



"First Among Equals" Masters the Fine Art of Collaboration



Alex Da Corte's "Scene Take Six" (2012)
Photo by Aaron Iglar + Matthew Suib /Greenhouse Media

Bringing together eight core artists and curatorial collectives from Philadelphia and Los Angeles, *First Among Equals* proposes a variety of strategies for working collaboratively across peer groups and generations. But it's not all as rosy as it sounds. Amid the resultant joint efforts and seamless assemblages, curators Alex Klein and Kate Kraczon have allowed contention, resistance and even some cold-blooded killing to infiltrate this multivalent exhibition.

Alex Da Corte and Mateo Tannatt come down on the side of informed consent. Both Da Corte's "Scene Take Six" (2012) and Tannatt's "Studio Complex/Beardsley Farm/Heaven's Gate" (2012) are built around collective values: collaboration, consensus and communication. Each artist worked with a variety of other artists whose contributions to the exhibition were incorporated into unified, sculptural installations. It's a method that results in some of the most visually intriguing and conceptually cohesive work in the show.

But *First Among Equals* is as much an exhibition about artists working against each other as it is a study of how they work together. Kathryn Andrews's "Serial Killer" (2012) takes the form of a chain-link fence on wheels—occasionally accompanied by living statues—that encroaches upon other artworks, ostensibly murdering them with its relentless and uninvited proximity. "Serial Killer" hit indiscriminately throughout the course of the exhibition, preying on five different artworks and even significantly enhancing a few; when it rolled up to Bodega's wall-mounted display of xeroxes, "Serial Killer" lent the otherwise lank paper a structural frisson by extending its monochrome pallet into the viewer's space. This was a serendipitous effect, since *First Among Equals* puts great faith in the power of the poster.

Borne out over an unusually large number of printed contributions is a belief in the poster's ability to advertise, mediate and stand alone as an object of aesthetic interest. This works more or less effectively, as long as you pay close attention, keep track of event dates and don't mind the fact that nearly half of what you see in the gallery is actually a placeholder for something else. There's a poster for Wu Tsang's film, *Wildness* (2012), eight posters by P&Co. for their sound project of remixed audio recordings, a wall of posters designed by Bodega to evoke their performance program and a series of posters by Emilio Macchia and Luisa Lorenza Corna for Machete Group's ongoing discussion series.

In all cases, the posters—as posters do—gesture away from the here and now of the gallery space toward time-based events accessible from different platforms. Thus, the viewer is referred to a performance commissioned by Bodega or to the ICA's website, where you can listen to P&Co.'s digital recordings. It leaves the viewer feeling alternately lucky when they catch a great event (Wu's *Wildness* screening was excellent, coming hot on the heels of the film's celebrated premiere in L.A.) and wistful when they realize they've missed half of the programming (for example, Machete's symposia ended in May). It's a risky approach to exhibition-making that demands curatorial stamina and presumes viewer tenacity.

But Klein and Kraczon have kept up the tempo, and there's still plenty to see and hear in the last days of the exhibition's run. For her solo show in Marginal Utility's constantly changing gallery-within-a-gallery, Abigail DeVille has shoved the black gallery walls flush to the white walls of the ICA in order to make room for "Hooverville Torqued Ellipse" (2012). Her giant cardboard barge borrows its shape from minimalist sculptor Richard Serra's iconic steel forms, but is constructed entirely from recycled materials. Its intense physicality offers a nice foil to the digital sculptures in Extra Extra's interactive virtual gallery, projected on the opposite side of the wall. This constellation stages a plausible parable for the exhibition as a whole: Like physicality and virtuality, *First Among Equals* suggests that collaboration and contention may be two sides of the same, oft-flipped coin.

Through Aug. 12. Institute of Contemporary Art, 118 S. 36th St. 215.898.5911. icaphila.org