

Eight Hours at the Comfort Inn

The zingiest art fair of the season was a one-day affair in a Lower East Side motel.

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Photographs by Pari Dukovic

Art fairs freak me out. They are hellish places where money and art have sex in public. But I gladly bundled up two Saturdays ago to head to the Dependent art fair, in the Comfort Inn on Ludlow Street. I'm glad I did, though I think I caught a cold while in bed with two people.

It was the week of the Armory Show and the Independent, huge events where art-worlders swap business cards and gossip. Last year, the Dependent debuted in a hotel on West 25th, and it was so crowded that when the doors closed there was still a line down the block. To sneak in, my wife and

I jammed our fourth chakras, became invisible, and pretended to be hotel guests. Such are the advantages of being a certain age.

Not wanting to run down our chakras this time, we got to the Comfort Inn at 2 p.m. The hallways were already packed. Twenty-one exhibitors occupied wee hotel rooms. Art was installed on every surface, even in the drawers. In one room, the gallery Ramiken Crucible showed Andra Ursuta's batch of what looked like butts wearing panties, set up doggy-style on the bed. *Hmmm.* (They were stools.) Recess's room held Abigail DeVille's assassin's lair, strewn with papers, blankets, and junk. It was *Hoarders* as art.

The Dependent is held in a hotel, for one day, on a shoestring. I didn't see many collectors. Then again, I might not know if I did, because most of the faces were young. People were making connections, creating all sorts of energy, having amazing discussions on beds, in hallways, wherever. Which, in 1994, was how the beast known as the Armory Show began.

The bed part was in the room of Canada gallery, which regularly shows good art while seeming out of control yet in business. The room was bedecked in flowers and handmade signs. In bed and in pajamas, Michael Mahalchick and Debbie Tuch re-enacted John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 1969 Amsterdam bed-in, playing guitars and singing, nonstop for eight hours, "Give Peace a Chance." How could I not climb in and sing along? All we are saying: Sometimes even an art fair can be a creative force.

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