

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

## The Zabłudowicz Clan Takes Times Square

*michael slenske* 03/02/11

In the summer of 1980, the Bronx-based collective CoLab and some 50 artists—including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jenny Holzer, Kiki Smith and filmmaker Jim Jarmusch—infiltrated a derelict massage parlor at 41st Street and 7th Avenue and put up the legendary *Times Square Show*. Today the neighborhood is nothing short of an amusement park—and many of those subversive young artists who partook in the establishment-skewering exhibition now comprise the establishment—but the impulse to take over a vacant space in the world's New Year's Eve capital with a scrappy group of emerging artists is still alive and well. Yet the terms of that infiltration have undoubtedly changed, as evidenced by the good fortunes of Anita and Poju Zabłudowicz.



Installation View Zabłudowicz Collection: Six Weeks in New York. © Courtesy Zabłudowicz Collection. Photo: Bill Orcutt

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For the past 15 years the Newcastle-born Londoner and her Finnish husband, Poju, have been amassing what is now a 500-artist, 5,000-piece collection. Four years ago they took over a run-down Methodist chapel at 176 Prince of Wales Road, and this week they made their New York debut on the 33rd floor of 1500 Broadway by initiating two group shows: "The Shape We're In," put together by Zabłudowicz Collection curator Elizabeth Neilson; and, independent of the collection, "Proposal for a Floor," organized by *Art in America's* Alex Gartenfeld.

The method of infiltration is different in today's Times Square. Poju's equity firm, Tamares, is on the 24th Floor, and Neilson came upon it while looking to store crates. "What we're doing here is taking the bare bones of what we do in London over here, inviting artists to respond to space," adds Neilson, who previously worked in educational outreach at the Tate.

The Zabłudowiczs regularly present collection shows in London, and "The Shape We're In" has a concurrent London twin. In truth, this isn't the first time Zabłudowicz has shown work in New York. Twice before she's opened the office of Tamares, on the 24th floor of the building, for VIP tours held during Armory Arts Week. There she's shown blue-chip photographers like Gregory Crewdson, Wolfgang Tillmans and Thomas Struth. Right now the floor holds arboreal landscapes by Leipzig School photographers. German photography is another of Zabłudowicz's long-running passions. "To do New York now, it's the back end of the recession, there are spaces available that probably aren't going to be available in the next one or two years and we just saw this as an opportunity to satellite what we're doing in London: showcasing young, emerging talent," says Zabłudowicz.

The Zabłudowiczs started out collecting twentieth century British painters like Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. It wasn't until they acquired a photograph by Matthew Barney in the mid-1990s that they took things in a more contemporary direction. (Initially that meant buying work by L.A.-associated artists like Lari Pittman, John Baldessari and Henry Taylor). "He's Finnish, and they're a bit avant-garde," says Anita. By "moving the goalposts," as curator Elizabeth Neilson refers to the transformation, the Zabłudowiczs have adopted the role of patrons. What that means in a stripped-to-the-concrete penthouse floor overlooking Times Square is responding to office life and commercialism, and the realities for artists today—primarily Americans. "We didn't want to intrude with our British or European artists because there's so much talent coming out of New York right now," says Neilson.

As its title suggests, Neilson's show is an examination of the space and what has made it possible to show there: Matthew Darbyshire's Woolworth Tower banner

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spoofs a proposed modernist condo project, Ethan Breckenridge's office terrariums and paintings made only using dust imbue the space with a sense of haunting, while Nick van Woert uses polyurethane to re-imagine Classical sculpture in a novel, exquisite corpse-like form. Anita cites van Woert, formerly Matthew Day Jackson's studio assistant, as a prime example of how the collection process works. The couple invited Jackson to do a residency in Finland and van Woerts ended up leaving some of his own work there, as a gift. "Then we went to his studio and he was morphing all these sculptures into things we'd never seen before, and experimenting with shapes and materials... I'm determined to continue this story."

*"The Shape We're In" and "Proposal for a Floor" are open today through April 15 on the 33rd floor of 1500 Broadway.*