

# VENUS MANHATTAN

Weaver, Cat. "A Blue-chip Collector Goes Against the Grain." *Hyperallergic*, May 11, 2012.

## HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

### A Blue-chip Collector Goes Against the Grain



*The entrance to "Venus Over Manhattan" (all photos by Hrag Vartanian for Hyperallergic unless otherwise noted)*

Upstairs from "Larry," in the Carlyle Galleries Building at 980 Madison Avenue, Adam Lindemann's latest art toy, Venus over Manhattan, was unveiled to the press Wednesday morning. Un-designed by the architectural firm Toshihiro Oki, it defies the traditional white cube and underscores (with conspicuous beams and bludgeoned cement covered with deliberately bare drywall) the building's fraught architectural history. With a façade that sports the "Venus of Manhattan" sculpture, a work by Wheeler Williams who was a noted supporter of the now notorious House Un-American Activities Committee, the building, under landmark protection, was forced to run through a series of proposals before it was allowed to add residential floors back in 2008.



*Flying Venus, Crouching Adam: "Venus of Manhattan" is a work by the commie hating sculptor Wheeler Williams and it adorns the façade of 980 Madison Avenue (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)*

At 10am, *New York Observer* columnist, power collector, and upstart blue-chip art market pundit, Adam Lindemann is holding court, surrounded by a circle of rain-drenched press, and espousing the wonders of the *À rebours* novel, the theme he chose for the gallery's opening event and premier exhibit. The gallery is dark, the works, spot lit. The cave-like closeness provides a very nice escape from the weather. Journalists stuff pastries into their faces, sip coffee and peer contentedly about. Many of them are familiar with Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1884 book; just as many are not. Lindemann is glad to explain the whole shebang to all of them: from what we gather, the show is about mankind making "decadence" by defying the norms of society and nature.

I'm quite thrilled to notice that the exhibit, *À rebours* is extremely true to the book — though one noticeable omission was a wandering bejeweled tortoise. Like a bibliophile going to see a movie emblazoned with the title of their favorite book, one could have worried that the theme would be treated shabbily. But Lindemann has it all covered in an amazingly literal translation of literature into display.



*Entering the gallery, as a small Gustave Moreau, "Apollon recevant les offrandes des bergers" (c.1885) framed by a pair of Cesar's bronze "Candelabres" (1997) greet you.*

The book's anti-hero, the Duc Jean des Esseintes' beloved Odilon Redon is represented with four works, including the large "Le Chevalier Mystique" (1892), and his character's style of appropriating sacred "objects consecrated in earlier times" receives its literal translation in the form of fetish objects, including a (purported) Jivaro shrunken head, some Papuan bone daggers and, in a few happily contemporary twists, David Hammons' untitled "African mask," and a giant, hairy, lascivious wall hanging by Piotr Uklanski. It's all complimented by the darkness and the perversely unfinished drywall surroundings.

Recalling that Des Esseintes makes himself ill with sickening perfumes in an arduously concocted "symphony of scents," I suggest a perfumed atmosphere to Artemis, associate gallery director and artists' liaison at VoM. It is, I explain, a *gesamtkunstwerk* gesture that I first discovered at the Neue Galerie when they used wafts of exotic perfumes and synthetic earthen scents to enhance the viewing of their Otto Dix show a couple of years ago. Artemis is receptive, "That's a great idea. We can go *à rebours*." Or did she say *overboard*?



*The low lighting wasn't conducive to good hand-held photography but these images give you a taste of the baroque installation. Clockwise from top left: a large yellow painting by Walter Damn hangs beside a pitch black sculpture by John Chamberlain, a Warhol portrait of an American Indian is coupled with a console by Rafael de Cardenas and 19th C. Papuan bone daggers, Andra Ursuta's "Breath Hold (Discipline and Vanish)" (2010) is a balloon with a noose, and Piotr Uklanski's large vaginal "Untitled" (2012) visually contrasts with Bernard Buffet's large clown painting (1991). (click to enlarge)*

A gleaming black Chamberlain, its overhead light casting a seriously value-added orchid shadow on the floor gets a lot of attention. Over it's shoulder Andra Ursuta's bungee cord noose, "Breath Hold" (2010) seems to dangle from what appears to be a marble balloon, though the checklist indicates is cast urethane. A Bernard Buffet, "Les clowns musiciens, le tube" (1991), which would, I'm guessing, seem birthday party-bright on a white wall, now blares a trumpet call of melancholy from the darkness nearby, its sad-clown subjects seeming all the more sour for being set alongside tokens of mortality and loss, like the noose, and like Olivia Berckemeyer's ghastly ghost ship "Frozen Endurance" — they pop in spark-like dots from the darkness, flotsam from the flames of what, in the 1880s would have been considered a very sick mind. It's worth noting that no one curates Buffet nowadays into shows, particularly in North America, so the choice of an artist who is best known for his heyday in 1950s and 60s Paris is a bold move.



*Jeff Koons' "Violet-Ice (Kama Sutra)" (1991) sculpture with Lucas Samaras' "Fowl III iMovie N. 463" (2006) in the background. (click to enlarge)*

I wonder if Adam Lindemann has turned Des Esseintes into the quintessential curator? The 'zine that accompanies the show describe Des Esseintes as: "an eccentric aristocrat who recoils from the manners and values of conservative Parisian society and flees to the countryside to immerse himself in art collecting and exotic fetishism."

But do I ask about this when I finally catch hold of Lindemann? No. Instead I ask him about his own collection and if the (horrid) Koons in the corner (Lavender Ice) is "his." Gross, I know, and Lindemann wastes no time telling me so. He's irritated. I'm the third person to ask him questions about which pieces come from his personal collection.

"Would you," he asks suddenly, taking me aback, "go downstairs and ask Larry which pieces in his gallery are his?" And before I can get my breath (eyes rolled into the back of my skull in search of a quip), he says, "Well then, why me?"

"Because," I venture, carefully "I think we see you as coming from the outside. As a collector ..."

"I'll have to do something about that," he says.