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Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Living Landmark

by [cameron shaw](#) 06/15/10

Among the masonry and brickwork of New Orleans' tree-lined St. Charles Avenue, one building sticks out—red and green and pulsating. Its history is as curious as its appearance. When, in 1981, the restaurant that occupied Paris' Eiffel Tower was deemed too heavy for its supports, it was dismantled, and after a Byzantine string of negotiations between businessmen on both sides of the Atlantic, shipped to Louisiana in 11,000 pieces. Architect Stephen Bingler incorporated the restaurant into a new iron and glass behemoth that suggested the latticework and sweeping curves of the Parisian landmark floating above the avenue. The re-installation, however, continued to bear the weight of the original failure; the building stood idle for years at a time as venture after venture folded.



Local developers LVX have recently stepped into the revolving door of prospective tenants and invited a group of artists, known as the Life is Art Collective, to resuscitate the space. Kirsha Kaechele, Tora Lopez, Elliott Coon, and Pamala Bishop moved in on May 22 and will not leave the grounds until late June. While one goal is to redesign the interior and cultivate a biodynamic garden to support a forthcoming supper club and lounge, the women also inhabit it to create a living installation. On the light-filled perimeter of the cavernous space, each has created a private enclave. Kaechele, who trained as an architect, has prepared a stark-white roost with a bed, table, lamp, and a tattered yellowing copy of *The Portable Jung*. A few feet away tucked in another corner, Lopez's makeshift closet brims with glittering fabrics that reflect her background in fashion design; her windows are lined with costume jewelry and handmade masks that the artists have been using for regular dress-up sessions and performances.

As their name would suggest, the collective considers every aspect of their communal living experiment art, from cooking to journaling to meditation. Their focus on the energetic process of transforming mundanities into creative acts aligns them with earlier artist-alchemists like Germano Celant and Gordon Matta-Clark. One especially ambitious future collaboration involves New York-based artist Daphne Park visiting to create a SuperConductor, a sculptural mass of silk, raw wool, goat cashmere, and alpaca shearing-materials meant to intensify the "orgiastic potency" or life-force within a space.

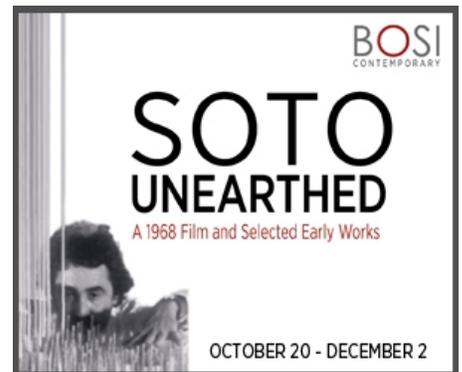
As part of the artists' commitment to the Conscious Consumption Creation Act, every piece of trash is being meticulously rinsed, sorted, and saved, while all organic material is composted for use in the garden. Nightly, Lopez incorporates portions of the day's refuse into an expanding sphere of cardboard, paper, glass, and twine, that the artists are calling "the pearl"—the conscientious person's rubber-band ball, its potential energy increasing each day.

It is a fitting emblem for a project that as a whole remains somewhat amorphous. Rather than following a precise plan, the collective is most interested in the ways in which chance will determine their experience. Based on a walk-in visitor's knowledge of sacred geometry, they are contemplating drilling holes in the floor to permit trees to grow through. When an air conditioning repairman entered the building last week, he promptly hypnotized Coon as a mystical exercise. The building now seems to be functioning as a magnet, drawing likeminded individuals unafraid to shape the space while simultaneously exploring the unknown.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL PALUMBO

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