Braving the Wilds of "Apartment Three"

Peter John Boyle
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"APARTMENT THREE"

The sub-under-under-art-whirls in Providence had a busy summer. While everyone who was already anyone was baking their buns, the perennial proletariat of the post-collegiate/pre-grant art scene sweated their neophyte butts off instead—inaugurating the city's newest, and sure to be shortest-lived, "zero amenities" alternative gallery Apartment Three in an empty top-floor pad on swinging Messer Street.

I'm really intrigued by the re-rerouting of previous generations' willingness to grovel at gallery doors, by a pure and simple mad to exhibit anywhere spirit which inspires exhibitions and exhibition sites such as this one. Many of AS220's regular contributors were among the throng that thronged the first exhibition at the end of June, which is either further indication of these young folks' madness for the sport of showing. Or else it's just another sign that AS220, the original "zero amenities alternative" is failing to meet the needs of this community by booking too much art by children and "artists of every caliber".

Regardless, you still gotta have art to stage an exhibition, which is why all the participants in APT 3's Grand Opening crashed and burned in a less than spectacular fashion. The exception being Alison Kyner who impressed me with an array of bathroom scales hung on the wall with enigmatic narrative paintings on them. The walls surrounding the painted scales were lightly decorated by borders of fancy cake frosting— which could be identified by its sweet smell. It was genuinely intriguing and the paintings worth looking at beyond the novelty of their support and setting.

The rest of the inaugural exhibition was less than remarkable, even artless in its entirety. OOPS.

The second installment exhibition, which opened the last weekend in July, was a huge step forward for this proto-communal effort, powered by a braintrust of Robin Nanney, Neal Walsh, and Adam Marney, with lots of help coming also from all exhibitors as well. I was struck by a spirit reminiscent of the early days of AS220 on Richmond Street. Particularly when I discovered the delicious ambient ambiance being woven on the spot by Tim O'Keefe, squirreled away with all his techno-gear—merely making a monophonic synthesizer scream like a woman.

The big event for me was the local scene of Chris Kilduff, who showed a bunch of new hybrid works fused and extended from earlier work. Kilduff brought his own ambient soundtrack to his installation performing various works by Popeye acapella. Very impressive!

Neal Walsh returned in this exhibition, to his lately celebrated abstractions, which I was glad to see more of. In the first installment exhibit he had stretched himself a bit too far in the direction of installation art for the sake of installation art, n it left me quite unsatisfied. Cause it wunt neither.

Also in the second installment show I was struck by an oddly compelling display of maps altered with bold black grids by Adam Marnie, who seems to have an intriguing capacity for generating these grid configurations in a manner as singular as snowflakes.

As the environs of Apartment Three are indeed a beat apartment, the artists are left to contend with the fixtures. And so I found a small, but arresting configuration, accomplished by Anna Tanner using the kitchen sink. Some architectural models were set in teacups on the draining board, capped by the odd surprise of a turquoise sea resting in the sink itself.

An exhibition and site such as Apartment Three not only reminds me of the initial purposes and intent surrounding AS220's beginning, but as well, of a perpetual need to remove art and the ritual of viewing and attending it, from the situations which become habitual and thus rooted in convention. Although this removal is more significant to the growth of artists who are just beginning to meditate the maze of society and the arts it places upon those who would affect culture, it nevertheless exposes jaded old eyeballs like mine to the prejudices which become rooted in the supposedly innocent act of observation.
The IMMIGRANT SONS concert in mid-August will certainly stand for years to come as a benchmark of both multi-instrumental virtuosity and a most incredible fusion of obscure genres of ethnic music (Albanian folk tunes, Klezmer music and Flamenco guitar) aggregated into something luridly modern, yet timeless and completely mesmerizing. But more than that... THIS BAND had a genuine “FOLK VIBE” - HERE-IN MEANING “WITH PEOPLE” through culture to the infinite: That which exists between people who are equal.

The music seemed to come from the players without the sense of separate egos or instruments. A note one moment felt from the vibrant strings of a violin was then carried by saxophone or clarinet or bass fiddle, hammer dulcimer, lute, man, woman, child, the air, the floor, the bodies in the room... THE MUSIC WAS given freely to them what assembled to listen.

AT A TIME WHEN AS220 IN-HOUSE bands are billing themselves as “FAUX EASTERN EUROPEAN FOLK ROCK” the music performed by IMMIGRANT SONS is genuine! Handed from father to his progeny in an eternal ring of life - into whose mysteries I am thrilled to have been initiated.

And GROWING! THROBBING n Thriving even... And if their dalliance with the music business is all in the past, BOY that would really make me happy. Ecstatic! Squirtng drops of joy! And possibly deliver the coup-de-grace in a sequence of unexpected satisfactions which I have been experiencing at AS220 since we crossed the threshold of that Y2K thang.

I’m Serious. The set they played the other night was a sharp as John Cody’s sideburns and the company of players’ seemed completely revitalized, reborn even. Now if they would just find the delirious satisfaction to be found in simply playing, and avoid “SELLING IT” either literally or figuratively, then this impossible, in-house, confabulation could easily become the transcendent dance ensemble that AS220 really deserves.