

ARTFORUM

SCHOOL'S IN FOR SUMMER

A visit to the Campus

By Lola Kramer ☼

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View of the Campus. All photos: Lola Kramer.

The usual last-minute bustle was taking place on a large shuttle bus parked and humming in front of 48 Walker Street in Manhattan's TriBeCa neighborhood. It was the Saturday before Independence Day, and the bus was due to leave for Hudson at 8:15 AM. I was headed out for the grand opening of the Campus, a new exhibition and project space housed in a former school building founded by six New York galleries: Bortolami, James Cohan, Anton Kern, Andrew Kreps, kurimanzutto, and kaufmann repetto. "All aboard the Gallerina Express!" one caffeinated gallerist remarked. As we merged north on the FDR, an assortment of staff from each gallery found their seats, passing around pastries and water bottles. Like an antisocial adolescent disturbed by the possibility of repeat-after-me camp songs, I made myself as invisible as possible in the back.

The vehicle pulled up to the former Claverack School just in time to see the first burst of guests admiring Virginia Overton's enormous wind chime in front of the Campus (never has a group rushed in more eagerly to fill a school in summer). A "class photo" by Miguel Calderón titled *Secundaria #4* (Secondary #4), 2003, hung in the space's entryway, instantly setting the tone. Calderón's tongue-in-cheek take on this genre of picture—depicting white-uniformed students in sunglasses—seemed as though it were an outtake from Wes Anderson's *Rushmore*.

Around the corner in a light-filled room off the entryway, Barbara Kasten, one of the most ageless and consistently stylish humans I've ever encountered, was seated patiently in a room where her vibrant Cibachrome prints from the 1980s hung on a colorful, geometric Nathalie du Pasquier mural. Kasten's ethereal smile bewitched each person who lined up to wish her a happy birthday. (Still fabulous at eighty-eight!)

A beaming Timo Kappeller, the exhibition's curator, greeted visitors in the hallway. "This was a K–12 school built in 1951. It was abandoned in the '90s," he said, explaining the Campus's origins, which the sextet of galleries discovered during Covid. Fabricator Nick Hochstetler, the mastermind behind the renovation, relocated upstate during the pandemic to oversee the construction of three wings for climatized art storage. Kappeller continued, "When Andrew Kreps approached me two years ago and asked if I wanted to help organize a show, we started coming up with proposals.... All the galleries had ideas." Still, ultimately, it came down to organizing something that generated conversations between the programs, like inviting artists not affiliated with the Campus's founders, such as Rachel Harrison and NXTHVN. (For instance, one meaningful contribution—a cast-aluminum plaque that reads, "TURN SOFT AND LOVELY ANYTIME YOU HAVE A CHANCE"—was created by Jenny Holzer, the

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preeminent Conceptualist whose 1989 installation, first presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, is back on view at the institution until September 29.)

I accompanied Kappeller and artist Sanya Kantarovsky into a classroom to admire the latter's work, staged in a room with sculpture by Thea Djordjadze. Conch-size objects made of wood, papier-mâché, and plaster lined a windowsill. At once alluring and unsettling, they reminded me of Duchamp's bronze-and-dental-plastic *Coin de chasteté* (*Wedge of Chastity*), 1954–63. Kantarovsky's figurative pastels, *Development and Regression*, both 2024, were made on the classroom's original blackboards. "I found this transparent gesso with ground pumice to make [the surfaces] more receptive to pastel." Kantarovsky, who is not represented by any collaborating galleries, said he was happy to be paired with Djordjadze, an artist whose abstract constructions invite closer inspection so that one may appreciate their textural and material nuances.

Rachel Harrison's abstract, pastel-tone sculpture *The Excavator*, 2023, featuring a weathered shovel leaning against it, was placed off-center inside a sparsely appointed room with framed drawings hung on chalkboards by the late Beatrice Wood, a "muse" to Duchamp. Because of this clever curatorial pairing, Harrison's shovel made me think of Duchamp's 1915 readymade, *In Advance of a Broken Arm*.

