Room and Bard

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON 08.29.12

THE CENTER FOR CURATORIAL STUDIES at Bard College is in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. That’s a couple of hours’ drive north of New York City. But the city is to artists and curators what the Hudson River is to wet. It’s the talent pool. So last Thursday, CCS Bard’s Twentieth Anniversary Weekend began with a benefit exhibition at Luhring Augustine Gallery in Manhattan.

Artists are asked for donations to benefit so often it’s a wonder some have any work for their galleries to sell. This time out they certainly did not hold back. Organized by CCS Bard director Tom Eccles and graduate program director Johanna Burton, “Painting in Space” has twenty-five works donated by as many fine artists. They include Franz West, Kelley Walker, Amy Sillman, Lawrence Weiner, Olafur Eliasson, Rachel Harrison, and Mark Handforth, whose giant black clothes-hanger of a sculpture fits the space like a custom-made suit. Over the years, all have exhibited or made work for CCS or its companion Hessel Museum of Art, named for the center’s founding benefactor, Marieluise Hessel.

A dinner for the artists followed at Bottino, where dealer Roland Augustine (a CCS board member) took pains to point out that their contributions were for sale and not up for auction—we know what such charity auctions can do to an artist’s market—and that the gallery was turning over the proceeds without taking a commission. After the applause, Augustine took a seat beside Hessel. Dinner was served, wine flowed. Inevitably, tongues loosened.
At one table, Charline von Heyl, Jacqueline Humphries, Haim Steinbach, and Wade Guyton thrashed out existential questions about the limits of radicalism in art. "You're a real painter," Guyton told von Heyl. "I don't know what I am." How's artist? Mixing it up across the room were the rowdies—dealers Gavin Brown and Casey Kaplan, attorney Michael Ward Stout (another board member), White Columns director Matthew Higgs, and former collaborators Angela Bulloch and Liam Gillick, a CCS Bard faculty member whose solo exhibition would be opening at the Hessel Museum the following day.

The subject of money came up here too, amid talk of the public relations coup that Larry Gagosian pulled off during Art Basel 43 with the announcement of his ginormous new Parisian outpost at La Bourget—the airport for private jets. Brown observed, (It is scheduled to open in the fall during Fiac with an Anselm Kiefer show, at the same time that Thaddaeus Ropac is to open a Kiefer show in his even bigger new space in Pantin.) "Hey Gavin! Maybe you should open a gallery at Teterboro," said Higgs, to loud guffaws.

The fun continued in slightly more cerebral fashion on Friday at Bard, where the weekend festivities began with "Why New Forms?" a curatorial conference organized by alumni, including Sculpture Center curator Ruba Katrib, New Museum curator Lauren Cornell, and Fionn Meade. In the audience were students and other parties on campus for the VIP opening of "Anti-Establishment," a group show Burton put together for the CCS galleries, and "From 199A to 1999: Liam Gillick," curated by Ecolles for the Hessel.

"What is curating?" asked Burton, as the weekend's participating artists and curators gathered for drinks in the center's lobby. "That's a question that doesn't go away." (If only she had put it to Paul Schimmel, who had appeared on a panel that morning, when he was still chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Unbeknownst to us, he would lose that position a few days later in a shocking move by the MoCA board, but his answer might have made more waves.)

"'Anti-Establishment' is post-institutional critique," she went on, as we walked through the show, which has recent painting, sculpture, video, and performance work that address each medium's conventions in different ways. "It's about re-engaging with institutions," she said, casting an eye at Gillick's parallel exhibition. "I worry," she confided, "that there's too much pleasure in my show.

I heard no complaints and didn't deliver any either, but I'm a hedonist. A room devoted to Humphries's 2005 black-light paintings glowed beautifully in their LED illumination, and Chelsea Knight's video of construction workers reading feminist texts was as laugh-out-loud funny as it was sobering. But it was a little startling to find Allan Kaprow's 1963 Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann re-done by curatorial students, when I had seen another reinvention (by artist Mateo Tannatt) just the week before in Juno Hoffmann's Art Parcours show in Basel.
What goes around comes around, I guess. Soon Gillick was leading Hessel, her sister Christina Lockwood, and Nata Andrei, the CCS building’s architect, on a tour through his show that kept picking up more viewers as he went along. Had he been to Documenta? asked one. “It’s hard for an artist to go to Documenta if you’re not in it,” he replied. “Because people keep asking you where your work is, and that feels terrible.”

However, his show at Bard, which revisits work the British-born artist made in Europe during the 1990s before moving to New York, includes a documentary video of the public clock he made for Documenta X, so that felt better. It also has a Ping Pong table covered in gold glitter—“Try and play on that,” he said. “You can’t”—and several years worth of his Pinboard Project, realized by other artists or his students at Bard, who also participated in several other works. Outside was We Are Medi(average), the hole he dug with Bulloch where, she said later, we could “watch the grass grow.”

Back in the lobby, everyone helped themselves to goody bags that contained not product samples from commercial sponsors—none here—but catalogues for each exhibition and a new book of art texts, Interiors, that Burton edited with Lynne Cooke and Josie McElheny. “I’m especially proud of this,” Burton said, adding that it was the first in a series based on those Dia once produced. “I miss them.”

Bags in hand, the assembled two hundred-strong crowd, which now included latecomer Maja Hoffmann (a board member), departed for a barbecue under a huge tent on Adam Lindemann and Amelia Dayan’s estate in Woodstock. Dayan wasn’t there but Lindemann made an entrance with a guitar, and promptly joined the local bluegrass band playing on stage. “We got married in this tent,” he said. “And every year we bring it out for Bard.” The food arrived, and even vegans Jonathan Caplan and Angus Cook dug in.

As darkness fell and a fog bank descended on a field lit only by fireflies, Eccles addressed the crowd. “CCS is not just a museum,” he said. “It’s a living factory, a library, and a research center. Someone has the vision, we find the funding, and engage other people in trying to create something new in the art of our time. Which isn’t easy,” he added.

Well, someone has to do it. To his mind, that’s Gillick, “one of the smartest people alive.” At that, Bulloch burst out laughing. And pleasure was had by all.
SCENE & HERD: The Artforum Diary
June 28, 2012
Linda Yablonsky at CCS Bard’s Twentieth Anniversary Weekend

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