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Bortolami creates US-wide mini-Marfas

Artists given non-traditional spaces and free rein to put on shows

by DAN DURAY | 26 July 2016



A former Taco Bell restaurant in Cahokia, Illinois, will show Eric Wesley's work. Courtesy the artist and Bortolami, New York.

As the art market continues to move beyond traditional bricks-and-mortar and embrace fair- and jpeg-centric business plans, New York's Bortolami Gallery has begun a novel experiment in how to keep its artists visible and happy. The gallery's Artist/City programme, run by its associate director Emma Fernberger, pays to rent non-traditional exhibition spaces for artists not based in New York. These "mini-Marfas", the Texas home of the Judd Foundation, allow artists to show their work throughout the year with self-curated shows in unique venues. The artists are free to programme the spaces as they wish.

The gallery has already established spaces for Daniel Buren in Miami and Eric Wesley in Cahokia, Illinois. Wesley's space is a former Taco Bell restaurant "replete with ersatz Spanish colonial architecture", according to a release. Fernberger is also working with the sculptor Tom Burr to find a venue in

New Haven, Connecticut, home to the Yale School of Art (where Burr has taught). She's also working with Barbara Kasten for a project in Chicago in 2017, and scouting locations for a Nicolás Guagnini space in San Francisco.

"It's a dream job," Fernberger says of establishing the programme, noting that while it allows for experimental shows, it also enables the mid-tier gallery to reach out to collectors and dealers in other cities during non-fair periods.

"It's a way for us to expand our reach without opening full-scale operations in another city or in New York," she says, "and just getting to see more of the country."