

The Faking Box

"Fake" is a nautical term meaning to coil or methodically arrange a rope "ready for running." The word provides no clue as to the larger purpose of a faking box: it was a life-saving device primarily used in the 19th and early 20th centuries for rescuing sailors stranded at sea. A faking box was made of wood with dowels that organized a rope in a zig-zag pattern, ready to be used in an emergency. When in need, the faking box was turned upside down, and the rope was neatly deposited from its frame onto the ground. The rope was attached to a Lyle gun, a line-throwing device that looked like a cannon that fired a shot line at the imperiled ship. Once secured, it created a rope bridge connecting land and ship. Additionally, pulleys and life-rings helped transport sailors to shore. The sole purpose of the faking box was to allow the shot line to be fired without becoming tangled or knotted. It is such a simple device you might think Temple Grandin invented it. It was a nitty-gritty and indispensable tool for rescue, but for our artists, it offers a lot of inspiration and meaning beyond practical use.

The No W here Collective: Alice Hope, Toni Ross, and Bastienne Schmidt will create visual mediations in different parts of the Amagansett U.S. Life-Saving and Coast Guard Station Museum by adding their creative rejoinders to this beautifully restored landmark dating back to the early 1900s. First and foremost, the Collective chose the faking box as their primary muse. Additionally, they selected for their consideration the south-facing second-floor room that once served as a crew's quarter and sick bay and the Storm Room on the ground floor. Finally, the Collective will install outdoor works in the Station's western-facing backyard and the wrap-around porch highlighting this historically significant structure positioned a few hundred yards from Atlantic Beach. In the years between 1902 to 1944, a crew at the Station had an unobstructed ocean view that afforded them a twenty-four-hour-a-day watch - not unlike a lighthouse.

The Station is classic Shingle Style architecture, distinguished by wood cladding, rooftops with varied slopes, and large verandas. This uniquely American design from the turn of the last century profoundly influenced the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The architectural historian Vincent Scully made the term Shingle Style popular by describing its complex shapes unified by cedar shingles. But the charm of the style also stood in stark contrast to the modernist incubator of art and design that appeared in Europe at the time, such as J.J. P. Oud, the Dutch architect, and the De Stijl movement. A little later, Piet Mondrian, the Bauhaus, and European modernism rattled the tectonic plates of culture and sent a rippling effect that would soon reach our shores.

Amagansett's Coast Guard Station was a countervailing aesthetic to European modernism and stood for American resilience, virtue, and convention. Nineteenth-century art and architecture in America flirted with a mixed bag of classic styles such as Greek and Gothic Revival and Second Empire with some splashes of Italian and Romanesque influences. There were some extraordinary exceptions to

traditional American aesthetics, primarily in the form of bridges: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Williamsburg, and Queensboro. American bridge design staked out new territory and broke with the confines of our prevailing trends. Almost concurrently, the European avant-garde shocked New York City with an exhibition titled "International Modern Art" that opened at The Armory on February 17, 1913. It was front-page news that fiercely divided the country. The backlash was immediate and ferocious: art students in Chicago found Henri Matisse or "Henry Hairy Mattress" guilty of sin during a mock trial for creating "Blue Nude" and burned it in effigy.

The No W here Collective artists are not sinners, but they are possessed by an aesthetic that speaks much more fluently with European modernism. Therefore, their alliance with The Amagansett Life-Saving Station is tinged with disruption and wonder; our ancestors, Amagansett seamen, fishermen, and locals from the turn of the last century openly conversing with contemporary artists fostering the values of European modernism - an extraordinary occasion when history, culture, and tradition can mingle and cohabitate without rancor. In reality, maritime history and art-making date back thousands of years and share more than we might imagine. The No W here Collective helps visualize some of those intersections by first and foremost commemorating the service and dedication of the early U.S. Life Saving Service performing rescues from the Amagansett Station. Their visual interventions are low-key, sensitive, and entirely responsive to different parts/aspects of the Station. At the core of The No W here is a chronic earnestness with an unyielding baseline: heavy industry. Theirs is an intensity of hands-on dedication, a work ethic that stands apart while endorsing the Bauhaus's utopian, even Marxist ideals: a world made equal by design, art, and architecture. However, the word Zeitgeist (time, ghost), meaning the cultural values of a specific time and period, couldn't mean much to a sailor stranded at sea.

The No W here Collective has its trademark of multi-tasking coupled with a deep commitment to craft. They don't have access to Harry Potter wands yet magically weave together disparate elements with hard work, sweat, and toil. Their unique insights create time capsules capturing content that counts. Time and history are updated and memorialized. The Collective emphatically acknowledges the Bauhaus: founded as an art school by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany. The Bauhaus promoted a comprehensive art form that would eventually join design, typography, interior design, graphic design, architecture, mass production, industrial design, sculpture, and painting into a single force. Upon fleeing Hitler's Germany, many members of the Bauhaus took up teaching art throughout the United States and, in particular, on the east coast. Since the late 1930s, several generations of artists eagerly absorbed the Bauhaus sensibility.

