

The New York Times

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NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2011

Art at the Food Cart and in the Park

said, will be named soon. In the meantime, it remains an event that loosens the reins of conventional presentation and is as much about art as it is about cultural melding.

This year the structure is slightly different: instead of offering a constant stream of performances and events, the directors decided to break up the festival into three rounds, starting with "Fiction & Non-Fiction," followed by "Lecture/Performance Series," which continues on Tuesday with the Belgian actor Jos Houben in "The Art of Laughter" and on Oct. 6 with the American choreographer Ralph Lemon. The final section, "Endurance/Resistance/Inspiration," highlights more politically charged work by choreographers including Rachid Ouramdane and Faustine Linyekula.

For the first part, the mission was to shake people out of their everyday realities with performances and events, participatory and otherwise. Certain artists were more successful than others. Kimberly Bartosik's "Ecstasiority3," which ran throughout the day, explored decay and was performed along a narrow hallway on the third floor of the embassy, seemed to fit the criteria for banality in "The Conspiracy of Performance."

Wearing a transparent tank and a white bobbed wig, Ms. Bartosik lifted her shirt and rubbed her chest against a column, while earless and tail-less plastic greyhounds stood in packs on the floor. Roderick Murray's "Lighting Installation," created for the entire building, made use of fluorescent tubing and free-standing theatrical lighting equipment — with a tangle of wires never far behind — creating heat and glare everywhere you turned.

The situation called for fresh air. Across Fifth Avenue was a food cart, or "The Spermbar," a

witty, disturbing project by the French visual artist Prune Nourry, in which lab technicians took orders from customers who checked off the traits they desired in a sperm donor. Each trait was linked to an ingredient and mixed into a vial by Cristian Molina, the bar chef at Rouge Tomate. Brown eyes meant apple; a college graduate was a splash of club soda. Yes, it's possible to order a child in pretty much the same manner you choose ingredients for a smoothie.

Throughout the day a mystery surrounded the potential contribution of Maria Hassabi, who was listed as an artist but remained, as far as anyone could tell, a spectator. "I'm here" was her cheerful reply to queries. Gradually, two



Ordering at the Spermbar food cart, part of the Crossing the Line festival.

slender women in black were spotted on the street and, later, inside the building.

As they froze before shifting positions — Ms. Hassabi's trademark way of transforming herself into something of an object — the puzzle was solved; the women were doppelgängers for Ms. Hassabi and her frequent dancer-collaborator, Hristoula Harakas.

The theme of appearance and disappearance continued in nearby Central Park, where, in "Lande Part," the French choreographer Laurent Pichaud was swallowed into a grassy hole at Cedar Hill. The trick was accom-

plished with a mirror in the grass; playful, certainly, but all too forgettable.

The German director and performer Raimund Hoghe, joined by the dancer Takashi Ueno, presented excerpts from "Pas de Deux," which was Saturday's most conventional offering. The performance was also familiar territory for Mr. Hoghe, who has a spinal deformity and is intent on shining a light — through carefully selected music and concise, austere movement — on notions of beauty.

Taking cautious steps in Japanese geta sandals, the dancers came together and moved apart, eventually dashing toward one another to the song "Cheek to Cheek." However refined the work, there was the feeling I'd seen it all before: Mr. Hoghe's usual juxtaposition of bodies (one aging and twisted, the other young and fresh) and memory-inducing music. (The piece began with Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" and concluded with Odette's rendition of "House of the Rising Sun.") "Pas de Deux" didn't shift reality; it was more a pause in time.

The closest to an out-of-body experience was "Fiction & Non-Fiction Soundwalk," an audio-guided walk by Soundwalk Collective featuring commissioned text by Olivier Cadiot, Philippe Claudel, Camille Laurens, Teju Cole and John Giorno. There were times when I wasn't sure if I were the subject or object, storyteller or listener.

During the journey, in which stops were made at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Café Sabarsky, the Guggenheim Museum and Central Park, I found myself staring — really sinking into — a painting; linking a color (blue) to a memory (death); and drinking a cup of hot chocolate (something I wouldn't do in a million years). The text remains available for a free download. In other words, this walk is a journey without a deadline: it's out there waiting for you to make the stories your own. Just take it.

The Crossing the Line festival runs through Oct. 16 at various locations; (212) 355-6100, fiaf.org/crossingtheline.



