

this city. It made me think of a quote from Ed Ruscha, who, when asked what he liked about LA, responded that it was "all facades here." All at once the city felt like it was compressed to a single microthin sheet, a massive picture screen, not unlike Murakami's superflat field or Andersen's speculation on the intermingling of fantasy and urban history: The horizontal city again went a queasy vertical.

Walead Beshty is an artist based in Los Angeles.



Epee du Bois performing at Wierd, Home Sweet Home, New York, July 16, 2008. Photo: Naomi Ramirez.

**HONOR
FRASER**
Los Angeles

**Cristina
Guerra**
Contemporary Art

L | A LOUVER

**sara
meltzer
gallery**

New York

Caroline Busta

I REMEMBER SEEING THE FIRST LOT scattered around the city's sidewalks at the very beginning of the year, when it was still cold enough to snow: thousands of television sets, quietly abandoned here and there by renters and homeowners in every borough, left on corners beside discarded pizza boxes and empty bottles, making New York seem less an actual city than the setting for John Carpenter's 1988 dystopian thriller, *They Live*—the avenues littered with electronic tombstones, intimating unseen forces that lurk under the surface of everyday life. Thinking back to this bizarre scene today, one might be tempted to see it as a premonitory moment, the first hint of the financial meltdown to come. Its implication of infrastructural decline seems totally in keeping with subsequent images of displacement and dispossession—of dressed-down investment bankers leaving bankrupted offices, boxes of belongings in hand—that accompanied reportage of the market collapse from its earliest stages. But in truth, the roots underlying these circumstances are very different: Separate from any credit crisis, the deluge of deserted monitors witnessed at the outset of 2008 arose from the US government's decision to end analog television transmission, mandating that all major broadcast networks switch to a "stronger, clearer" digital signal by February 2009. Households with cable plans or satellite TV would be unaffected, but old sets with rabbit ears—whose viewers had been watching for free—would henceforth need conversion equipment to receive anything beyond a field of fuzz. Gone, in other words, was the McLuhanesque site (and sight) of democratic potential in this medium—and with it the original idea of television as a kind of cultural commons.

page 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

continued »

ARTGUIDE | DIARY | PICKS | NEWS | [IN PRINT](#) | FILM | 500 WORDS | VIDEO | PREVIEWS | TALKBACK | A & E | BOOKFORUM | 中文版

All rights reserved. artforum.com is a registered trademark of Artforum International Magazine, New York, NY

visit **FILM****ARTFORUM**

login | register | ADVERTISE | BACK ISSUES | CONTACT US | SUBSCRIBE

search

ARTGUIDE | DIARY | PICKS | NEWS | **IN PRINT** | FILM | 500 WORDS | VIDEO | PREVIEWS | TALKBACK | A & E | BOOKFORUM | 中文版

IN PRINT



SUBSCRIBE

recent issues

December 2008
November 2008
October 2008
September 2008
Summer 2008
May 2008
April 2008
[Archive to 1998](#)

employment,
exhibitions,
and general
information
dedicated to
the educational
community

**art&
EDUCATION**

DECEMBER 2008

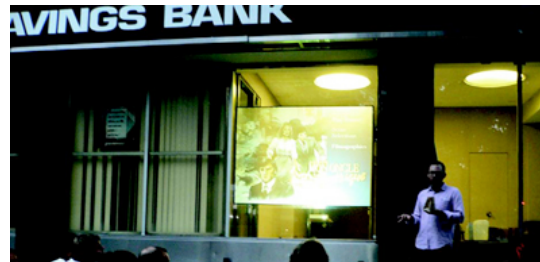
2008

On the Ground

In a year marked by so many historic political and economic events, such a shift in technology might seem subtle, if not altogether slight. And yet it offers a useful metaphor for the past year of art in New York. After all, if people are already pondering the possibilities for art in a shifting cultural and financial landscape—will the city become more affordable for artists? will there be a change in artistic priorities and models?—we must first consider the ways in which conditions on the ground have in recent years altered, perhaps irrevocably, the terms for a public sphere in the city. For if the covenant of “free programming” between network, viewer, and advertiser is dissolving, that demise is nevertheless attended by the rise of other media and other ways of watching, distributing, and circulating content; and perhaps something similarly diversified and diffuse is arising in New York’s art scene, both in terms of its art and its geography. Certainly, looking at the television sets strewn around town as artifacts of an outmoded utopian vision, I couldn’t help but think of how the networks for emerging art have been correlating less closely with the main channels of distribution (including even, in the most literal terms, New York’s mass-transit system): The flow of the city’s art, perhaps not unlike the flow of broadcast information, seems to be parting ways with its long-standing infrastructure.

