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Thursday, October 11, 2007

Lush Life: No-Mad II

A grand opening in Parkville
With Steve and Edie

We were delighted to toast the opening of *No-Mad II* this past Saturday. Mounted inside a stunning empty warehouse at the Design Center in Hartford's Parkville neighborhood, the show features work by 22 artists in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, video, installation and performance. *No-Mad II* is organized annually as a grassroots survey for area artists, and has a high degree of stylistic and conceptual diversity. It also reveals the shared enthusiasm among these artists for opportunities to create new and meaningful local culture.



This may be the only opening we've attended in a long time where the crowd was definitely more interested in viewing the artwork than hobnobbing, rubbing shoulders, blowing kisses and over-congratulating each other. Another true success of *No-Mad II* is the fact that the building's owner allowed the artists to have their way with his unoccupied building – rent-free – and the architectural beauty of the room obviously inspired great vision for artists/curators Hirokazu Fukawa and Maria Gabriela Galarza-Block.

It's always a too-rare pleasure to come across work by sculptor Fukawa, whose installation, "Water Puddles/Summer, 1945," is included in the show – a wooden chair with blue neon lights, which appear as if they are falling like water off the seat, and surrounded sparsely by glass "puddles" filling up a large section of the gallery. The puddles reflect the light pouring in from the cathedral-size windows, as well as light from the neon, for fantastic material effect.

Another highlight of the day was a performance by artists Sam Ekwurtzel and ColIn McMullan, titled *Two for One Boissons et Hors d'Oeuvres, Vernissage Incognito*. We hit the bar as soon as we arrived and, much to our gleeful surprise, the two bartenders were actually one bartender. During their performance, Ekwurtzel and McMullan wore a barkeep uniform that joined them at the side like conjoined twins – two arms, three legs and two heads. For the duration of the opening, this hilariously slowed the bar line down as Ekwurtzel and McMullan concentrated on coordinating their movements while mixing drinks for gallery-goers.

Barca, a soon-to-open restaurant on the first floor of the building hosted a very cool after-party. The space may be a hip restaurant in the future, but they rocked exposed brick walls and sheet rock on Saturday. It felt like we were partying in a squatter's dream home. DJ rizzla and DJ m@ spun while Hartford's bright young things danced and carried on into the early morning. At roughly 2 a.m., Steve quipped, "Hartford may not be doomed, after all."

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