

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Happenings | A Secret Chalet Off Hollywood Boulevard Where the L.A. Art World Gathers

Kevin McGarry



This wooden enclave, just off the Hollywood Walk of Fame, is designed by the Gehry Partners architect Edwin Chan. Daniel Trese

Around the corner from a blighted stretch of the Hollywood Walk of Fame, through a back entrance that opens onto a seedy parking lot, there's a space that feels rather like an alpine chalet. Created by the artist Piero Golia, the unlikely oasis is a salon for those in the know located in the storage of L.A.C.E. (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), an artist-run space that has been operating since the late 1970s.

Golia, originally from Naples, shows locally with Gagosian Gallery. But in certain circles he's better known as the co-founder of the Mountain School of Arts, an unaccredited alternative to an MFA program, which has for 10 years drawn Europeans, East Coasters and other non-natives to Los Angeles for an immersive semester of studio visits and conversations. The chalet, which is open several nights a week for occasions ranging from performances to birthdays, was founded in a similar spirit. "While the school is reserved for a younger crowd, the chalet is for a broader range," Golia says. "I feel like the chalet is more of a tool than an exhibition space could be. If you learn how to use it, there's much more functionality in the chalet — in reality, it's more similar to a community, like the school."

The wooden enclave is designed by the Gehry Partners architect Edwin Chan. Not surprisingly, art is an integral component of the club. The Los Angeles-based painter Mark Grotjahn has work in the front room, while the centerpiece of the back room is an aquarium by the French artist Pierre Huyghe that sustains an ecosystem of giant hermit crabs and floating rocks.

So far, evenings at the chalet have proven themselves to be both intimate and unpredictable. Back in November, on one of its first nights, the choreographer Stephen Galloway danced for the first time in public since leaving the Frankfurt Ballet. In late January, the Los Angeles High School marching band performed as a welcome for Huyghe, who is temporarily based in Los Angeles while he prepares a retrospective this fall at LACMA. Several weeks ago, the collector Stefan Simchowicz — the subject of several recent profiles detailing his practice of hoarding and liquidating works by very young artists, like penny stocks — was publicly flagellated by a dominatrix. A late spring gathering took the form of a luau, with Hawaiian ice shavings and Polynesian dancers.

The project will come to a close in late November, coming full circle with another party for Huyghe to celebrate the opening of his show at LACMA. Golia is already planning the space's demise. "I want there to be the feeling that the thing will vanish, step by step. The architecture will slowly start fading while we are going to the end."