Indeed, at the same time that artists seeking studio and living space have dispersed across the city during the past decade, to neighborhoods ranging from Bay Ridge and Bushwick to Astoria and Staten Island—making everyday hubs for communities of artists hard to discern, let alone map—some of the better art stories during 2008 were not announced by mail or media listings but instead circulated by word of mouth, text messages, and e-mail forwards, often taking place in venues just as ephemeral. For instance, Ronnie Bass, Jeremy Eilers, Georgia Sagri, and Nic Xedro auctioned art in corporate plazas; Michael Portnoy staged a portion of his SculptureCenter show in a decked-out limo outside the venue; and Ei Arakawa rehearsed a performance piece in the New Museum lobby, so confusing the guards that his entire audience ended up admitted to the institution’s observation deck free of charge. Elsewhere, painter Pieter Schoolwerth’s Wierd parties occupied a bar on Chrystie Street on a weekly basis, taking over the space with smoke machines and minimal electronic cold wave; and Berlin transplant Evas Arche und der Feminist secured spaces for last-minute-notice performances and soup dinners. Gone as soon as they happened, and using the medium of performance and the fleeting logic of bring-your-own-fan-club, these events proposed a new kind of commons that couldn’t really be quantified in conventional terms.

Of course, Lower Manhattan has remained an axis for all these activities in one way or another. And yet the status of this artistic staple was perpetually under reconsideration; for instance, the Lower East Side this year became even more established—home to major institutions such as the new New Museum on the Bowery (as well as any number of contemporary art galleries) at the same time that the New York terrain, more broadly speaking, seemed totally saturated (the frontier logic of finding the city’s “next” bohemian neighborhood becoming a thing of the past). In fact, such circumstances constituted a specific subject of inquiry for common room, an architectural collective started in 2006 by Lars Fischer, Maria Ibañez de Sendadiano, and Todd Rouhe. Operating out of the modest, modernist Emigrant Bank Building on the far east end of Grand Street, what is now a “firm” was initially nothing more than shared office space for a group of independent architects. Before long, however, Fischer, Ibañez, and Rouhe started to take on joint projects, many of which addressed the ways in which social bodies come to inhabit built structures differently over time; and, as significantly, the ways in which these structures might be reconceived to better accommodate their changing communities. (To illustrate, think of how our parameters of “work” have changed—bleeding beyond fixed institutional structures to the BlackBerry in our pockets and the social dinners at the end of our day—and then consider how our behavioral patterns change, creating different requirements of the buildings we occupy.) Soon the trio, offering a twist on corporate lobby art, took up their building’s entryway—the most natural common space, which happens to be shared with a bank, two senior centers, and a childhood-development program—as the site for a series of provocative considerations of the very idea of the commons.



Craig Buckley introducing a screening of Alain Resnais’s *Mon Oncle d’Amérique* (1980), as part of “Universal Fittings,” common room 2, New York, July 13, 2008.

This past summer, for instance, the artist Rey Akdogan used the lobby, which the group calls common room

**Michael
Werner**

links

LEHMANN
MAUPIN
GALLERY

CATRIONA
JEFFRIES
GALLERY

SIKKEMA
JENKINS & CO.

Peres
Projects

W.P.S.1
ART RADIO

David Zwirner

**Galerie
Max
Hetzler**

L | A LOUVER

JACK
HANLEY
GALLERY

CONNER
CONTEMPORARY
ART

MAX
WIGRAM
GALLERY



2, as part of her exhibition "Universal Fittings." Seeking to engage a broader theoretical sense of the communal, Akdogan organized events and performances there, asking architectural theorist Nader Vossoughian to lecture on the "permanent temporary cities" of transient urban communities, and inviting curator Craig Buckley to screen and then informally discuss Alain Resnais's *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* (1980), whose narrative weaves together the lives of three ambitious individuals as they negotiate, while reaping personal rewards and damages from, the changing corporate and class structures of late-1970s France. Still other common room 2 efforts have taken into account the context itself, particularly in terms of the lobby as a shared space, featuring shows that—while often so understated that they go unnoticed as "art"—consist of public information, beautification, or, perhaps most accurately, points of interest. It's important to note in this regard that the surrounding Lower East Side is spatially defined by the massive Seward Park Co-op towers, which have in the fifty years since their construction become a naturally occurring retirement community, with many of the original tenants still residing there. For one of common room 2's first projects, the group simply translated and made freely available—in stacks, laid out as if just another supermarket circular—the November 2003 issue of the German journal *An Architektur*, which not only took up the idea of communal spaces but also featured a discussion of Seward Park. Before long, the neighbors began picking up copies—just one more acknowledgment and utilization of this group's endeavors.

