

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Reflecting on Nurture Art's "We Are" Summer Experiment

by [Howard Hurst](#) on September 6, 2011



Installation View, (all images courtesy Nurture Art)

[We Are](#) is Nurture Art's summer initiative. All summer the nonprofit has lent its gallery space out to a number of Brooklyn-based artists, curators and galleries. According to the organization's website:

This hybrid between art festival, short-term residency program and neighborhood jamboree is a honest statement of identification with the people that make our community.

The second to last exhibition in the series, which opened September 2, is an installation by Jonathan Ehrenberg and Meredith James. According to Nurture Art's gallery director, the video which is projected onto the gallery walls is likely to be the first of a larger video project.



Jonathan Ehrenberg and Meredith James, "The Gleaner" (2011), digital c print, 19 x 26.

Ehrenberg cites the still life portraiture of [Guiseppe Arcimboldo](#)'s as a starting point. Using collaged layers of paper, plaster, cloth and cardboard, the artists created a sculptural mound of still life-esque fruit, set against a purple and black mountain silhouette. The artists also created a sculpture-tree costume. The suit is worn in the video by Ehrenberg, the resulting moving tree beast reminds me of something between the *Lord of the Rings* series and the [Berenstain Bears](#) children's books.

As the tree-creature begins to dismantle the (delicious looking but obviously fake) mountain of fruit at first everything looks normal. It is only after looking for several minutes that one realizes there is something fleeting and spectral about the video. The woodland protagonist is haunted by what appears to be a spectral copy of it. An arm appears here, grabbing a piece of fruit, only to disappear and reappear as a figment of brief movement. The artists used a technique called peppers ghost in which the performance is actually shot through glass, upon which a first take of the performance is projected.

The props/sculpture from the video performance have been re-created within the gallery in an installation that serves as both context and extension of the video itself. I think its fitting that this installation feels so process based, not only are we exposed to physical evidence of the film's creation, but the version itself is only a fraction of the footage captured by the artist.

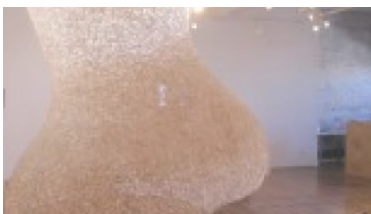


The opening night poetry reading was held on the gallery roof.

The setting for this exhibition, lends itself to this kind of experimental, collaborative approach. The brief five day exhibition series has felt like a sort of laboratory of sorts. The opening of the exhibition was accompanied a series of poetry readings, involving a group of writers and collaborators from past projects.

I'm under no illusion that what Nurture Art has undertaken has been 100% all inclusive, it has indeed been a flashpoint for community involvement, discussion and experimentation. Ehrenberg's exhibition was perhaps the most polished and formal of the series (aside from maybe the exhibition of paintings from Rachel Budde). While *We Are* was intended by the organization as a way of defining the organization, reflected back through the community it is surrounded by. I think what perhaps happened, without the pressure of a four or five week exhibition, is that people felt free to have fun and experiment. We need more of this, and indeed, perhaps Nurture Art can use this (what seems like a breakaway success) as a model for future programming. I wonder, in a community of artists, writers, curators and musicians, is a shorter exhibition schedule not wise anyway? Perhaps a fulltime space for very short exhibitions is really what Brooklyn needs. I think we need a space where younger emerging artists, historians, curators or whoever it might be can have a place to try things out, where failure is ok because the show won't be up very long anyway.

[**We Are: Jonathan Ehrenberg and Meredith James**](#) was a five-day art show that ended yesterday at Nurture Art (910 Grand Street, East Williamsburg, Brooklyn).



Risky Business