

ARTFORUM

Condo Camping

LONDON 01.26.17



Left: Artist Martine Syms with dealer Bridget Donahue, hosted by Sadie Coles. Right: Dealers Jaqueline Martins and Sylvia Kouvali at Rodeo. (All photos: Kate Sutton)

IN THE SERIES OF LECTURES that now constitute *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf made the case that for a woman to write anything of substance, she must have access to resources—most notably, the titular claim to space—that could free her from the tedium of social convention. The argument was radical at the time in proposing the domestic sphere as a space for transgression and reinvention, rather than just a convenient place to keep your housewives.

Woolf may not be namechecked in the press release for Sadie Coles's current group show, "Room," but her thinking pervades it. Curated by Laura Lord, the exhibition explores how fifteen artists (all, incidentally, female) have built, modeled, or reinterpreted the various architectures surrounding them—from the crusted nicotine scab of Sarah Lucas's smoking parlor to the pharmalike capsules of Andrea Zittel's *Escape Vehicles* to Andra Ursuta's dreamy, dollhouse rendition of a room from her childhood home.

In a separate space at the back of the gallery, dynamo New York-based dealer Bridget Donahue quite literally had a room to herself, which she filled with "The Easy Demands," a solo by the mighty Martine Syms. The arrangement was part of the gallery-sharing initiative Condo, a "collaborative exhibition" that launched its sophomore edition at venues across London the weekend before last.



Left: Artist Tschabalala Self at Parasol Unit. Right: Artist Jasmina Cibic.

In a moment when art fairs have purportedly rendered brick-and-mortar outfits obsolete, Condo reasserts the indispensability of the gallery space. Touting the benefits of an art fair without the bills, the project counters the doldrums of January—traditionally a slow month for the city's art scene (something this week's London Art Fair hoped to change)—by having galleries give up part (or all) of their space to international visitors. Participating galleries cover only their own expenses, while also chipping a little into the modest pot for PR and an opening party. "Last year, they had a closing screening program too," Koppe Astner's Emma Astner told me. "But by the time it got to Sunday evening, everyone was too exhausted to make it to the theater." She paused, like, adding: "But, you know, like, *good* exhausted."

Spearheaded by Carlos/Ishikawa's Vanessa Carlos, Condo was conceived in the aisles—or, more accurately, death-trap stairwells—of Liste, during a conversation with Jeanine Hofland. At the time, the Amsterdam-based (now itinerant) dealer had been experimenting with turning her space over to other galleries for a project she called A Petite Fair. "I was really struck by the generosity of that act," Carlos recounted.

"Generosity" would become Condo's guiding mantra. The initiative launched last year with sixteen visiting galleries (well, *fifteen* visiting and then Dave Hoyland's London-based gallery, Seventeen, because, as The Sunday Painter's Will Jarvis put it, "Everyone loves Dave") setting up shop in eight local spaces, including Rodeo, Arcadia Missa, and Project Native Informant. This year the event swelled to fifteen London galleries hosting twenty-one visitors (well, *twenty* visitors, and, again, Seventeen, because everyone still loves Dave). While conceived as an art-fair substitute for cash-strapped younger galleries, Condo's sophomore edition attracted staples like Greengrassi, Herald St, The Approach, and Maureen Paley. "We had to think carefully

about how to grow this," Carlos admitted. "It was important that the bigger galleries coming in share that same spirit of experimentation and openness to collaboration."

Perhaps reflective of the company it keeps, Condo launched party-first. Participating galleries forwent Friday openings (Coles excepted) in favor of all-day previews on Saturday and Sunday. Otherwise, the daunting geographic sprawl—from the East End to Vauxhall to Peckham—would have necessitated the kind of social Sophie's choices counter to the collaborative spirit of the event. Instead, early Friday evening, the thirty-six participating galleries and their guests pooled into The Union Club, a historic Georgian townhouse tucked in the middle of Soho. Quaint, yes, but not necessarily designed to host Condo-sized crowds. Fortunately, the venue had recently taken over part of the building next door and adapted it into an upstairs dancefloor, relieving some of the crush at the entrance. "This club's like FIAC," mother's tank station's Finola Jones chimed in. "They're always finding new spaces behind some door or another."



