



INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

# Art in America

ELIZABETH PEYTON  
TERRY WINTERS  
ALFRED KUBIN  
PROSPECT 1 NEW ORLEANS  
plus THE NEW REAL

FEB'09 \$5.00

## NEW ORLEANS REPORT

Roger's project space was devoted to a group exhibition called "Katrina: Catastrophe and Catharsis."

The St. Claude and St. Roch area welcomed several alternative initiatives, including one from KK Projects, named for Kirsha Kaechele, its founder, and widely considered to be the most exciting gallery in New Orleans for its all-night events and smartly chosen exhibitions. Kaechele acquired several dilapidated shotgun houses along North Villere Street and has opened them up for site-specific installations and architectural interventions by local and international artists. A new video work by New York's Tony Oursler, featuring New Orleans inhabitants chanting, rapping and playing a harp, could be viewed through small peepholes drilled into the wall of a derelict store. Peter Nadin, also from New York, placed his ceramic sculptures in a shallow 220-gallon pool of dark honey. New Orleans sculptor and designer



Robert Tannen was responsible for a garden in which various weeds and toxic plants were lovingly encouraged to grow, and Dawn DeDeaux, also of New Orleans, installed an evocative broken-glass floor piece in one of the KK Projects houses.

Another area house accommodated Mel Chin's "Operation Paydirt," an ongoing venture that helps support the rebuilding of New Orleans from the ground up by sealing lead and other contaminants in the soil. Chin (based in North Carolina) turned the house into a vault, its entrance fitted with a semblance of a giant circular safe door. The structure is papered inside with thousands of "fundreds," facsimile \$100 bills drawn by New Orleans schoolchildren and visitors. The bills will ultimately be col-

lected by a Brinks truck and brought to Washington, D.C., where they will be presented to Congress in an effort to exchange the fake money for real. Chin is hoping to raise \$300 million this go-round, the estimated cost for treating approximately 86,000 New Orleans properties with perilously high lead readings in their soil.

"Prospect.1" was itself an artful public-service event, deftly skirting the sentimentality that sometimes threatened to swamp it. Nothing, of course, is perfect. Why, for example, weren't prominent Louisianans such as Keith Sonnier and Lynda Benglis included? Cameron responded to an e-mail query about the number of local participants by observing that of the 81 artists, not only were 10 (nine living and one deceased) long-term Louisiana residents but another two were raised there, two more studied in the state and several others had strong local ties before "Prospect.1," such as Portuguese-born Francis Cape, who helped physically salvage the U.S. Mint's collection (where his work was shown during the biennial). Cameron added that, while he thought the percentage was standard, he is committed to increasing their numbers for "Prospect.2."

Dedicated to the belief that art can make a difference and seems to have already done so in individual ways, "Prospect.1" remains hard to fault. Did this place-sensitive combination of art and altruism, ardor and context, signal a curatorial paradigm shift? Might biennials become WPAs for a new century, a new community-oriented era? Could they harbinger change we can believe in? ○



Above and right, views of Mel Chin's fundraising endeavor *Operation Paydirt: Safehouse*, 2008. Photos this page, unless otherwise noted, Endotherm Labs. Right, photo KK Projects.

Top, Peter Nadin's installation *The First Mark*, 2005, pool of honey, ceramic sculptures, wall works of beeswax, animal fur and other natural materials.

"Prospect.1 New Orleans" was on view at 28 venues with performances and itinerant shows at three additional sites in New Orleans, Nov. 1, 2008-Jan. 18, 2009.

**LILLY WEI** is a New York-based writer and independent curator.

