

All the fun of the fair: Theme of play emerges at Frieze New York

By Julie Belcove

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Phragmites root, scavenged from New York's Mill Basin by artist Marie Lorenz for her 'Tide and Current Taxi' project, which will ferry Frieze visitors along the New York shoreline

When visitors show up at this year's Frieze New York, they will not only be able to stroll the serpentine tent in search of paintings, photographs and sculptures from contemporary stars, or stop to fortify themselves at Momofuku Milk Bar, they will also have the chance to go on a springtime boat ride helmed by the artist Marie Lorenz.

Lorenz is transporting her "Tide and Current Taxi" – an ongoing performance-based work in which she paddles a handmade boat in the nooks and crannies of the city's shoreline – from Brooklyn to the annual art fair. Visitors will be able to sign up on a first-come, first-served basis, allowing roughly 50 of them a jaunt.

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While they wait at the booth that Lorenz has built from materials scavenged on past outings, they can watch a live video stream from the boat, look at photographs from her many trips on the East River, or just hang out on the pier.

If all this sounds a bit, well, fun, that's at least part of the point. As the contemporary art world democratizes into something approaching entertainment, the trend of art as play continues to gain momentum.

"I think it has to do with the broadening of the audience of the art world," says Cecilia Alemani, curator of Frieze Projects, the not-for-profit arm of the fair that tapped Lorenz. "Many museums and institutions now like to propose something that is easily digestible and fun." In the past couple of years alone, New York has been deluged with light-hearted interactive exhibitions that have proven to be big draws at major museums, non-profit spaces and commercial galleries alike.

Marie Lorenz's 'Tide and Current Taxi' at Frieze

Last summer visitors lined up for as long as nine hours in the scorching sun to gain admittance to "Rain Room", by the collective Random International, at the Museum of Modern Art, for a chance to frolic for a few minutes in manufactured, backlit rain without getting wet. Then, in the damp cold of autumn, the queue snaked around the block for the opportunity to spend 45 seconds in Yayoi Kusama's mirrored room strung with flickering LED coloured bulbs at David Zwirner Gallery. Before that, fans waited for a turn on one of Ann Hamilton's swings, which powered a dancing curtain at the Park Avenue Armory, and for a trip down Carsten Höller's 102ft slide through two



storeys of the New Museum.

Alemani, who also curates the High Line, the elevated park traversing New York's Chelsea gallery district, says that she approached Frieze Projects' theme of play from a different perspective: as an exploration of the fair's home on Randall's Island.

"Since the 1990s," she explains, "it has been turned into a giant field." New Yorkers know it as the site of untold numbers of soccer games for city kids deprived of ample sports fields, as well as the John McEnroe Tennis Academy. Alemani says she hopes the artists she commissioned will give visitors a moment of "conversation, pause, interruption ... The point was to commission works you wouldn't necessarily see in the fair. It would not be interesting to commission a painting."

Carsten Höller's 'Experience' at the New Museum in 2011-12

Hence the restaging of Allen Ruppersberg's wacky 1971 installation "Al's Grand Hotel", with two guest rooms available for overnight stays inside the fair. Organisers have received about 50 calls from visitors interested in booking either the "Jesus Room", which features a substantial cross, or the "Bridal Suite", from \$350 a night.

"I don't know if art needs to be serious," says Alemani. "It's about having an experience. That can be fun or entertaining. It doesn't have to be contemplative." She points to a popular piece by Liz Glynn at last year's Frieze Projects. Behind an unmarked door between two booths, Glynn set up a secret bar reminiscent of a 1920s speakeasy. Lucky visitors were given instructions for gaining entry and then, undoubtedly in a nod to realism, treated to cocktails.



But the concept of play at Frieze can also have a dark side. Eduardo Basualdo, for instance, is turning a lawn into a faux soccer field, with one important caveat: the goalposts will be blocked with sheets of glass, making a would-be game of football frustratingly impossible. Eva Kotátková, meanwhile, will riff on the idea of a children's playground, with performers perched on or in cage-like outdoor sculptures.

Naama Tsabar, on the other hand, is producing a mini music festival as a kind of homage to the island's music-heavy history. (It has been an important venue for acts as varied as Duke Ellington and Jimi Hendrix.) Tsabar is carting the floor from one of the fair's booths outside to use as a stage, and booking only bands with female drummers.

Candy from Oscar Murillo's show at David Zwirner

There's a party-like atmosphere as well to [Oscar Murillo's](#) New York debut, now on view at Zwirner. Murillo, 28, a Colombia-born, London-based artist who has been facing the media glare lately as speculators buy and flip his work at handsome profits, installed a candy factory in the gallery and imported a crew of workers from the Colombina sweet-manufacturing plant where his mother and several generations of his family once worked.



Visitors can see the machinery and try some chocolate-covered marshmallow Chocmelos – for free! The sticky-sweet treats come wrapped in shiny silver packaging with a giant yellow smiley face. It's a feelgood take on candy that will no doubt stand in stark contrast to Kara Walker's mammoth screed on the sugar trade's history opening on May 10 at the Domino sugar factory in Brooklyn.

Murillo explains that he was thinking about Colombina's impact on the economy and on the community back home, about his own journey as an immigrant, and also about the workers' encounter with New York City.

“Candy and chocolate and marshmallows become a bridge to the city,” he says.

Murillo acknowledges that some of the visitors to his exhibition might be more interested in a sugar fix than a consideration of cultural exchange, but he is philosophical. “Some people will look at the different layers put into place. If people want to come in before work and pick up a crate of candy, that’s great too. It’s just another form of engagement.”

Random International’s ‘Rain Room’ at MoMA last year

For Lorenz as well, that engagement is paramount. She hopes that riding in her boat will help her passengers recapture that childhood idyll of letting their imaginations wander. “That can feel playful or weird,” she says. “I’m trying to bring them the experience of getting lost in the woods but in this huge metropolis.”

Her ideal passengers will decide to go and build their own boats after disembarking. But first things first: Lorenz has an extra oar. They should be prepared to paddle.



Frieze New York, May 9-12, friezenewyork.com; ‘Oscar Murillo: a Mercantile Novel’, until June 14, David Zwirner, davidzwirner.com; ‘Kara Walker: a Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby’, Domino Sugar Factory, May 10-July 6, creativetime.org

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