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DEBRIS



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DEBRIS

TO BE
INTO SMALL HOLE
EAD OF SCREW
TIGHTEN SCREW.

IN THREE INCHES OF
LE

IF FIRE AND ELECTRIC
DUCT TO BE INSTALLED
ELECTRICIAN ONLY.

WIRES ARE LOCATED
THREE INCHES OF BALLAST,
IRE RATED FOR AT LEAST
(194°F).







DEBRIS theory

From trash comes art – or at least it did in the recent “art experiment” held by artists Blue Curry and Heino Schmid. This showing was labelled an experiment as opposed to an exhibition because of its non-traditional location and subject matter. Tin cans, bottles, electronic equipment, old shoes, discarded toys and appliance parts, among other objects, were collected and displayed in this one night event held on July 7th in an empty shop space in Palmdale. For these artists, this type of experiment is about pushing the Bahamian understanding of “gallery” and “art” into new territories.

As the name of the show suggests, DEBRIS was comprised entirely of found material. Things that others discarded as useless trash were reclaimed and carefully displayed to be scrutinised and admired as art. These “found objects” are as unique and singular as any piece of art in the artists’ view. They have the curious ability to be both lost and found at the same time; having lost their original intended use and owner they have found a new purpose and status as art object. Decidedly not pretty, immovable and temporary, the works on show would leave the average art enthusiast scratching their head as nothing was for sale and most of it was destroyed the following day.

This type of art production raises interesting questions regarding the purpose art serves in the Bahamas. “The question of art as

commodity is vital in contemporary Bahamian artistic discourse” suggests Schmid, “Why make a work of art if you can’t sell it? This is a common question among Bahamian artists and it contributes directly to the type of art produced.” Taking the consumer, the art buyer, out of the equation these two artists have freed themselves to work entirely on creative instinct and to set their own aesthetic rules. As Curry added, “The experience was a freeing one for both of us in that we only had four days to put this experiment together which meant that things had to be done quickly and with a looseness that we are perhaps unaccustomed to. Working this way allowed ideas to develop organically and limited time meant that any overly critical thinking had to be put on hold.”

The place and way that art is shown is also being questioned in their choice of venue. Formerly a clothing store, a video rental centre and an electronics shop, the space at No.7 Alexander Street can now add art gallery to its list of reincarnations. Both artists wanted to work with a “non-gallery” space in order to comment on the limited number of spaces that exist for artists to show work in Nassau and the lack of a private gallery system. These deficiencies have contributed to a severe lack of critical discussion about art in The Bahamas. “If we as artists don’t begin to branch out and take these inadequacies into our own hands, nobody will do it for us and we will suffer from our own inertia. Art can be in the National Gallery or the Central Bank, but it can also be in Palmdale or Over the Hill ... as artists we just have to make sure that it keeps happening wherever it can on whatever budget available” commented Curry. The artists spent a minimal amount putting this show together.

Untouched since the last tenant moved out, all of the sparsely lit rooms of the shop space were open for viewers to explore. Nothing was hung on the walls and most of the art pieces lay on the floor to be inspected and walked around. In what used to be the back office, the store surveillance cameras allowed a voyeuristic peek at the movements of others. A collection of rusted floor fan covers hanging in the storage room turned and twisted throwing their shadows over the walls. One of the most intriguing pieces in the show was a mattress supported by four wooden palettes. Around this “bed” were objects you might find in your own bedroom: a pair of shoes, bedside reading material, trousers slung over a chair. Only when you enter the next room and see a photograph projected onto a screen do you realise that this is not an artistic construct, but rather the relocation of an actual bed found behind the shop.

Curry explained: “After working with the discarded objects we found on the inside of the shop we turned our attention to the outside. In the backyard we found a bed where neighbours said a man used to sleep – but he had not been seen recently. The composition of the bed was so striking we decided to move it into the gallery space in its entirety.” This artwork, aesthetically speaking, was therefore entirely fashioned by this homeless person or “joneser”. The artists meticulously moved every piece of the outside bedroom inside with great attention being paid to the placement of the associated ephemera such as bits of paper, bottle caps and pennies as not to disturb the original composition. By bringing it indoors into a gallery space the viewer is forced not

only to consider the piece as an artwork but also to contextualize the social conditions under which the work was made. At the end of the one night experiment the mattress and all of its surrounding paraphernalia was put back outside and left exactly as it was originally encountered.

Probably the most alarming part of this show is the fact that many of the objects collected were found on beaches in Yamacraw and South Beach. The bottles and rusted cans that packed the cupboards might not be a surprising find, but the over four dozen shoes displayed in a pile were also found scattered along the length of a beach. In one place, several yards from the shoreline, televisions, furniture and appliances were stacked high; birds nesting in and around them. Even a rusted projection screen was found buried in the sand. “These beaches are being used as unrestricted dumping grounds. Perhaps seeing this may force viewers to consider the role they play in the contamination of the environment and therefore the creation of these works” says Schmid.

DEBRIS was strategically opened on the evening after the inauguration of the *Third National Exhibition (NE3)* at the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas in order to provide a counterpoint in national discussions about art. It is hoped that viewers who saw both shows were able to surmise the full spectrum of contemporary art in the country – which may just be entering its most active period to date. “The Bahamas is in the midst of a cultural renaissance” states Curry. “After Independence we gravitated toward American

culture and allowed it to eclipse the value of our own artistic output. Now we are realising that Bahamians can produce world-class art and are giving it the respect it deserves." This newfound confidence is translating directly into respect internationally.

The exhibition, *Funky Nassau: Recovering an Identity*, which both artists participated in at the Nassauischer Kunstverein in Wiesbaden, Germany, is an excellent example of this rebirth of Bahamian art. Garnering the attention of the national German press and that of international critics, the show was described an "exciting contribution" because all of the artists involved "defy the traditional image of the island paradise."¹ This type of exposure allows Bahamian art to participate in an international dialogue that it has never been able to participate in before. According to Curry and Schmid, their German experience was a catalyst for this new "DEBRIS theory" they are experimenting with.

Using appropriated spaces and found materials on a minimal budget and with a limited engagement, DEBRIS is not a singular event, but rather an ongoing project that will take place in many different venues in the future

Nassau, Bahamas. July 14, 2006

¹ "Blut, Sand, Wasser," Christoph Schütte, Kultur, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Nr.87, 12 April 2006.

