Artist's collectives have challenged conventions for the past sixty years by toying with and upending some of the most fundamental aspects of the making and exhibiting of artwork. They have redefined the concepts of exchange, competition, commercialism, and collaboration. The artists in a collective surrender a part of themselves because the object or artifact gives way to requirements outlined by

the group or by conditions spelled out in the world. The trade-off is that singular opportunity to respond and react to an agreed source, providing them with another history and way of thinking. The Amagansett Life Saving Station is a marker and symbol because its everyday use has given way to modern technology. But our imagination tells us something else; it represents the strength of purpose, courage, and rescue. The No W here Collective embraces this image and makes badges honoring the building and its past occupants.

Toni Ross has the lightest touch of the three artists of The Collective. Her artistic contributions could be mistaken for parts of the original building: a bedspread, a flag, a nesting buoy, and an isolated wooden ramp. Ross harmonizes with the Station by appropriating her subject matter from existing parts and functions. She also creates thoughtful pauses and suspensions of reality by tricking us a little because her interventions are so veiled. Ross pampers us with care and consideration by providing access with her ramp, comfort with her bedspread, a cradle for a buoy, and an additional flag for reassurance. Nurture, revival, and rescue get a boost. Her weavings are like jewels quivering in light, fanciful but real. Geometry in her hands is rendered boundless as if edges have double meanings. If Ross is anxious about making art, she steadily recycles it into radiance and conviction. She provides sanctuary.

Bastienne Schmidt modulates her impact more broadly: the second-floor closet doors are exchanged with four airy designs supported by copper pipes depicting loose grids that neatly fill the space. But even more so, they are uniquely observed condensations of her more immediate task. Schmidt champions the schematic, the pattern, the arrangement, the blueprint, and the archetype. As proposed by Carl Jung, the personality type reveals character. In this case, Senex: the image of wisdom provides a grounded and stable outlook; Schmidt's work exudes reliability. She bases almost everything she makes on repetition and progressions, yet she is not calculating. Imagine Agnes Martin as a mannerist, a self-conscious creator of ideals. Schmidt delivers visual aphorisms or reminders of where we are going and what we must do. Her pillows with bold words won't entice sleep rather they goad us towards watchfulness. If Ross provides sanctuary, Schmidt is sentential.

Alice Hope is the trickster or the skeptic. Albeit cerebral, she's hands-on as she manipulates recycled materials like the lids of beer cans while creating forms that look like crop circles. Hope's imagination is turned loose like a cicada outbreak streaking through the midlands. She time-travels from Charles Chaplin's "Modern Times" to Pointillism while doing jumping jacks to heavy metal. The outcome is a stop dead in your track moment. Like an Aztec sun stone, Hope stakes her world on the hypnotic: a spellbound fixation on the process as she drives home her view of the universe. She petitions for inspection while giving us the real go-around: a Shaman daring us to surrender to the eyepopping glare. Or like Paul Gauguin said years ago about Pointillism: "a chemist who piles on dots." Hope cycles us back to the late 1960s when the canon of American art was fumbling badly: the large, bright, bold designs of color field painting retreating from view, and Pop Art taking

a bullet. Today, from the recesses of our minds, blissful memories of Ken Noland's Target paintings and Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty as a war raged on. If Toni Ross provides sanctuary, Bastienne Schmidt is sentential, and Alice Hope lends conscience. Collectives work:

The Scarecrow needed a brain.
The Tin Man needed a heart.
The Lion needed courage.

We are all on an extended search for what is missing, not unlike the Amagansett U.S. Life-Saving and Coast Guard Station Museum. At the same time, artists are on a quest for what is real and alive. The current conversation taking place at the Station is intuitive and vivid. The No W here Collective kindly concentrates our attention on the Station with care and creativity, and their effort is a remarkable synthesis of time, history, and present-day purpose.

George Negroponte
June 2022

**Guild Hall presents NOW HERE
at the Amagansett U.S. Life-Saving Station**

By the No W here Collective, Alice Hope, Toni Ross, and Bastienne Schmidt
Curated by Christina Mossaides Strassfield

On View July 16 through September 30, 2022

160 Atlantic Avenue, Amagansett

HOURS

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SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 6PM: Panel Discussion with the Artists

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NOW HERE is supported by Judi Caron, with additional support by Judith Hope.

Guild Hall's museum programs are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, an anonymous donor, Crozier Fine Arts, and funding from The Michael Lynne Museum Endowment, and The Melville Straus Family Endowment.