

Art and about: Fruit, goats, and art served together | Ghent, New York

by John Isaacs



Who would ever imagine an art gallery on an apple orchard, with a petting zoo alongside? Well, Francis Greenburger, the brains and benefactor behind Art Omi.

Art Omi is one of the most ambitious cultural projects in Columbia County. Its rich, publicly and proudly accessible collection of major sculpture set in glorious grounds is an ever-evolving and expanding treat for lovers of art and/or nature, especially those with children in tow. To experience its visual and conceptual thrills should be on the agenda of not only visitors to our area but of every resident here (and in particular of local educational institutions who could do no better than to bus kids there for a truly immersive and playful experience).

Public art, that is art not confined to commercial galleries and the excesses of trading art for profit in auction houses, is one of the pillars of cultural life. Witness the sheer delight of Mary Mattingly's environmental projects, or Duke Riley's spectacular experiments with birds, or any of the extraordinary creations documented in yesterday's New York Times article (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/29/arts/design/public-art-to-see-in-new-york-city-this-summer.html>), to see how profoundly the ingenuity and imagination of modern artists contributes to the experience and appreciation of life for all of us.

Outside New York, it is astonishing how the Hudson Valley too has, almost overnight, become a little Mecca for public art (all those dogs on Warren Street a few years ago were sheer joy, and Olana's enterprise is exemplary). And witness "Reactor", the current centerpiece of Art Omi's architectural program, that draws deserved acclaim from such publications as ArtForum. Obviously, the landscape itself, and the repurposing of old buildings, has lent itself to this development. But, then again, who would have imagined an art gallery on an apple farm?

The much beloved orchard on Route 9H, bought and restored by Greenburger a year or so ago, after a disastrous fire had decimated its infrastructure, opened Love Apple Art Space yesterday with an inaugural exhibition in its farmhouse, elegantly reconfigured with multiple galleries and charming little theatres.

The curator of the space, Jennie Lamensdorf, had the bright and appropriate idea to focus the show on artists' interpretations (including some fascinating videos) of the concept of labor. While not every work, by an accomplished coterie of emerging and mid-career artists from all over the map, is obviously relevant to the

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subject, overall you get the sense that hands-on effort is the bedrock of human activity, and hopefully always will be (though the ways in which the forces of automation threaten that prospect were hardly addressed here).

In any case, the bucolic setting, the attendant migrant laborers (upon which the whole operation there is dependent), the delightful music, the deeply fragrant local tipples from Tousey Winery, the fruit(!), the mixed crowd of locals and metropolitans, and, most of all, the audacity of the project made a poignant case for bringing art to the masses.

But if your tastes run otherways, you can always let the kids roam the galleries while you pet the goats.

“Art Work: An Exploration of Labor” at Love Apple Art Space, 1421 Route 9H (between Claverack and Ghent), open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, 11-6.

Image: Noa Charuvi, Men at Work, 2017; Image courtesy the artist