

Bushwick Open Studios: Where Artists Run the Show

by PADDY JOHNSON on JUNE 11, 2015

Now that the art tornado that is Bushwick Open Studios (BOS) has run through the land, what is there to say about it? Last year, I didn't have [very many positive thoughts](#). I spent just enough time pounding the pavement to conclude that democracy in art looked like a [performance artist dangling a stuffed animal from his nuts](#). I let the crap ruin my experience.

This year there's still plenty of bad art, though, more than ever it seems to be paired with more brands and startups hoping to cash in on the popularity of the event. That's made my inbox a little hazardous, but BOS in general, a little more palatable; my expectations for brands and internet companies are much lower than they are for artists.

Needless to say, as always, there's plenty of stuff worth ignoring. Happily, though, I found more worth talking about than I have in the past. Here's what I saw and liked.

I'm not sure the NEWD art fair was all that different than last year. Most of the same galleries participated, some of which had made plenty of sales, others of which were still waiting when I arrived Sunday afternoon. But, given that the usually [reliable NADA New York](#) was a flop this year, NEWD gets AFC's emerging art fair crown for the season. Most of the work is pretty good and it's possible to have a conversation about art here without feeling the constant pressure for sales. Many of the booths are artist-run galleries that will live for as long as the artists maintain their interest in the project.

I probably spent twenty minutes talking about this Amanny Ahmad sculpture with [Signal](#) partner Kyle Jacques because *what the hell is going on with that wine bag?* The picture on the front shows wine being poured into the glass, and missing it entirely. Why? The tree is



decorated as though its a response to the bag, which is filled with lilies. It too, makes no sense. Nestled in the branches are a lobster claw, a pair of sunglasses, some cast tongues and a lotto ticket. Merry Christmas everyone?

Anyway, this sculpture gets a nod from me because I don't know why anything looks the way it does, and in this case, I find that confusion really pleasurable.

Reactivator might have been the most consistent show I saw all weekend, and these ceramic totems/permission figures by Joe Bochynski were certainly the stand out. And I'm not just saying that because Bochynski references my favorite Sparks song, "This Town Ain't Big Enough for the Both of Us". Mostly, the song's a clever entry point to urban totems he typically installs in subways and stairwells. When displayed on the streets, they emit a vaguely spiritual presence—the faint pulse of an undefined religion within a largely agnostic city. Here, the context is the gallery, so the read is slightly different; they're more like the gleaming prize from an archeological dig for early nineties nostalgia, then a public art commission. In either space, the works succeed.

[Rachel Stern](#)'s showed a collection of portraits, framed in fake gold and at each end of the gallery mounted against faux marble. Unfortunately, the long narrow shape of The Commons's building gallery insured that I took terrible photos of this show, as well as the Swingers exhibition one office over. So apologies for that to everyone because both shows were strong.

I bring Stern and Swingers up regardless, though, because in order to experience any of the work in building, I was forced to sign up for a mailing list that sends co-working space offers from the space. And the email bouncers at the entrance were demanding; I wasn't allowed entry into the space unless I gave up my email. I had them remove my name

when I left, so not the end of the world, but this is a pretty good example of how the mismatched objectives of space owners and artists can create unnecessary tension.

[Kevin Reuning](#)'s show is all digital prints, paintings, videos and moving sculptures. We're supposed to consider the subject of identity, authorship and online sharing. A lot of the work isn't that interesting — "PT Cruiser" for example, a collage of all the 3D models



found through the same named Google Warehouse search looks pretty much exactly as you'd expect. It's a bunch of cars scattered around a yellow surface. Several other collages made in this vein hang from the wall, "My Perfect Home", "Mjolnirs", "Things Wearing Top Hats" "Moogs". They all have the fact that the designs were made by someone else and shared in common, which in and of itself doesn't seem all that significant.

"Scenic Vistas" a fan that rotates over a moving projected image of water and sunset felt pretty predictable at first too. Didn't Zilvinas Kempinas [point two identical model fans at each other](#) to float a looped strip of film at MoMA not too long ago? Doesn't the fan read a little too theatrically—as though it was supposed to approximate ocean air or the approximation of ocean air?

All of this is true, but it also seemed liked the point was to show that it's possible to use the infinitely replicable to approximate the ephemeral. That contradiction was weighty enough that I began to reflect on the artist-run space I'd seen that weekend—Microscope, NEWD, Transmitter, Signal. Where these galleries, too, showing replicable work? Nothing here looked all that different than what I'd see in the Lower East Side. It's all work I like, but perhaps there's more homogeneity within the New York emerging scene than many of us care to think about.

I doubt there's much any of us can do about this on our own—I've never once talked to an artist who wants to make work that copies another. But it did make me hope for another art world shake up some time soon. We're well over due.