

# HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

## Considering the Environmental Damage Done by Art Fairs

Built with the collected detritus of art fairs, *The Fair Housing Project* illustrates just how much good material is thrown away once the tents fall.

Zachary Small | 18 hours ago



Ghost of a Dream, 'When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project' (all images courtesy Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, NY, all photos by Etienne Frossard)

Somewhere in the idyllic countryside, an unvarnished wooden cabin stands surrounded by video cameras. These record a visual testament to the cabin's existence, its position in space, and its contrast to the natural world around it. As time passes, however, a dense fog rolls over the hill, enveloping the cabin until it disappears completely from sight. When the mist finally dissipates, the cabin is gone.

This cabin now stands at the center of [Smack Mellon's](#) waterfront space in Dumbo. The cameras that once surrounded the small shack have now been replaced by a hoard of television screens looping the same footage of the cabin's time in the wilderness from different vantage points, a simple choice that underscores how this installation smartly plays with ideas like sustainability and foreboding anxiety.



Ghost of a Dream, 'When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project,' installation view at Smack Mellon, Brooklyn

Created by [Ghost of a Dream](#) (Adam Eckstrom and Lauren Was), [When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project](#) notes, perhaps at first unexpectedly, what so many critics have failed to address: the impact of art fairs on the environment.

Infrastructure may not be a sexy topic, but Eckstrom and Was easily communicate a message on how wasteful the art world can be. Built with the collected detritus of art fairs — crate lids, shipping containers, and foam padding — *The Fair Housing Project* illustrates just how much good material is thrown away once the tents fall. And as the installation's name implies, we must subsequently ask how “fair” that really is. Isn't it an embarrassment of riches that the art world cannot find a way to recycle the materials that make shipping and exhibiting art possible?





Ghost of a Dream, 'When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project' (detail)

Eckstrom and Was use the cabin's interior to simulate the sensory overload normally ascribed to art fairs. Built in the same dimensions as the average gallerist's fair booth might be, the cabin is packed with countless optical paintings, also made from recycled materials. Washed in a harsh fluorescent light, these works create a collective unease, a dizzying assortment of illusory patterns that cause the paintings to blur together. This is reminiscent of "art fatigue," that exhaustion one feels at an art fair after visiting dozens of gallery booths in one day.

Shares

While Eckstrom and Was's recreation of the art fair in all its sensory overload is on point, I have trouble understanding one of the installation's central premises. The artists attempt to correlate the fluctuations of the art market with the volatility of the housing market in a hazy relationship at best. Based on the exhibition materials and a short conversation with Eckstrom, the artists argue that the boom and bust cycle of the art market often corresponds to that of the housing market. The comparison seems spurious and I would argue that Eckstrom and Was aren't looking high enough. The relationship isn't *between* the art market and the housing market; rather, it is both sectors' connections to American financial structures and the wealthy elites who run it.





Ghost of a Dream, 'When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project,' interior view

**The** *Fair Housing Project* finds its strength and relevance as a project of artistic economic Shares fantasy. Like the fog that quietly abducts the cabin from its bucolic setting, artists might wish that some otherworldly force could make the art market magically disappear. And the multichannel recording might lead us to a meditation on the unpredictability of the art market and its effect on the psyche of artists. The fog is symbolic of the larger, hidden forces at work in the art world: wealthy patrons and investors who predominantly steer the art world's salience through the trickle-down economics of museum collections, institution building, and grant funding. Completing this image, I suppose we are the cameras in waiting, eager to document those mysterious forces to give some guidance to an artist, however powerless we are to operate the larger system.

When the Smoke Clears: The Fair Housing Project *continues at Smack Mellon (92 Plymouth St, Dumbo, Brooklyn) through October 30.*