

## Covering The Waterfront: The DUMBO Gallery Round-Up Part 1

by [Emily Colucci](#) on October 6, 2016 [Neighborhood Watch](#)



Installation view of Ghost of a Dream's When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project at Smack Mellon (Courtesy the artists and Smack Mellon)

Can art thrive in the land of startups and \$10 coffee? Neither is known to be particularly art friendly, so the question seemed relevant as I headed over to DUMBO. Dotting the neighborhood are several non-profits, many of which are beneficiaries of the space subsidy program run by [Two Trees](#), the largest (and arguably only) arts-friendly developer in the city. The program offers these spaces rents at reduced retail prices. (Disclaimer: Art F City is a space subsidy program participant.)

This fall, the proliferation of non-profits in the neighborhood hosts more than its share of politically oriented shows. Following my [last gallery round-up](#) in the West Village, I decided to cruise the Brooklyn waterfront on a Saturday afternoon to see what these non-profits offer for their fall shows. And I was not disappointed. Here's what I found:

### ***Ghost of a Dream: When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project***

I never considered the enormous material waste that art fairs generate until I visited Ghost of a Dream's exhibition When The Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project at Smack Mellon.

When The Smoke Clears revives a favorite and, at this point, possibly exhausted art world pastime: criticizing art fairs. Of course, art fairs are easy targets. From the crowded installations to the commodification of the art object and the ridiculousness of its social scene, there's a lot to complain about.

And yet, the duo's refreshing focus on the little considered material excess and unsustainability of art fairs revitalizes this old topic. Launched in spectacular fashion, their critique of this excess involves building a life-sized house from leftover fair detritus. To do this, they spent three years gathering materials from dumpsters, hitting fairs like Art Basel Miami, the Armory Show and Frieze. The result of this effort now sits in the center of Smack Mellon.

Titled Fair Housing Project, the piece is made to the size of a traditional art fair booth. Surrounding the house on the periphery of the gallery space are dizzying textured paintings created from art fair rugs and videos of the house in an idyllic lakeside setting. With benches and patio furniture made from art crates scattered around the gallery, it feels like you're visiting someone's rural cabin. You almost want to ask the gallery for a glass of iced tea.



Inside Ghost of a Dream’s Fair Housing Project (Courtesy the artists and Smack Mellon)



Detail of Fair Housing Project (photo by author)

It should probably go without saying that the house is the main fixture of the show. At first, it appears like any small, reclaimed wooden structure like a model log cabin in a history museum. On closer inspection, *Fair Housing Project* is covered in recognizable shipping labels and even, legible gallery names. For example, one side of the house is emblazoned with the name Sikkema from Chelsea’s [Sikkema Jenkins & Co.](#) I wonder how the gallery feels about their name—and trash—appearing on a shack.

Stepping inside *Fair Housing Project* is an exercise in overstimulation. The abstractions made of carpet cover almost every available space in the interior—a mockery of the familiar overblown art fair aesthetic. In fairs, this hanging style leaves me just on the edge of a panic attack. The experience is no different here, though it is mitigated by knowing that the sensation is being purposefully evoked. Every abstract carpet design and wall hanging exist to further the viewer’s conceptual and physical understanding of the staggering amount of waste generated by the fairs’ production.

By placing the house both within a gallery space and a natural landscape in the videos, Ghost of a Dream links their critique of fairs with the housing crisis. As New York City’s homeless count hits [a record high](#), how ethical is the sheer material expenditure of art fairs? Could we actually construct houses out of art fair junk to live in? If the house in Smack Mellon is any indication, it may be a viable and potentially necessary option.