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Exterior of Hampton Hall, home of the 1st Scope Hamptons contemporary art fair, July 15-17, 2005



The exhibition floor of Hampton Hall, Southampton, New York, 2005



Thomas Allen
Timber
2005
Foley Gallery, New York

UN-HAMPERED by Ben Davis

"I am wrapped in an ennui that is like a good and true peach-hue shawl from Christopher Fischer."

This, the opening line from an article in this month's *Hamptons* magazine about summer in the swanky resort town, says it all with regard to what exhibitors were dealing with at **Scope Hamptons**, the contemporary art fair held in Hampton Hall in Southampton, July 15-17, 2005.

On the one hand, you have the obvious gravitational pull of the Hamptons crowd with their megabucks and airy pretensions to glitter. On the other, there is Scope's trademark profile as a fair for scrappy up-and-comers, with a leaner, less grandiose feeling than other art fairs.

The 40 exhibitors on hand found various ways to navigate these particular shoals. Some were happy to embrace the frivolous spirit. Chelsea's **Foley Gallery** showed photos by **Thomas Allen** of constructions he makes out of old pulp fiction novels. The artist cuts and folds their cover art to give them even more animation than the illustrations already possess, then lights them theatrically to form whimsical scenes. These works (price: \$1,600) are pure superficial fun, and their playful celebration of artifice seemed right at home in the Hamptons.

On the other hand, if you didn't know better, you could pass the suite of paintings by **Wayne White** at East Hampton's **Edsel Williams Fine Art** several times before the chintzy frames gave a clue that something more is going on than first meets the eye. White is known for transforming found paintings from garage sales, adding giant 3D words marching across placid landscapes ... a sly detail hidden in plain sight in the midst of cheesy hotel art – it could be a metaphor for Scope in the Hamptons itself!

One notable trend here was the presence of Latin American artists. Perhaps their energy has something to do with the dramatic social forces currently rocking Latin America -- though this only makes their presence at the chichi American beach town stick out all the more. Among the most memorable was Cuban-born **Liset Castillo**, a veteran of the 8th Havana Biennale, at Brooklyn's **Black and White Gallery**. On first glance, Castillo's works appear to be the labor of the world's most disciplined pre-schooler: her photos present images of the incredibly rigorous architectural forms that she sculpts out of sand. The large format images enlarge the child-sized constructions into monumental cloverleaves and interlocking highways, and the resulting display of simultaneous discipline and fragility makes a nicely ambiguous statement about the instability of society.

The work of the duo **Guerra de la Paz** (like Castillo, originally from Cuba) at Miami's cool **Liquid Blue Gallery** also invests materials



Wayne White
Sorta
 2005
 Edsel Williams Fine Art, East Hampton



Liset Castillo
Departure Point series
 2003
 Black and White Gallery, Brooklyn
 \$5,500 - Edition of 5



Guerra de la Paz
Bonsai
 2005
 Liquid Blue Gallery, Miami



Gabriela Maciel
Puzzle
 2005
 Praxis, New York

with social significance: constructing works entirely of salvaged fabric and materials, GdIP makes a valiant effort to call attention to the waste of U.S. society, harnessing its debris and showing how it can be turned into something beautiful, as in their serene bonsai tree, meticulously crafted from found fabrics -- even the bed of pebbles around its trunk is made up of individual, tiny knots of material. Liquid Blue also displayed work by the Argentine artist **Agustina Woodgate**, who weaves her and her lovers' hair into a delicate, child-like drawing of a couple embracing.

Rio-born artist **Gabriela Maciel** also spun art from common fabrics at the booth of New York's **Praxis** gallery. The artist twists and knots synthetic fibers into lively sculptural forms that dripped from the walls of the booth. The knotting together of the fibers is clearly also symbolic of the knotting together of human relationships, as in *Duo* (2005), in which two different colors of massed fabric grip each other with a combination of fierceness and affection. Perhaps most engaging of all (literally) was *Puzzle*, a construction of knots ingeniously constructed so that viewers could detach and put them back together as they liked to form different sculptures.

