

ARTFORUM

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"MIR2"

SMACK MELLON STUDIOS

Harking back to elaborate tree forts hosting gangs of neighborhood kids, "Mir2," a group project organized by artists Ward Shelley, Peter Soriano, and Jesse Bercowetz, brought together dozens of collaborators to build a complex of seven modules suspended from the ceiling of this Brooklyn gallery's two-story main space. Linked to one another by scaffolding, extension cords, and a profusion of thin steel ropes, the modules were connected to the gallery only by the cables anchoring them to the ceiling and by a flimsy Styrofoam footbridge held aloft by Mylar balloons, which led to a mezzanine. Such playful blurring of functional and fanciful, utility and bricolage, served a rather serious game of make-believe that wavered between the childlike and the childish.

In an entry gallery, banks of old TVs showed live and taped footage (one couldn't tell which was which) from inside Mir2, along with abstract psychedelia and Op-ish fodder. A jumpsuited woman at the "control" desk, equipped with a Fisher-Price baby monitor and a Nickelodeon PhotoBlaster camera, acted as a kind of den mother to a trio of artnauts who had opted to inhabit Mir2 full-time for the last three days of the show. She offered to play "relaxation tapes" for one discontent, who admitted the guys were starting to get on each other's nerves. The continuous sound track of droning white noise—which didn't seem generated by any onboard activity but was there more for atmosphere—probably didn't help.

Up in the complex, a guy in the requisite orange jumpsuit lay in a hammock strung between two modules, scooting along the scaffolding on a pulley system. Nearby,

another guy emerged from a cocoon-shaped pod, hanging upside-down in low-tech sci-fi style. A sunny yellow plastic pavilion showcased an iMac and a sling chair; a third artnaut logged off and held forth from here, chatting with visitors on the ground about maintenance tasks and getting used to living up in the air, if not quite in space.

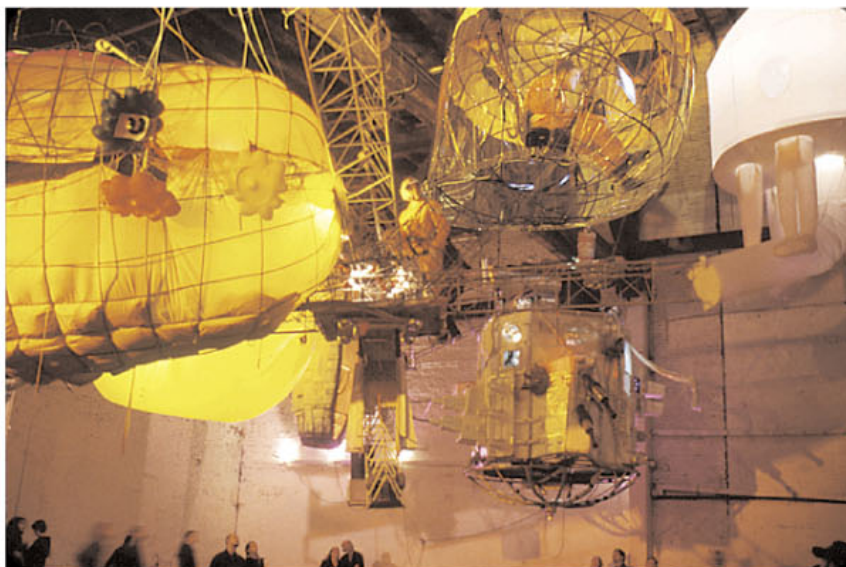
Rounding out the "neighborhood" were a blimplike module with a tie-dyed peace sign and a hexagonal nightclub/lounge pod lined with red velvet and mirrors. A renegade crash-landing module cobbled together out of Styrofoam, popcorn buckets, and other refuse was devoted to "waste experiments" (traces of which had fallen to the floor—empty Ho Ho boxes, Baggies filled with suspicious brown matter). Visible inside the module, a growth of pork rinds evoked the futuristic farming of human skin. Hung higher than the others and contrasting with them in its simplicity was a serene white pod, from

which dangled six torso/leg forms like fisherman's waders. A celestial escape vehicle?

It was heartening to see such stalwart scrappiness and communal spirit in Brooklyn's fast-gentrifying DUMBO neighborhood. Mir2 recalled the days of Ben Vautier and others living in shop windows in derelict areas or chaining themselves to one another. It could also be seen as a low-tech take on Andrea Zittel's experiments with self-contained living quarters, the early antics of Matthew Barney, or, in its boyish communal spirit and gleeful use of castoffs, those of impish Austrian quartet Gelatin.

Still, the artists could have pushed their project further. As the Russian cosmonauts invited their American colleagues to their hapless space station, why not invite visitors to spend a night aboard Mir2? As it was, viewers were left just viewing—watching the TVs or craning their necks at the installation—amused but not enlightened.

—Julie Caniglia



"Mir2," 2001.
Installation view.