Left: Dealer Max Mayer with curator Francesca Gavin at Tayyab's. Right: K11 curator Victor Wang at Tayyab's.

The quirky layout gave each room its own distinct flavor. In the main bar, dealers like Jones and Maureen Paley rubbed shoulders with Frieze Art Fair director Victoria Siddall (characteristically radiant, even after having just flown in from the San Francisco fairs), the Tate's Gregor Muir, Chisenhale's Polly Staple, Art Basel's Alia Al-Senussi, and curator Omar Kholeif, while Hauser & Wirth's Selvi May Akyildiz showed artist Issy Wood her newly acquired "I ♥ Caravaggio" T-shirt, a souvenir from a last-minute trip to Rome. In a portrait-lined parlor upstairs, Gasworks's Alessio Antoniolli caught up with Serpentine curators Amal Khalaf and Rebecca Lewin and artists Cécile B. Evans and Yuri Pattison, while in the smoky back bar Ingrid Moe and Lloyd Corporation's Sebastian Lloyd Rees and Ali Eisa kept it Nordic. Throughout it all, an amiable Oscar Murillo sat stationed at the door with the list girls. "I can't decide if I want to come in yet," he shrugged.

To the casual observer, it looked like an art-fair party at its best. But the abundance of good vibes might have had less to do with the generous libations and more with the fact that there was decidedly less at stake for the dealers in the room, many of whom struggle to regularly make rent, underwrite artists' increasingly complicated commissions, and still keep up appearances on the international fair circuit. "You hear people brag about skipping one fair or the other these days, like we should be congratulating them for their self-discipline," Jones told me. "The truth is, if you're not in one of these art capitals, then the fairs just aren't an option. We have to do them."

But Condo is not about bringing proverbial bumpkins to the Big City; if anything, this style of international exchange grows more vital for London with each passing day, as Brexit snowballs toward reality. "I haven't seen my passport in seven weeks," Project Native Informant's Stephan Tanbin Sastrawidjaja confessed, citing the demands of the residency process. In a culture that conflates ubiquity with credibility, can a young dealer afford to sit on the sidelines for that long? Certainly more than they could afford to pack up and start all over somewhere else.



Left: Dealers Nick Hackworth, Carl Kostyal, and Dave Hoyland at The Sunday Painter. Right: The Sunday Painter's Tom Cole and Will Jarvis with artist Emma Hart.

While Condo emphasized exhibitions over the politics of geographic fluidity, its map sang of Brexit blues. Designed by Sam de Groot in a throwback to ancient cartography that superimposed a giant serpent over the Thames, the map's double-sided format featured two high-contrast color schemes, riffing off the EU flag on one side, and the Saint George's flag ("It's like the racist English flag," Carlos explained) on the other. More troubling to some, however, was the ambitious sprawl of the territory that the map covered—particularly after a late night at the Union Club made Saturday's noon kick-off feel decidedly less generous than it originally sounded.

We began our day at Carlos / Ishikawa, where Murillo unveiled his massive new installation, *Human Resources*, which peopled a space-swallowing set of rudimentary wooden bleachers with a collection of effigies from the artist's home country of Colombia. While traditionally these human figurines are burned at the end of the year in a ritual supposed to bring good luck, here they stared blankly over an Ouyang Chun triptych brought by ShanghART, and Antwerp-based Timmy Simoen's contribution, a curious Aztec-themed, model roller-coaster ride by the artist Yutaka Sone. Carlos and ShanghART's Serein Liu were talking me through the process of putting the show together, when Hans Castillo, a family friend of Murillo's now living in

London, entered the space, took a seat, and broke into what sounded like... yup, a Spanish version of "Hotel California".