page 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

continued »

RHONA
HOFFMAN
GALLERY

MAUREEN PALEY

NYUSteinhardt
ART

ROBERT
MILLER
GALLERY

ARTGUIDE | DIARY | PICKS | NEWS | [IN PRINT](#) | FILM | 500 WORDS | VIDEO | PREVIEWS | TALKBACK | A & E | BOOKFORUM | 中文版

All rights reserved. artforum.com is a registered trademark of Artforum International Magazine, New York, NY

art&EDUCATION

ARTFORUM

login | register ADVERTISE BACK ISSUES CONTACT US SUBSCRIBE

search

ARTGUIDE DIARY PICKS NEWS IN PRINT FILM 500 WORDS VIDEO PREVIEWS TALKBACK A & E BOOKFORUM 中文版

IN PRINT



SUBSCRIBE

recent issues

December 2008
 November 2008
 October 2008
 September 2008
 Summer 2008
 May 2008
 April 2008
[Archive to 1998](#)

employment,
 exhibitions,
 and general
 information
 dedicated to
 the educational
 community

art&EDUCATION

DECEMBER 2008

2008

On the Ground

Any consideration of the recent history of the Lower East Side, however, must take Orchard, a cooperatively organized exhibition space that closed this past May (as had been planned at its inception three years ago), squarely into account. Created in 2005 by a loose, cross-generational assembly of twelve artists, filmmakers, curators, art historians, and critics, Orchard would become central to a community of spaces that shared a common geography, all setting up shop below Delancey Street and east of Allen Street, but which were better grouped (or "localized") according to their small scale, discursive orientation, and political outlook. (Many of these were also, as a matter of principle, commercial.) In fact, Orchard's anchoring presence—like that of the nearby Reena Spaulings Fine Art—helped create and sustain a kind of intimate internationalization of the area's art scene, generating ties across continents as much as between neighborhoods. For example, last February saw the opening a few blocks away (above the speakeasy basement space of just-in-time publishers Dexter Sinister) of Ludlow 38, the downtown annex of the Goethe-Institut New York, jointly run with the Kunstverein Munich. The space kicked off its first year of exhibitions with "Publish and Be Damned," wherein an assortment of zines and small-run journals, from *Made in USA* to the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, were hung by binder clips along the walls for anyone to page through. It has since hosted lectures and screenings, including a showing of a noteworthy 1992 VHS distributed by Cologne-based *Spex* magazine, which featured shorts by younger versions of some sixty artists who are now well established, from Josef Strau and Stephan Dilleuth to Wolfgang Tillmans and Angela Bulloch. The occasion offered a poignant sense of continuity between that earlier scene and the international exchanges now in play on the Lower East Side. This fall, in a telling coincidence, one could have left Stephan Dilleuth and Nils Norman's show at Reena Spaulings only to happen upon a video clip here by Dilleuth, teaming up with Norman and Strau, from a decade and a half ago.

Attuned to such particularities of the neighborhood's changing environment, Orchard, of course, heeded the local arrival of the New Museum, whose SANAA-designed building brought with it an iconic silhouette of irregularly stacked boxes ascending into the sky. The institution's new face was introduced by a slick, if savvy, marketing campaign by design firm Wolff Olins (also responsible for the visual identity of the 2012 London Olympics), which covered the city with posters on which opaque, Pantone-calibrated fields of color enveloped a negative space mirroring the building's idiosyncratic shape. These fields were filled variously with views of installed works of art or faux-defaced subway posters—the former reading as a kind of reconscripton of art to the clean walls of the institution, the latter a romantic framing of the grittier New York out of which the New Museum had, historically speaking, been born. Mindful of this framing of the museum, artist Christian Philipp Müller created *Infill*, 2008, conceived for Orchard's storefront window and installed as part of "Cookie Cutter," his January exhibition there. Müller made the work by taking a three-section sheet of plywood and removing from its center an area whose jagged outline, on first glance, echoed the SANAA architecture. But in fact, this irregular shape was based on the architecture of Orchard's space, determined not by the gallery's vertical profile but rather by its floor plan—since the artist sought to underscore his belief in "foundational" transparency. To accompany this piece, Müller presented four of the six original vitrines belonging to an older work, *Interpellations*, 1994, which contained travel guides for the New York of that time. Into each booklet's coverage of SoHo, the artist had inserted, by hand, an entry about American Fine Arts Co., the gallery he showed at in the '90s. In this way, Müller self-consciously rendered the space as a character in the narrative that the surrounding neighborhood had been assigned.



View of "Publish and Be Damned," 2008,
 Ludlow 38, New York. Photo: Peter Lueders.