East Hamptons' own **Solar** gallery (which specializes in Latin American art) featured works by the Venezuelan artist **Lucia Pizzani**, who was on hand along with curator **Esperanza León** greeting fair visitors. Her installation *Amazon-City* (2005) presents color photographs of an isolated jungle community in Venezuela (accessible only by canoe, Pizzani explained) via little plastic slide viewers. This method of presentation heightens the sense of remoteness of the jungle culture depicted, while at the same time giving the images of this rough locale a jewel-like beauty.

Another work by Pizzani, *Guindadero* (2005), featured two photos of stuffed animals seemingly discarded, dangling from clotheslines, flanking an image of a little girl. The triptych was itself presented hung from a clothesline, so that the form reflected back onto the content, depicting the rural child as herself tossed aside by society. The work is \$2,500.

More explicitly on the political side was the *Dictator Inc.* project from Chelsea's **WEISSPOLLACK Galleries**. Artists **James McLeod** and **Joshua Weintraub** presented product lines branded with the names of (in)famous world leaders, such as "Pinochet Pinot Noir" and "Gaddafi Coffee." The unsettling combination of commercialism and ugly political reality (and goofy alliteration) stood out as nicely challenging amidst the show's light fare -- though **Allan D. Hasty's** suicide-bomber-themed outfit was enough to make one slightly queasy.

Other fair-friendly, crowd-pleasing gestures came from a trio of Chelsea galleries, including the simulated taxidermy of **Johnston Foster** at **RARE**, conjuring fearsome animals out of carpet and packing materials; **John Powers'** Sol LeWitt-inspired gridded boxes at **Virgil de Voldère Gallery**, modeled on the proportions of a cigarette box and stacked or bonded together to form different sculptural constructions; and **Richard Klein's** sculptures incorporating found glass objects at New York's **Caren Golden Fine Art**, works which gave off radiant halos in the sunlight filling Hampton Hall during the opening day.

All of these pieces seemed to be at home at the event, nicely straddling the Scope Hamptons directive to expose viewers to something resembling a new experience and the need for nifty collectable objects. But it was outside, on the sweaty, sunlit lawn,



Lucia Pizzani
Guindadero
 2005
 Solar Gallery, East Hampton



James McLeod and Joshua Weintraub
From Dictator
 2005
 WEISSPOLLACK Galleries, New York



Johnston Foster
High Plains Drifter
 2005
 Rare, New York



John Powers
Orchid
 2005
 Virgil de Voldère Gallery/SlingShot Project, New York

that two special projects most directly thematized the spirit of the day.

The first was **Charles Truett's** *CBTSA* (an acronym for "Charles Badgett Truett Space Administration"), a tent in which a data collection station offered you the chance to put an item from your pocket into a plastic bag along with a description of its significance -- all for the good of pseudo-anthropology! A table displayed items that had been previously collected in small plastic boxes, including pen caps, lost teeth, lucky silver dollars and the inevitable empty condom wrapper. In a commercial art fair centered around flattering the high-class visitor's sense of himself as smart, this piece cut out the middle man and put the **public's self-love** on direct display.

And finally, there was *Lifeboat*, a project presented by **Mary Mattingly** and **Paul Middendorf** "providing education, training, and security for the Hamptons and other Micronations." Walking the fine line between cutting edge institutional critique and *New Yorker* cartoon, the artists presented a miniature Hamptons in the form of a fully stocked pool complete with a tower of Evian water, American flag and martinis at the ready -- leaving it nicely ambiguous whether this weekend the artists had taken over the Hamptons, or the Hamptons had taken over the artists.

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Richard Klein

Eyeful

2001

Caren Golden Fine Art, New York



Mary Mattingly and Paul Middendorf

Lifeboat

2005