"You have to do something a bit special for something like this," reasoned *dépendance's* Michael Callies. The Brussels gallery had temporarily settled into the upstairs at Maureen Paley, where they had centered a display of works by Richard Aldrich, Sergej Jensen, and Haegue Yang around a Nora Schultz floorpiece. Tying the room together was a subtle paint job that mapped out the placement of each piece on the opposite wall, creating a kind of shadow play that resonated nicely with Paley's own group show downstairs, curated by writer Michael Bracewell. As the veteran East-Enders noted, the initiative wasn't just about bringing people out East, but bringing part of the East to the West by extending opening hours to Sunday. "Originally the East End galleries were open on Sundays because that's when you go to the markets – to Columbia Road, to Brick Lane," Paley told us. She stressed that the international aspect of Condo could not be undervalued, as a display of collaboration, rather than competition – the usual model found at art fairs.



Left: Dealers Phillida Reid and David Southard. Right: Newly named director of Goldsmith's forthcoming gallery Sarah McCrory and The Approach's Jake Miller at Sadie Coles.

"For us, the exhibition process came about quite naturally," Nicky Verber recalled, across the way at Herald St. The show revolved around a series of Bruce McLean photographs from Berlin's Tanya Leighton, who also brought Sam Anderson, Pavel Büchler, and a mirrored piece by architects Robert & Trix Haussmann. These works were rounded out with some perky Amalia Pica pieces from Herald St, accented by contributions from Martin Boyce and Pádraig Timoney, courtesy of The Modern Institute. "We didn't realize how many links there were between these artists until we started putting them together in the space," Verber marveled.

Our next stops included The Approach (hosting Simone Subal), Vilma Gold (hosting Neue Alte Brücke), and Emalin (hosting Gregor Staiger), followed by a quick lunch at Shoreditch House, before zipping down to Peckham for The Sunday Painter (hosting Jaqueline Martins, Stereo and Seventeen) and Arcadia Missa. The last of these had given over its space to Oslo's VI, VII gallery, who paired Than Hussein Clark's comely "Constant Lampposts" with Emma Talbot's *You Do Not Belong to You (Universal Story)*, a hand-painted silk tent illustrating the artist's intricate theories about the linkages of the moon and menstruation. Suffice to say, it's good to be in sync.

While galleries were free to celebrate their Saturday nights as they pleased, Carlos booked a catchall table for forty at Tayyabs, a popular Punjabi spot steps from Whitechapel. "Careful how you breathe in here," K11 curator Victor Wang warned me, mere seconds after I had already inadvertently inhaled some of the permanent spice cloud hanging heavily in the air. As my seatmates Francesca Gavin and Max Mayer caught up over curries, pakora, and papadum, it wasn't just spice hanging around; a club-clad crowd teetered on their heels behind each table, the waiting area downstairs having long since spilled out into the streets. "It's always that way," someone mused. "I mean, the food's good and cheap, but the seating situation is just legit insane."



Left: Chewdays' Tobias Czudej with Max Mayer's Gloria Hasnay. Right: Architecture critic Brendan McGettrick and Zain Masud at Southard Reid.

Leaving aside the evening's intrigues to WhatsApp (but seriously, where was her phone...?), my Sunday morning moved at a decidedly more leisurely pace, beginning with Union Pacific, which was hosting Misako Rosen and Jans Kreps, before continuing to Project Native Informant (mother's tankstation and Queer Thoughts), Rodeo (Supportico Lopez), and Southard Reid (Koppe Astner.) The Central stops covered, I soldiered on to Vauxhall for Greengrassi, where *Proyectos Ultravioleta* revisited some of the same themes as "Room" with the "These Architectures We Make," a thoughtful selection commingling Felipe Mujica's geometric-chic banners, Johanna Unzueta's playful felt pipes, and Elisabeth Wild's elegant magazine collages.

Architecture took on a more foreboding association in Chewday's "The Middle Class Goes to Heaven." A collaboration with Max Mayer, the exhibition takes its title from a slideshow by Nicolás Guagnini that pairs images of drab modernist housing complexes with phrases capturing the uniquely aspirational malaise of the middle class—"health insurance," "paid vacation," "couples therapy," etc.—in English, Spanish, French, and German. The slideshow shuffled on alongside a set of photographs and dried samples of cemetery weeds by Jeff Geys, as well as a trio of ancient Egyptian funerary objects stationed at a table by the door. The casual era-hopping implied that hard times were here to stay. Let's at least hope this spirit of collaboration proves half as enduring.

— Kate Sutton