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Bortolami Pushes Art Beyond NY and LA

BY TAYLOR DAFOE | JULY 30, 2016



"Eric Wesley / St. Louis," Phase 1, 2016 (Bortolami, Cahokia Installation view)

(Courtesy the artist and Bortolami, New York)

Last December, Bortolami Gallery launched the project "Artist/City," in which it helps artists from its stable install artworks in nontraditional spaces across the country for a year. So far the project has spawned two installations: Daniel Buren's in Miami and Eric Wesley's in St. Louis. Two more are on the way: Barbara Kasten's in Chicago and Tom Burr's in New Haven.

The gallery's goal is not to establish "permanent satellite locations throughout the country," said Emma Fernberger, the Bortolami associate director who runs the program, but rather to experiment with exhibition techniques while expanding the art world beyond of the two coasts. "People from New York and LA have the tendency to be self-absorbed, because there's so much emphasis on those two cities at the moment. But there's the whole rest of the country where there's still exciting things happening. There are many different art worlds. It's great to get to know other places, see other things, and meet new people — expand our community."

The project has no set model. The artists are given free rein to find locations and use them as they choose. "Each of these projects has its own syntax," said Fernberger. "For each there's a process of discovering what that is."

Wesley has occupied an old Taco Bell in Cahokia, Illinois. The building, which he has named the Bell, is “replete with ersatz Spanish Colonial architecture,” according to the press release. The artist has taken a “cumulative approach” to the project: Throughout the year, he has continued to add components to the installation, hanging artworks in the gutted interior, planting a garden in the front of the building, and erecting sculptures on the roof. The Bell will also host “happenings” involving the local community throughout the year. Buren, the first artist to participate in Artist/City project, has taken a more traditional approach, occupying an event space near downtown Miami where he has curated and installed exhibitions of his own work.

For Burr, the project has brought him home, in a sense. Burr is in the process of selecting a space in New Haven, Connecticut, where he was born and raised (his father was a dean at Yale). He also has a longstanding interest in Brutalist architecture, of which New Haven has some of the country’s most important examples. The artist is still planning the programming, but according to Fernberger, his installation in the space will likely be additive, evolving over time. Kasten is working with the gallery to secure a space in Chicago, which she chose in order to strengthen her connection to the Bauhaus, a huge influence on her work. (She was also born in Chicago.)

To document the evolution of the program, Bortolami has established Tumblrs for each project. Those for the first two, featuring candid photos, proper installation shots, artist-shot video, sketches, and more, can be found [here](#).

The future of the project is still sketchy, but there are no plans to slow down. Fernberger is working with other Bortolami artists on securing new locations for new projects.

“It’s been an incredibly rewarding experience,” she said. “It’s nice to be able to go and meet people in their own city, on their own terms. People appreciate you taking the time to get to know their city. They’re proud of their local institutions.”