

# ARTFORUM

DIARY

## TROPICAL MODERNISM

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Backporch in Bolivia performing a free show at Brooklyn Museum's Target First Saturday.

**At 7:12 p.m.** on a Saturday we convened at AJ's apartment in Boerum Hill, a neighborhood long home to literary figures like "that one character from *10:04*," and maybe Jonathan Safran Foer. I had come straight in a Juno from La Guardia off a Cape Air flight, just hours after meeting in Cambridge with K. Michael Hays. (United prices were cheaper, but politically unsavory.)

Brooklyn Museum was opening its James Polshek-designed doors to anybody and everybody, another evening of Who's Who shot through with the spirit of democracy, just as Dewey always imagined it. A very chic-looking trio, standing in line behind us, had moved into the neighborhood from Bedford ("the one in Manhattan"). We laid bets on whether they were poly. A couple in matching camel-hair pea coats tried futilely to bring their Afghan Hound inside, while AJ couldn't stop mouthing, "Balenciaga."

While we prowled *Infinite Blue*, a (very much finite) collection of museum assets prominently featuring the color blue, we tried to remember what wall labels were called, only to be disappointed upon looking up the answer. "I just feel like it needs a -taph, -graph, or -thet suffix, you know?" I wondered. AJ stared at his iPhone. We were standing in front of Samuel Levi Jones' *Blue Pill*, designed to challenge "the assumed authority of institutional texts on history, law, medicine, and higher education."

"One problem with contemporary art," I said, "is that even though some kind of conceptual 'integrity' exists, it's only known privately by the artist, and therefore is completely closed off to the audience. It's really a bizarre reversal of the typical effect triage." Everyone agreed that paintings which rely on labels to explicate their purpose pose a specific phenomenological challenge: after all, what happens to a painting when you know it's been named off of *The Matrix*?

We wandered down the hall past 18th century portraits of Incan Kings, a series of paintings and busts playing cleverly with other public visual vocabularies such as the "meme" and "reaction GIF." "Wouldn't this make a great TFW photo?" one Gen Z-er with an Apple Watch asked as he passed out of earshot.

The idea stuck with us through the Rodin statuary, and we made a quick exit circa the battered *Balzac Monumental Head*. "It looks like a mid-tier French bureaucrat receiving oral exultation in exchange for paperwork." A round of tired puns ensued, riffing on Honoré's family name. Next to a collection of bronze appendages, a guest could be heard loudly commenting, "Nice."



Left: The artist Bridgette McNeal holding a martini. Right: Performance-art team Radical Blitzkrieg.

Given the high concentration of carpenter's glasses, one can only assume most of the night's visitors had come to see *One Basquiat*, the new exhibition featuring a single painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat. For those impressed by money, the sheer capital worth of the painting dominates experiences of the canvas: dimly lit from the sides, and complete with rows of communal benches, it had something like the effect of an altarpiece or religious iconography. AJ: "All I can think about is the fact that I'm staring at like thirty million dollars." The NYPD officer stationed stoically in the corner appeared to agree.

We "gathered ourselves" (exposure to diverse cultures is a must) in the second-floor bathroom outside Arts of Korea before proceeding to Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, the museum's crown jewel *éternel*. A dance party was well underway on the third floor, and blaring traphouse could be heard from the mezzanine level. "Is that music?" an elderly woman said as she walked along the balconies. "I think I just saw Chris Kraus" someone said after she'd passed. We stuck around to salivate over a particularly sumptuous Art Deco study set up just around the corner from Saudi photographs of Mecca.

There was a brief, windswept lull between Brooklyn Museum and our next event of the night, an “architecture and labor” party at Prime Produce in Hell’s Kitchen, so we stopped at Mitchell’s near Prospect to get collard greens and drumsticks. Unlike Peaches Hot House, none of the fellow customers were members of the creative class.

The quick transition from a public space to the privacy of each other's company had left us both in need of a drink. AJ put on his best impression of Frank O’Hara, improvising a stanza between sips of Sixpoint: *Since the symphony was late / sharing food with someone is better than any artwork / That is why I’m going to have to leave you now / When the orange orchids of San Sebastian don’t have to wait for anyone.* Nice, I said. “The second line was earnest,” he replied. Nice, I answered. “Orange you glad I didn’t say banana?” AJ inquired. “It’s a New York joke, because only New Yorkers say ‘orange’ like ‘aren’tchya.’”

Hell’s Kitchen may be the least fashionable neighborhood in Manhattan, but that didn’t prevent us from enjoying ourselves. Spotting Chuck Close with a friend near the laser-lit DJ lounge, we made our approach, only for it to turn out to be an ad consultant standing next to a lecturer “on hiatus” from the New School. We wanted to ask, but, you know. One doesn’t do that.

██████████ De Martino, rumored to be writing a book on the Italian mafia, tells us over Coronas and sweet-and-sour how when she was at the Met for the Hockney exhibition everyone smelled like weed (*s. diesel?*). “It’s still surreal to me... it’s 2018,” a casual quipped from the corner. It was at that moment ██████████’s music producer boyfriend ██████████ Marion pulled her away for a one-on-one in the gender neutral bathrooms. Ah, youth. AJ and I were forced to go our own way across the dance floor, where Zak Hap met us with updates on his dayjob. “I sold my Ripple and bought Ether. But now I’m thinking, maybe I sell my Ether and buy Ripple.”

An hour later we stood near the exit as AJ held court on the Oulipo because he was “taking a class” for his MFA program. Like all fashion-forward parties, the music was too strange for anyone to comfortably pass judgment on, and too loud to do more than go through conversational motions. Dan Taeyoung, manning the lighting, was making heroic

attempts at small talk. “What?” AJ said. “What?” Dan Taeyoung said. “I don’t know” AJ replied.

Outside over a smoke, a quiff-cut in a Carhartt administered strong words on the “anti-nicotine circlejerk.” “All My Friends,” Brooklyn’s dance anthem *de rigueur* going on a decade, could be heard faintly through the entrance doors: the cue for anyone whose career arc hadn’t peaked in 2007 to leave. We were just in time to catch the end of a Rangers Game at Lincoln Park Bar & Grill. A current of warm air — unseasonable in its equatorial humidity — had slunk into Manhattan from the south, and we walked freely for a while. “Don’t you have a Tinder date?” AJ asked me around 3:15. “It’s Coffee Meets Bagel, and I don’t want to pay for condoms. Isn’t art enough eroticism for the night?” With eyebrows furrowed, AJ was forced to concur.

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