

GAGOSIAN GALLERY  
frieze

# Happy Hours

What Piero Golia's Chalet project reveals about private and public social spaces for artists

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Fireworks, two marching bands and a large banner that announced, "That's all Folks!" marked the finale of Chalet Dallas at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, in February. Brainchild of artist Piero Golia, the private club was as much a work of sculpture as it was a place for a group of invited guests to drink, be entertained by contemporary art and artists, eat cotton candy and chat. The lore of Chalet Dallas's nighttime activities imparted itself upon the space during the museum's regular operating hours. When the general museum-going public was invited to take part in the experience, the sculptural tableau on view threw into relief a tiered system of access that reflects all too well the conditions of contemporary art today.

As a public institution, the Nasher was tasked with the difficult responsibility of mediating these after-hours activities to an audience that, during museum hours, could only access the work as a more-or-less static entity. A painting by Mark Grotjahn, an aquarium by Pierre Huyghe, a photograph by Jeff Wall, a piano on loan from Christopher Williams — all arranged amidst furniture and décor designed by the architect Edwin Chan — greeted visitors alongside the installation's daily fixture: the actor Maneesh Raj Madahar. During the day, Madahar could be consulted as an unofficial ambassador for the Chalet, explaining the installation or the artist's intent, while forming his own relationships with the Nasher's community. Madahar was on hand for the evening activities too, installed in a corner

while J.D. Whittenberg performed music written in collaboration with the artist Mario Garcia Torres, or Tacita Dean's film *The Green Ray* (2001) was screened.

Madahar was at the Chalet the night I was invited to bartend with Sohrab Mohebbi. As two Los Angeles-based curators, our role — beyond serving martinis — was to convey the atmosphere and mythology surrounding the Chalet's initial 16-month iteration in Hollywood during 2013 and 2014. Mohebbi and I frantically handed out drinks to a crowd that seemed eager to get blind drunk. Keeping up with their healthy appetites for free alcohol (one museum donor insisted on drinking from a vodka bottle when we'd run out of clean glasses) was probably the hardest either of us had ever worked. We often found ourselves having to explain, "We're curators, not bartenders," when patrons tried to order off-menu or became frustrated by our lack of professionalism. Upon learning of our day jobs, one particular guest was flummoxed that we'd not been to see the Jackson Pollock show at the nearby Dallas Museum of Art in our few hours there; but, rather than see shows as curators tend to do, we had to go to work. On this particular night, Golia debuted miniature paintings by Richard Pettibone alongside *The Kite* (2011–12), a miniature newspaper by artist Pentti Monkkonen. A hired pianist played songs from Guns N' Roses' album *Use Your Illusion I* (1991) while participants such as Monkkonen displayed their agile proficiency at mechanical bull-riding in an adjacent velvet-curtained room that normally serves as the Nasher's café.

In its original, West Coast incarnation, Golia's project was run according to a staunch invitation-only policy and funded primarily by the artist himself. The Nasher version highlighted

how the relationships between institutions and their publics, between artists and audiences, remain fraught and subject to constant reappraisal. While the development of new strategies for public engagement represents one pole of this divide, the increased privatization of museums represents the other. As a project that is simultaneously absorbed into the logic of museum exhibitions yet rejects it, by establishing its own terms of accessibility, the Chalet sat somewhere along the axis of hospitality and withdrawal.

In the same manner that Allen Ruppersberg's *Al's Café* (1969) and Jason Rhoades's *Black Pussy Soiree Cabaret Macramé* (2006) — both by artists from Los Angeles — turned

installation art, public sculpture and performance into a social space for a handpicked group, Chalet Hollywood was intent on bringing local and out-of-town artists, curators, writers and other inhabitants of the art world together to take part in an experience divorced from institutional protocol. In Golia's case, the Chalet in Hollywood was located in storage rooms at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, although resourced by the artist and funded independently, allowing the club to operate more or less autonomously out of the non-profit's back entrance. With the shift from a self-initiated work to one with institutional support from the Nasher, Golia's objective became one of accommodating a different clientele while remaining committed to the idea of an inner artistic life that is lived among peers and colleagues in the off-hours — the social lives that run adjacent to the exhibitions, publications and events that make up our professional selves. In some senses, the installation of the Chalet at the Nasher exposed the artistic breakroom to the conditions of display, just as much as it was able to keep these activities private, secret and for ourselves to enjoy.

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Piero Golia  
Chalet Hollywood, 2016

Courtesy  
the artist; photograph:  
Jeremy Bittermann

