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Art Trek: Brooklyn

Martha Schwendener

Chasing a Dream and an Unalloyed Ethos

ARRIVE in Brooklyn, and you've entered the belly of contemporary art. It's our 19th-century Paris or 18th-century Rome, with one of the largest concentrations of artists in the world. Here, you'll find both commercial galleries and nonprofit and artist-run spaces — and thousands upon thousands of places you can visit during open-studio weekends scattered throughout the year.

Yet Brooklyn is an embattled utopia. In 2002 the artist Ward Shelley created a seven-foot-long timeline, now owned by the Brooklyn Museum, that set the "golden age" of Williamsburg in the early 1990s and its era of "consolidation and professionalism" around 2000. Now we're in the artisanal cocktails-and-condominium afterlife.

It's a well-known progression: Artists gentrify neighborhoods, only to be forced out by rising rents as these areas attract restaurants, upscale shops and people who covet the lifestyle rather than the studio space. That's happening here, and some fear that even the artist-run spaces contribute to this process. (Martha Rosler reflects on the complicity of artists in that regard in her 2013 book, "Culture Class," echoing observations by other veteran Brooklyn creative types, like the filmmaker Spike Lee.)

And yet, cognizant that despite its complications, Brooklyn is still a mecca, young artists continue to arrive, chasing the bohemian dream out to Bushwick and a handful of other neighborhoods. Here's a selective gallerygoer's guide.

Williamsburg/Greenpoint

THE BOILER/PIEROGI The best place to start is The Boiler, the auxiliary space of the landmark gallery Pierogi, where, through Saturday, you can see "In Orbit" (2014), the remnants of Mr. Shelley's recent performance-collaboration with the architect Alex Schweder. A 25-foot-wide wheel made of wood, steel and furniture, suspended from the gal-

lery's ceiling, provided a home (complete with kitchen and chemical toilet) for the first 10 days of the show. Although the artists and the informal audience are gone, you can watch a video of the performance and see the sculpture.

REAL FINE ARTS Up the way in Greenpoint is Real Fine Arts, a small gallery that harks back to that golden age of Williamsburg but also draws inspiration from artist-run spaces like Orchard and Reena Spaulings on the Lower East Side. Started by two Pratt Institute graduates, Ben Morgan-Cleveland and Tyler Dobson, the gallery tends to show the work of friends like Ned Vena, whose current "Paintings Without Borders," all in the shape of the letter G (like the nearby G train, perhaps), suggest Frank Stella's shaped paintings, or graphic design. Emblematic of the gallery's subtle disruptions of white-cube protocol, the floor is currently covered with black anti-fatigue rubber, a comfortable surface that eases the labor of looking at art.

Bushwick

Whereas earlier generations inhabited waterfront neighborhoods like Dumbo and Williamsburg, artists have now ventured further outward. The migration on the L line started over a dec-

ade ago, and this neighborhood might be, to borrow Mr. Shelley's phrase, midway through the "consolidation and professionalism" period. But it's still a place where art is being made, hence Bushwick Open Studios, which takes place over three days, May 30 through June 1. You can also see art in a variety of galleries and artist-run spaces.

STUDIO 10 Just off the Morgan Avenue stop on the L is 56 Bogart Street, a former industrial building housing studios and galleries. Studio 10 is showing Susan Silas's "love in the ruins; sex after 50," a series of photographs in which the artist has sex with her husband. Provocative and somewhat disingenuous — Ms. Silas's svelte form hardly suggests the catastrophic decline suggested by the title — the photographs echo projects by John Coplans or '70s performance artists. (Possibly more interesting is how Ms. Silas and her husband began their sex life: in cars, because of their respective living situations.) At the adjacent nonprofit Momenta Art, Ms. Silas is showing more images of herself, alongside work by Joy Episalla: evocative photographs and a video in which the artist manipulates a cap-like cone that she crched from her own hair.

LUHRING AUGUSTINE The arrival of the blue-chip Luhring Augustine gallery in 2012 may have been viewed by some as a there-goes-the-neighborhood moment. Yet the gallery's use of its ultra-white-cube space for large-scale installations and long-term projects splits the difference between art history and commerce. And the current exhibition is a museum-quality display: Michelangelo Pistoletto's "The Minus Objects," a series of sculptures made of cardboard, spray paint, sand and other humble materials in 1965-66. A seminal figure of the Arte Povera movement, Mr. Pistoletto has made sculptures that are right at home with the pieces of much younger artists working in Bushwick, and, fittingly, they were originally exhibited in his own studio in Turin.

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