

ARTS

Co-Lab Projects and Partial Shade's "Soft Opening"

In this one-night event, four works by four artists revealed themselves over time in an empty East Austin lot

REVIEWED BY TAYLOR PREWITT, FRI., MARCH 15, 2019

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Steef Crombach attending "Soft Opening" (Photo by Ryan Thayer Davis)

This past Sunday, in an empty East Austin lot at the edge of the urban sprawl, Austin art organizations Partial Shade and Co-Lab Projects debuted "A Platform," a new collaborative series making use of that lot and a custom-built platform created therein.

Essentially a half-acre of open field, the space is emblematic of both projects' continued use of nontraditional environments in exhibiting art. It is also the freshly purchased future site of Co-Lab's planned studio complex and venue: the resulting investment of seven years of stowed away art sales funds.

Co-Lab, the long-running nonprofit, finds an ideal partner in curatorial project Partial Shade at this latest show, titled (with a wink) "Soft Opening." Developed by artists Rachael Starbuck, Michael Muelhaupt, and Jesse Cline, nomadic-by-choice Partial Shade seeks unconventional space to show work that is responsive to and considerate of its environmental context. Its last show, "alligator," exhibited in Huntsville's Club Lake and featured floating works of art.

"Soft Opening" took this same approach, curating four works by four artists of various backgrounds united by a sense of place: a closet in a Brooklyn apartment, an imposing platform, a field in rural Vermont, an Austin fitness studio, and, of course, the meta-location of the East Austin lot.

The art appeared in phases so that if you arrived around 6:30pm, it might have looked as if the field were just a field, with a group partying together, red Solo cups in hand.

Immediately, attendees stumbled upon a television – tipped flat on the ground of the field – playing a thermal heat video by artist Peter Clough. An attendant pamphlet, handed out with the red Solo cups at the welcoming table, tells guests that the film was created in Clough's closet in Brooklyn, a locale relevant because it is the exact size of the fetishistic dog cage that holds Clough. The closet intensifies the sounds of him moving, groaning, urinating, and drinking that urine, and the oranges and purples of the thermal projection create an abstract moving image of a body that is comforted (though not comfortable, he writes) by the space it inhabits.

To the right is the eponymous platform that will remain throughout the collaborative series of shows. Created with a literal access ramp, the central figure is intended to figuratively grant the viewer more access to the performance and to blur the boundaries that exist between viewer and performer. At this show, the platform was a stage for artist Virginia Lee Montgomery, who had created a large, simple machine that used the weight of a small rock struck against a larger rock to shimmy a faux, detached ponytail. Montgomery continued her Sisyphean task (futile because the small rock continued to fall from the string it was strung

around) as the sun set, at which point a third work of art became apparent upon a screen set up opposite the platform. That work, by Adrien Sun Hall, projected video of manipulated nylon fluttering in the wind, a piece mimicking natural leaves that was both created in a field and displayed in a field.

And at the end of this journey, once darkness had settled and a larger crowd had finally appeared, queer performance artist and personal trainer Erica Nix performed what felt like a finale of space. Around the primordial stage of a fire pit, Nix incorporated spooky stories of shame in an interactive performance (popcorn was thrown) that culminated in her humping pillows to a crowd of cheering spectators. Taking the mock coitus from the privacy of a childhood bedroom to a public performance by way of the fitness studio where the work was conceived was intended to deliver her from shame and (again) use the environment as a means to mediate art.

Later, the show ended, the people cleared out, and the exhibition space was an empty lot once more.

Soft Opening

Co-Lab Projects

@ Glissman Road, 5419 Glissman

March 10

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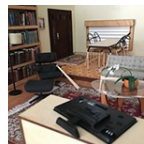
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KEYWORDS FOR THIS STORY

Co-Lab Projects, Partial Shade, Rachael Starbuck, Michael Muelhaupt, Jesse Cline, Peter Clough, Virginia Lee Montgomery, Adrien Sun Hall, Erica Nix

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