

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Interview with Jacob Patterson Is Los Angeles the New Creative Frontier?

Katharine Hargreaves · Thursday, July 25th, 2013

Think Tank Gallery first began as a collective back in June 2010, when a dream of shaping a street art gallery brought together a small group of artists who shared the same vision. What started as a factory warehouse later became an underground art space, hidden two floors above the bustling Fabric District in downtown Los Angeles. In an area of the city known more for its historic flavor than fine art offerings, Think Tank Gallery has carved out a unique presence among the colorful bolts of cloth.

Today over 20 artists operate out of the space as it finds its footing in an evolving art market. Since its inception, Think Tank Gallery has been known for its underground art parties, collaborative exhibitions, and eclectic space. As the downtown landscape shifts away from one of decay, Think Tank Gallery offers a cutting-edge take on the traditional gallery model. Curator Jacob Patterson discusses the risks and rewards of integrating art into the urban fabric.



Front window of Think Tank Gallery

KH: How would you define Think Tank Gallery?

JP: The word gallery is a loaded term: it connotes white walls, polished floors, perfectly framed art. We're a mix of an event venue, a fine art space, a film production studio and a fraternity. There's a lot of reasons why those things don't get along, but they do offer a new way of navigating culture. Think Tank is really site responsive in that way.

KH: Given all the opinions regarding how an art space should function, how do you shape something new?

JP: LA has a Wild West sort of mentality that you can't find anywhere else. You can get away with things. We once had an intern from Berlin who was offended by the way we approached the art process. And it wasn't just us, but LA in general. At the time, we were at a [Jeffrey Deitch show](#) (curated by Mike D of the Beastie Boys) where Diplo was the DJ. There were a ton of kids dancing in the middle and rich white folks standing at the edge drinking wine. We ran into Jennifer Aniston, the whole thing. Our intern felt this scene was inappropriate in a fine art setting. But I was so excited by the dialogue this event opened up about art. Where I come from, there's not a lot of money or time to educate young people about art, so for a long time I didn't feel comfortable in a museum setting. Think Tank offers something different to the younger generation. When people come to our art parties and experience the interactive elements (such as music curated alongside

the art) they feel different. That's what's important.

KH: Think Tank's current show *Ritual*, an immersive installation by Allison "Hueman" Torneros, includes a pyramid slide by local sculptor Brandon Muñoz AKA Monkwood. This added something rarely seen in underground art shows: an element of the playful.

JP: We bring in Brandon Muñoz because he's our Instagram. People stand in front of the stuff he makes and that's our free advertising. But the thing is, people are still there to be cool. They weren't going to take a turn (down the slide) and risk getting their butts dirty. When people are in an art gallery they are conditioned to think they can't touch the pieces on display. We love Brandon because he creates immersive sculptures that encourage interaction.



Pyramid Slide by Monkwood. Photo credit LA Taco.

KH: Do you think immersive experiences/installations are becoming more necessary in order to have a successful show?

JP: If the traditional gallery and alternative art spaces are going to merge, the answer is yes. If you're not doing art in a way that people can engage with it, you're doing it wrong. That's not an elitist perspective because most art galleries don't want their audience to explore and touch the art. They don't want them to feel comfortable in that setting. That's the point. At Think Tank, interaction is one of the main elements we focus on.

KH: Compelling art shows usually offer at least one moment where you risk losing your audience. For me, this moment was when the *Ate9 dance performance* happened in the middle of Allison's opening. What is the payoff when it comes to this kind of risk?

JP: Danielle Agami is a world-renowned dancer and choreographer that we've been wanting to work with, but she's been busy traveling. When she was finally able to make this site-responsive piece for us, it was important. Because the dancers emerge from the audience – people who have been hanging out like everyone else – you become more aware of the unexpected. The power of Danielle's work is that it involves you. A professor of mine once told me that creativity is the bridge between your audience and your original idea. That's a difficult thing to build but it does force you to be more brilliant in your presentation.



Allison Torneros' piece 'Being' courtesy the artist.

KH: As a curator, how do you know when something is good? Does a show need to push the envelope every time?

JP: It needs to be better than the last show. However, that all depends on what I value in terms of impressions. Again, it's in how you build that bridge: is the concept more cohesive? Does the show offer an element of the unexpected? Does it challenge people's ideas about what an art show should offer? For me success is when someone is forced to acknowledge what it is they're witnessing. Not what they hoped or expected to see.

KH: Are there any "wrong" ways to go about constructing an experience?

JP: I don't know the answer to that question. Of course, you could make something sloppy. I think a lot of that discussion is subjective.

KH: What about corporate sponsorship in creative spaces? Is that considered selling out?

JP: That's a tough question. There are many ways to go about making money off your art. For our *You Are Here* series, we invited Leica Camera to sponsor the show. We created a map of the Los Angeles neighborhoods where participants were shooting and used a red dot to denote where specific photographs were taken. Conveniently, Leica's logo is also a red dot. So for us this melding presented a successful way to combine subtle sponsorship with an interactive media element. In this situation, "selling out" didn't feel bad, it felt right.

KH: How does art play a role in change on a broader level?

JP: All change comes from inspiration. My job as a curator is to offer that up to others and guide the wave, so to speak. I'm going to do that or die trying.

View Allison "Hueman" Torneros' solo show RITUAL at Think Tank Gallery.

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