Müller's impulse is useful for considering the Lower East Side's recent evolution and, within that arc,



links



Galerie
 Max
 Hetzler





Orchard when it first began—particularly when it comes to a self-reflexivity regarding the economic forces at work in the neighborhood. Although Orchard's various constituents felt from the outset that the strongest kind of collective would be a diverse grouping of individuals—the mission statement declared that the group “[did] not have a univocal position in terms of their working methods or views on art”—they nevertheless shared a sense that to operate as “not-for-profit” (which implied a perspective from outside the institution of art) would be inherently disingenuous. To claim commercial status, on the other hand, was to admit the real conditions of the market in which art operates and out of which it comes. And indeed, the art-related activity on the Lower East Side in recent years has affected the locale, drawing people to it and even, perhaps, preparing the ground for an institution of contemporary art. To seek a kind of transparency here was, from the beginning, to understand space differently, a notion that was literally manifested by the group: Orchard installed its drywall perimeters with a several-inch reveal at the ceiling and floor, which—in addition to permitting a flexible electrical wiring system—rendered visible not only the cables and aluminum studs but also the structural limits of the preexisting space. Hence, with every show, there was a built-in acknowledgment that the white cube's remove is always only a construction.

page 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

continued »



asiart
ARCHIVE

ARTFORUM

login | register ADVERTISE BACK ISSUES CONTACT US SUBSCRIBE

search

ARTGUIDE DIARY PICKS NEWS IN PRINT FILM 500 WORDS VIDEO PREVIEWS TALKBACK A & E BOOKFORUM 中文版

IN PRINT



SUBSCRIBE

recent issues

December 2008
November 2008
October 2008
September 2008
Summer 2008
May 2008
April 2008
[Archive to 1998](#)



DECEMBER 2008

2008
On the Ground

It was also, of course, an adaptation to, and alteration of, the original storefront space—suggesting a different way of occupying it, a manner of clearing room that is less about resistance than about engaging and then turning over the conditions we encounter in order to espouse new life. Interestingly, this notion was also apparent in any number of shows throughout the city this year. Consider SculptureCenter's important effort "Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s," which, rather than dealing with issues historically (and conventionally) linked to women (housework, child care, hysteria, obsession), recalled the themes of Lucy Lippard's 1983 text *Overlay*, invoking those qualities defined in the critic's feminism: receptiveness (found in, say, Nancy Holt's light-capturing *Sun Tunnels*, 1973–76); reflection (in Holt's *Hydra's Head*, 1974, where shallow depressions in the earth holding rainwater create natural mirrors); and nurturing (in Agnes Denes's *Wheatfield—A Confrontation*, 1982, for which the artist raised crops in the old Battery Park landfill). This close observation of one's surroundings—in terms of the social, the environmental, and the dynamic relationship between the two—was evident even in the show of Gustave Courbet's work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art this past spring. As one of its catalogue's quotations from the Communist read: "[T]here's no exit possible, other than a progressive and ineluctable abandonment to the unchained forces of nature." Perhaps this tactic (and metaphor) is no longer available to us as it once was. More than a century later, nature—our living environment—is continually showing itself in new guises. Looking past the idea of an exit, one might still take up such developments as the shedding of outmoded infrastructures with an eye toward cultivating, progressively, different bandwidths. In the past twelve months, this city has signaled renewed efforts to embrace its changing form.

Caroline Busta is an assistant editor of Artforum.



A market in Lagos, Nigeria, April 24, 2007. Photo: Sunday Alamba/Associated Press.

Lagos

Bisi Silva

THE POLITICAL SLOGAN *Eko O ni Baje* ("Lagos won't spoil"), a rallying cry of Nigeria's Action Congress Party, aptly expresses the vision of a place that has experienced numerous assaults over the past two decades. Lagos, a megacity of approximately fifteen million people, is one of the fastest-growing "urban agglomerations" in the world. The influx of migrants has, in the absence of corresponding infrastructural development or urban planning, created a deficit in the provision of amenities such as housing, water, and transportation. But the 2007 election of Babatunde Fashola to the governorship of Lagos State, and his dynamic implementation of policies in health, education, and road-network upgrades, offers some cause for

MARIAN
GOODMAN
GALLERY

links

MISAKO
&
ROSEN
TOKYO®NYUSteinhardt
ART

mixed greens

Gavin
Brown's
enterprisesara
meltzer
gallery

P.P.O.W

FISHER LANDAU
CENTER FOR ARTemilyTsingou
fine artHAUNCH
OF
VENISON
11/LEHMANN
MAUPIN
GALLERYGABINETE
DE ARTE
RAQUEL
ARNAUD