Back in the hallway, I ran into artist Madeline Hollander (the person responsible for the haunted choreography in Jordan Peele's 2019 horror film *Us*), whose son, Max, played with his mother's Möbius strip-like aluminum sculpture, *Charlie*, 2023, which came from her last exhibition at Bortolami. Hollander created the work using a formula that, with one good push, would allow it to be turned into a kind of perpetual-motion machine. I told her I had watched her Art Basel Parcours performance, *Sub-Clique*, on Instagram Live a few weeks ago. The piece was inspired by the ancient Swiss bacchanal *Basler Fasnacht* (*Carnival of Basel*) and involved dancers who, according to the artist, were masked by "layers of carnival confetti pulp," and dressed in street-cleaning uniforms, parading handmade municipal manhole covers through the *Strassen* of the city and over the Rhine. Unable to travel to Switzerland during the fair, Hollander had to watch her work unfold over social media. In fact, she had choreographed the entire event via FaceTime from New York using a proxy on-site producer, pulling consecutive all-nighters to accommodate the regional time differences. She told me that her next performance in New York, *Hot Hands*, will take place at Columbia University's Wallach Art Gallery on September 8.

In a room where a large Goshka Macuga 3D tapestry hung in front of a set of furniture, I found artist Josiah McElheny standing in front of his piece *From the Library of Future Geometries II*, 2023, which made an appearance at his recent exhibition with James Cohan. The work features a line of five polished, solid-glass polyhedrons set into an immaculate wood frame using display techniques à la Carlo Scarpa. (McElheny is a self-professed "Scarpa freak.") "In the future, there can be many more [polyhedrons]. There's an unknown number of them," he told me. "The idea is that knowledge is expandable. We don't know the limits of knowledge."

I asked what his impression of the show was. McElheny explained that for him, the Campus is a model demonstrating that capitalism doesn't only function through economic consolidations and monopolies. "The best of capitalism is when you have many people doing the same thing, and they're in dialogue," he told me. "That's one of the strongest arguments against these huge galleries [promoting] the idea that a single vision can be a complete world...everyone is saying, 'There's too much art,' but no, there's not enough good art. There is, in fact, a great dearth of good art. The more we encounter each other, the better the work [will be]. This feels like a subtext of the Campus: While each gallery has its own vision, it's also not about competition."

Down the corridor, in front of Cecily Brown's paintings, dealer Francesca Kaufmann introduced me to documentary film directors Roger Ross Williams and Brooklyn Sunado, who recently codirected *Love to Love You, Donna Summer* (2023), a deeply personal feature on Sunado's mother, the iconic disco queen who passed away in 2012. "I think someone needs to make a good documentary about the art world," Kaufmann mused, nominating Williams. "It's so big, the art world, what do you do? How do you do it?" asked the filmmaker. "That's why I found you somebody who can lead you," exclaimed Kaufmann. "Marc Spiegler! He's the ex-director of Art Basel. He's very sharp. He would be perfect."

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By 2 PM, it began to get exceptionally crowded. I was searching for Tom Burr. Rumor had it that he was gallivanting around the Campus with gallerist Emma Fernberger, who is pregnant, and her chihuahua, Howard Fernberger. Burr's reflective folding screen, *A Few Golden Moments*, 2011, was quietly nestled, and almost camouflaged by, the overgrown grasses and weeds inside the school's central garden. The work was placed next to an abstract bronze sculpture by Erika Verzutti. I decided these were daydreaming artworks; you would miss them if you didn't longingly gaze out of a classroom window.

In the principal's office, dealer Stefania Bortolami sat at a table with the Campus's staff—everyone was taking a break from the excitement. "So how do we, you know, end this thing?" she laughed, gesturing into the packed hallway while addressing the event's publicist. "You could pull the fire alarm," I said. Maybe it was a passing fantasy, but I had briefly considered taking this measure while stuck in the hallway bottleneck, near an indoor balloon release.

On the steps behind the school, children ate sausages while dogs ran around near Maren Hassinger's gourd-shape, armature-like steel sculpture, *Vessel 3*, 2022. When it began to drizzle, couples sipping wine moved under the trees to listen to music emanating from a large white tent where White Columns dealer (and former secondary-school punk) Matthew Higgs was spinning selections from his personal vinyl collection. The soundtrack for the Campus, under the direction of Higgs, ranged from recordings of ambient bell sounds to R&B tracks like "Frenemies" by Fabolous (featuring Josh K) or Eumir Deodato's discotheque hit "Keep On Movin'." Despite light rain, folks from the city were arriving until the very end of the day.

Being at the Campus made me think of the late critic and artist Brian O'Doherty, whose trio of essays, "Inside the White Cube," were initially published in this publication in 1976. "To investigate things in relation to their context, to come to see the context as formative on the thing, and, finally, to see the context as a thing itself," was, in his words, one of O'Doherty's greatest legacies. Lately, I've found myself most "turned on" or responsive to art when it sits outside of a white-walled space, even in a home. By providing a distinct environment for art to push up against, the Campus provides a context, outside the white cube, for works to subtly reshape themselves so that we, too, may be reshaped in the process.