A Visit to the Sperm Bar

using art and food to question the business of birth

By Anna Marcum

It was a shoddy-looking food cart: dented metal with two flimsy light blue umbrellas. Standing opposite to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the cart appeared like any other. When I began to cross the street, the faces of the pedestrians clustered in front of the cart slowly came into focus. No longer were they a mass of indifferent people mindlessly clustered on the sidewalk. Their faces contorted into expressions of disgust, shock, confusion, and amusement as they read the name on the banner: “Sperm Bar.”



Sperm Bar is not just an extremely odd, borderline inappropriate food cart—it is the brainchild of French performance artist Prune Nourry. Inspired by the unique sperm bank business of the United States, Sperm Bar playfully investigates the commoditization of the creation of life. Housed in an everyday New York City food cart, Sperm Bar has an almost uncomfortable air of accessibility. However, the product for sale is not literal sperm, but rather a symbolic manifestation of the unique genetic makeup of each donor represented through mixed juice. The artist collaborated with New York-based mixologist Cristian Molina to assign each trait a unique flavor, creating a unique mixed drink for each symbolic donor.

As I made my way through the crowd I noticed four or five “lab technicians” standing in front of the cart. Each had an iPad equipped with a unique “donor selection” app. At first the categories were standard and expected: height, eye color, hair color, ethnicity, blood type. Then I was asked to answer more invasive questions about things like religion, education, occupation, personality traits, and—most importantly—celebrity look-alike.

I settled on donor number 17, a tall, blue-eyed college graduate. He worked as an analyst and considered himself to be creative and artistic. He was an ideal donor. Hold on a second ... this was entirely metaphorical. Why did I let myself get so caught up in it? The thrill of finding a good donor was starting to match that of finding an exquisite handbag. Once I decided on 17, the lab tech wrote me a “prescription” for the syrup: a watermelon, pomegranate, basil mix. I went to the counter and they removed a vial of pink liquid from a cloud of dry ice, bringing to mind scenes of futuristic movies and images of aliens. As I began to sip the mocktail, I felt simultaneously embarrassed and intrigued. I could feel the scandalized crowd’s judgment. For some inexplicable reason I felt the need to explain myself to every raised eyebrow in the crowd.

Nourry has spent the last three years as the artist in residence at the Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn, where she became interested in the business of baby making and mixing it with gastronomy. In 2010, Nourry’s “Procreative Dinner” toured the country. The piece asks spectators sit down for an “a la carte meal,” meant to make them think about the artificial selection of children in assisted reproduction. When asked to explain what interested her in this subject, Nourry largely attributes it to the difference between sperm-banking in America and other countries. In America, she

says, there is a much stronger emphasis on choice than in other countries. “Especially in the United States, as opposed to other countries where you have less choice, and less possible selection online, here you can have a lot of services and the more you pay the more [information] you get,” she says. “You have services such as donor’s religion, even though the donor’s religion is not genetic. You have also information like donor’s celebrity look-alike. If you want your donor to match Brad Pitt, why not? You also have face match services if you want your donor to match someone you know. You send in a picture of that special someone and through a mathematical formula, they match you to a donor. All of these processes are here, symbolically, placed in parallel with gastronomy. Each person is a unique cocktail.”

The Sperm Bar Project puts the every-day consumer in the hypothetical situation of sperm bank patrons in search of an ideal donor for their future child. According to Barnard’s President Debora Spar, who wrote a book on the business of assisted procreation called *The Baby Business: How Money, Science, and Politics Drive the Commerce of Conception*, the baby business is secretive and almost taboo. “It was the only business that I’d ever looked at where nobody in it wanted to acknowledge that they were in business,” Spar says.

It is not just the businessmen and women who feel a sense of taboo, according to Spar. “I think particularly for parents or would-be parents that are going through this process, they don’t want to acknowledge that they are engaged in a commercial enterprise, because they are just desperate to have a baby,” she says. “Therefore, the folks who are providing the services very quickly slip into that mode of talking about things like providing a family, and working with compassion, and using language that is all about love rather than about commerce.”

Nourry translates the sensitive issues of the assisted procreation industry into a playful and approachable, yet thought-provoking medium using gastronomy. “There is a certain element of frivolity that enters the process,” she says. According to Spar, “It is very easy to get sort of carried away. I’ve watched people select sperm—‘Oh he plays volleyball, I like volleyball! Well, that’s probably not a genetically-carried trait. People say things like ‘oh, but I like dimples,’ or ‘my grandfather played the cello’—it’s trivial.” On the Sperm Bar, Spar concludes: “I think that because it was so playful and these were flavored syrups, that she captured some of that tension.”