalia on its head.

“I wanted to open it up to people who had never been out here,” Phillips said on Saturday afternoon, sitting on a wooden bench outside the Surf Lodge on a sandy nook by the water.

“These aren’t second-home artists selling to the same people but artists who will really embrace the unknown.”



Entrance to the small gallery space at the Surf Lodge, which has been taken over by Signal Gallery. PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM

Around him, the crew behind the first of his three choices—Bushwick’s Signal Gallery—was setting up for the takeover while members of the Signal community milled around, drinking Coronas and sunning themselves. Usually, one artist will put up some works in a room at the Surf Lodge and call it a day, but Signal brought out a gang of 17 and stormed the premises with gleeful work by artists who poked fun at the all-fun scenario at hand—while enjoying all the madness, too.

During the afternoon, the current project—which will remain on show for the next two weeks—involved trying to mechanize a machine that will activate *Ask the Mouth*, a new installation by Nathaniel DeLarge, Raine Trainor, and David Kirshoff that was made very much with the Hamptons in mind. It’s a big white tent that gets filled with rosé vapor—the concept of a rosé vape pen, blown up.



David Kirshoff exits the rosé vape tent. PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM

“The super-structure for the anti-chamber, that worked out?” asked Signal co-founder Alexander Johns, walking on the sand up to the rosé vape tent. It was confirmed that the super-structure for the anti-chamber had in fact worked out, and the machine would soon would start vaporizing the contents of magnum bottles of fancy wine at a quick clip.

“We were told that there was a rosé sponsor, and they said, can you incorporate it somehow?” Johns said. “Not sure they were expecting this.”

“Have we been kicked out yet?” Kyle Jacques, who founded Signal with Johns, joked.



A typical scene at the Surf Lodge. PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM

They had not been kicked out, and the installations around the grounds were embraced by the pastel-wearing bros and groups of sundress-clad women at tables tending to the familial hearth of bottle service—a caste described by one onlooker as “bachelorettes with the same length hair.” Either they got the joke, they didn’t mind being the butt of it, or they didn’t notice. In any case, it was a bit surreal to see one of the more exciting artist-run freeform outfits in Bushwick showing work in a place all about sunshine and lobster rolls.

And the art really is everywhere. Egg-themed glowing titanium works by DeLarge were installed above where beautiful people get brunch, and hotel-friendly sculptures by Kirshoff consisted of concierge bells on top of wine glasses. Aidan Koch has dreamy blue-toned portraits placed on the awnings of the main A-frame, which is not-restored just enough to evoke the bygone fishing village that Montauk once was. Andrew Laumann is showing canvases nearly melted into the reclaimed wood behind the DJ booth they are mounted on. And a work by the artist Greem Jellyfish depicts, in green neon, an elderly woman hanging ten. It’s called *Surfing Grandma*.

“For me, it changes the entire notion of art on the east end,” Phillips said, still hanging at the bench. “The idea of driving out young galleries to the Surf Lodge, that’s new for them. And they really needed carte blanche to do whatever they want.”



Richard Phillips. PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM

Johns told me he had never been to Montauk before the project, and the other two galleries Phillips chose for the project don't exactly scream "boats and bikinis." Up next is Kai Matsumiya, which has built a reputation on staging hyper-conceptual shows at a tiny Lower East Side storefront. And then there's Weiss Falk, a young gallery in Basel, Switzerland, the austere Swiss fair mecca.

"Richard approached us because he wanted it to be really weird," Johns said. "Like he was thinking, 'These guys are going to do crazy stuff in the middle of this Montauk culture.' "

By the water, someone suggested that Signal's whole project was a send-up, at which point Johns said, "Oh, no, we're very serious about all of this."

As an addendum, Johns all of the sudden said, "The boner guys—they're a little funny."

Oh, yes, the boner guys.



Signal Gallery co-founder Kyle Jacques gets hit on the head with a bottle. PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM

While speaking with Phillips later in the afternoon, a man in nice sunglasses approached us on the bench wearing a blue chambray suit, no shirt, so socks, and certainly so shoes. He sat down, extremely relaxed, and began extemporizing on the rosé vape tent, which he referred to as the “brosé vape tent.” He began asking about the availability of cornhole, a beanbag-toss game popular on college campuses. Phillips told him there were horseshoes instead.

“I fuck with horseshoes,” the man in the chambray suit said.



An interesting game of horseshoe. ARTNEWS

Phillips led us to the other side of the Surf Lodge, where a horseshoe-themed work called *Randy* by DeLarge, Trainor, Kirshoff and Sarah McElwee had been installed. The installation is two extremely lifelike human dummies dressed up like Surf Lodge lifers, with the pastels and the sunnies and the boat shoes, lying down on the sand as if passed out. At the groins of the dummies, beneath their pants, is a metal protuberance spiked straight up to the blue sky, ready to get clanged by a horseshoe.

“I’ve been known to ring a few boners in my day,” the suited beach man said. It took some practice, but he eventually got one on the firm appendage, at which point he proclaimed, “I rang the boner! I rang the boner! I rang the boner!” and began high-fiving patrons sitting at tables equipped with magnums of rosé.



A performance by FlucT involved eating glass. PHOTO COURTESY MADISON MCGAW/BFA.COM

Later that evening, the Signal gang was preparing for the nighttime part of the gallery's programming, which included a DJ set from Animal Collective and a performance by FlucT, two women who engage in balletic, ultraviolent dance routines. This is not where FlucT usually performs—they've been asked to perform at the Queens Museum, Andrea Rosen, and NADA—and the setting here was such that their performance became more seething. On the main stage, in front of the pastel-clad dudes and the bachelorettes with the same length hair, the women of FlucT—Monica Mirabile and Sigrid Lauren—came out in facepaint that would melt off and started biting into liquor bottles, slamming each other onto the stage hard but with the gallant woosh of trapeze artists, each spinning off for star turns and wowing with a performance that was graceful and scathing.

They did it all while glaring at the rows of party-mode guys who were whooping and chanting at the two women as the soundtrack began repeating a mantra: "Culture is not your friend, culture is not your friend, culture is not your friend."