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ALLONS À LAFAYETTE NEW ORLEANS

When Kirsha Kaechele and co-curator Dickie Landry selected the work for *Allons à Lafayette*, their intent was to explore the contemporary art of Lafayette, Louisiana, and its historic ties to the New York and international art scenes [KK Projects; April 4—June 1, 2008]. That it does, albeit in an oddly improvisational way, through a varied selection of work by artists such as Landry, Francis Pavy, Keith Sonnier, and Robert Rauschenberg, and others. Instead of formal surveys, *Allons à Lafayette* is a notably more freewheeling and subjective undertaking, partly because the exhibition facilities tend to inspire unorthodox responses.

Unusual by almost any standard, Kaechele's KK Projects main space occupies a starkly minimal expanse—a sleekly renovated former bakery in the hardscrabble St. Roch district. While galleries on urban frontiers are nothing new, KK Projects is distinguished by its adjunct spaces, several semi-ruinous Creole cottages that form a loose-knit compound stretching the length of the block. For *Allons à Lafayette*, the Cajun contingent seemed intent on providing freewheeling installations, to which the uncertainty and asymmetry of these spaces lent themselves beautifully. The result was a series of dream chambers where new and older work mingled with talisman-like memorabilia—like reliquaries of cultural memory and personal symbolism reflecting the unique worldviews of the artists.

Dickie Landry is a central figure. You may not have heard of him, but you may have *heard* him. A conceptual artist, photographer, composer, and sax player who was part of the postminimal wave of Cajun artists in New York along with Keith Sonnier, Lynda Benglis, and Tina Girouard, Landry is a prolific collaborator, most notably with Rauschenberg, John Cage, Gordon Matta-Clark and Laurie Anderson. He was a founding member of the Philip Glass Ensemble, and collaborated with a startling variety of others, making him the living link between Philip Glass and Fats Domino. Here, his installation is typically ephemeral: photographs of various projects



and events are mingled with relics found on site, including Mardi Gras beads and a plastic Virgin Mary salvaged from the flood waters by a former tenant. While appearing almost random, the installation conveys an experiential sense of time-space continuum in which artifacts are signifiers of trans-temporal continuity—an Asian notion of an “eternal now” that resonates in south Louisiana. This loose sort of improvisation recalls his Rauschenberg collaborations, most notably their 1980s *Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange*, which took them to villages in China, India, Mexico, Tibet, and Sri Lanka, where they used whatever was at hand to make art. A photo of Landry and Rauschenberg in a small plane inscribed “From Miami to Havana at the invitation of Fidel Castro, 1988,” appears near a pair of salvaged dice and Mardi Gras doubloons on a ledge nearby.

Although born just across the Texas state line, Rauschenberg's involvement with Lafayette, Louisiana, began in 1945 when his family moved there. He remained close to his family and adopted hometown, making frequent visits. In this show, he is represented by his *Star Quarters*, 1971, series of four large serigraphs on mirrored Plexi, which take up most of a back wall of the main gallery. It seems an odd choice at first, more elegant and luminous than most of his oeuvre. But when he died, just after the show opened, the silkscreened images of lions, bulls, and scorpions floating in the sky with their equivalent star constellations as well as astronauts, bikers, and elements lifted from Duchamp's *Large Glass*, made an eerie sort of sense, identifying Rauschenberg with the heavens as if to commemorate the passing of this most Zen-like and protean of artists.

A freewheeling improvisational approach propels many other Lafayette artists, including Francis Pavy, a noted Louisiana Imagist. On view in the main gallery, his paintings radiate an electric, neo-psychedelic aura. In his cottage installation, a variety of found, concocted, and improvised graphics turned the walls into large collages of his emblematic themes: alligators, vortexes, playing cards, all-seeing eyes, guitars, crescent moons, palmetto fronds, and shadowy figures rendered in electric fauvist colors—a visual manifesto of timeless subtropical ephemera.

Fred Daspit is an architectural historian whose sculpture recalls visionary outsider art of an unusually anthropological sort. Meticulously fashioned from wood that looks more like terracotta or Corten steel, his works invoke oppositional associations such as, for instance, tramp art and Hindu temple carvings. Dionysian and demonic yet hieratically ordered, they suggest ritual objects from some long-forgotten Indo-Aryan mystery cult. For KK Projects director and exhibition co-curator Kirsha Kaechele, an architect who visited New Orleans eight years ago and never left, these artists' chaotic installations initially posed a challenge to her minimalist sense of order. To her credit, she chose to go with their anarchic flow and was ultimately gratified by a series of environments that embody the ever-experimental spirit of Robert Rauschenberg—a passionate embrace of exploration for its own sake.

—D. Eric Bookhardt