



February 28, 2008

## ARTS&LETTERS

### Contemporary Art and Animal Heads

#### Art Around Town

By [KATE TAYLOR](#)

February 28, 2008

It was an exciting moment at the Park Avenue Armory yesterday afternoon: the unveiling of the tequila bar.

Probably not since the Gilded Age has the old building seen as much partying as it is likely to see during the Whitney Biennial, which opens to the public next Thursday. Besides the tequila bar (of which more later), the six weeks of the biennial will include dance parties, rock concerts, a gypsy banquet, and a sleepover. And, yes, all of these are "art."

When the curators announced that the biennial this year would be expanding to the Armory, about 10 blocks away from the museum, it was clear that the presentation would be different from your typical art exhibition. The Armory is a huge, gothically ramshackle 19th-century clubhouse, full of dim hallways, crumbling period rooms, and walls mounted with giant, rather desiccated animal heads. Inspired by this setting, 37 artists have created site-specific installations and performances.

The works are being produced, and largely paid for, by the Art Production Fund, the not-for-profit founded by Yvonne Force and Doreen Remen. The Art Production Fund has also produced, among other projects, Aaron Young's "Greeting Card" — in the Armory's [Drill Hall](#) last fall — and Tim Noble and Sue Webster's "Electric Fountain," which opened last night at Rockefeller Plaza.

To fabricate and install the works at the Armory, the Art Production Fund has hired an array of theatrical set and lighting designers, audiovisual producers, and others. Yesterday afternoon, these people were running on adrenaline, like the crew of a complicated stage production that was going into tech rehearsals.

In the upstairs hallway, [Casey Fremont](#), the director of operations at the Art Production Fund, was dodging workers carrying large pieces of scaffolding as she conferred with the multimedia producer, [Mike Skinner](#), about music for the tequila bar. Meanwhile, the president of the Seventh Regiment

Armory Conservancy, [Rebecca Robertson](#), was admiring the bamboo tent being installed in one of the rooms by the artist DJ Olive the Audio Janitor (also known as [Gregor Asch](#)).

Mr. Asch, a long-haired, bearded gentleman who exuded the musky perfume of several long days of work with few showers, was in his room supervising the tent's construction. The tent, built out of bamboo tied together, as Mr. Asch noted, with traditional Chinese knots, will be a kind of resting place for visitors to the biennial. There will be nine cots and four speakers, which will play Mr. Asch's latest piece in a series of musical works he calls "Sleeping Pills."

Ms. Robertson noted how well the tent interacted with the moose heads mounted high up on the wall.

"Oh, the moose need dusting, by the way," Mr. Asch said politely. Next, Ms. Fremont, Mr. Skinner, and Ms. Robertson ran downstairs to check out the tequila bar, which is actually an artwork by [Eduardo Sarabia](#). A few years ago, Mr. Sarabia had some special tequila made and imported to New York. When he moved to [Berlin](#), he took some of it with him and opened a sporadic, unlicensed bar in the basement of an art school his friend was starting. His work at the Armory is an elaborated version of the Berlin bar.

The physical bar is covered with blue-and-white tiles, which tell the story of Mr. Sarabia's tequila — from the harvesting of the agave to the bottling in New York, culminating in a scene of Mr. Sarabia in a swimming pool with several women in bikinis. Above the bar, neon signs will hang from the antique deer heads.

Down the hall, [Marina Rosenfeld](#) was fussing with her speakers. Ms. Rosenfeld is doing two interrelated works at the Armory. One will be a performance in the Drill Hall called "Teenage Lontano" — an adaptation, with teenage volunteers, of a composition by György Ligeti from 1967. The other is a permanent installation called "Teenage Lontano / 16 Channels," in which two huge speakers play sound from the rehearsals of "Teenage Lontano."

Other works were under construction all around the building: the booth where Bert Rodriguez will give free therapy sessions, and an installation of wrecked neon signs, scavenged from Miami after Hurricane Ivan by the artist Gretchen Skogerson.

On the fourth floor, a large room has been converted into a movie theater, where a silent film by [Amy Granat](#) and Drew Heitzler will be screened while a musical group including Ms. Granat plays accompaniment from an adjacent kitchen.

Mr. Skinner pointed out the weird, haunted-house features of the fourth floor: an abandoned bar, which will be brought back into service for the film screening, and dusty storage rooms that the Seventh Regiment labeled with sometimes creepy literalism.

"Room 5: rugs, curtains, screens, and misc. fabric," one sign read. And on another: "Room 6: damaged art and animal heads."

Ms. Robertson, for one, is thrilled with how contemporary art promises to bring the Armory to life. "With this mix of stuff," she said, "it ends up feeling less like a mausoleum and more like a vibrant place."