

ART IN REVIEW

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By Holland Cotter

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Smack Mellon Studios

56 Water Street

Dumbo, Brooklyn

Through Nov. 18

The Soviet space station Mir, or a witty approximation of it, is on maneuvers in Brooklyn, manned by a crew of weekend cosmonauts under the leadership of the artist Ward Shelley. Mr. Shelley, who recently created an ingenious, Orgone Box-ish crawl-through environment at the Pierogi gallery in Williamsburg, cooked up the idea for the Mir project; but the final product is a collaborative effort, and it suits Smack Mellon's two-story interior to a T.

Composed of connected modules suspended from the ceiling, the piece vaguely resembles a molecular structure. And while it looks to be made largely of wire, tape and colored transparent plastic wrap, it is substantial enough to accommodate several passengers with sleeping quarters, a dining room and a "luxury lounge." Shipboard activity is monitored from the ground by a bank of video screens, some with pretaped films, others with live transmission.

Actually, the whole thing is a sort of luxury lounge, an extravagance put together with serious, hands-on skill by some 20 sculptors, performers, and sound and video artists, the core group being Mr. Shelley, Peter Soriano and Jesse Bercowetz. Think of a Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt tabletop sculpture made monumental, or an early Matthew Barney environment on a tight (very tight) budget, or the installations of the self-taught artist Emery Blagdon and you get something like the idea.

All, or most, hands will be on deck today from 3 to 9 p.m. and tomorrow and Sunday from 2 to 6 p.m. The crew will actually be living on board for four days from Thursday through Nov. 18, and the show will be viewable during regular gallery hours. The Saturday I was there, everything seemed to be working just fine, which is more than one can say of the original Mir. And with once-affordable Brooklyn neighborhoods like Dumbo gentrifying at a horrific clip, artists in outer space may just have to be the next frontier. HOLLAND COTTER