

GLADSTONE

Sophie Kemp and Matt Weinberger, "An Art Show That Smells Like Elf Bar and Sounds Like the Internet," *i-D*, November 25, 2024

i-D

An Art Show That Smells Like Elf Bar and Sounds Like the Internet

A dispatch from the esoteric rap show at Mark Leckey's new exhibition in Chelsea.



MUSIC • MATT WEINBERGER, SOPHIE KEMP • NOVEMBER 25, 2024

After 8pm on a weekend in November, Chelsea is desolate. Galleries with all the lights off, idling there like airplane hangers. A handful of diners with names like Malibu and Johnny's. For the ten minutes that I am walking to the show from the train, I am one of the only people on the street. A lady walking her dog. A tourist couple huddled over a new kind of iPhone. It is cold out — one of the first really brutally cold evenings of the winter. When I arrive at Gladstone Gallery, another one of those airplane hangers, the first thing I notice is the crowd. There are dozens of mostly young people idling outside. They are smoking cigarettes in their trench coats. They are adjusting their hats, their evening finery. They are ready not exactly to dance, but to be seen, watching.

Here's the conceit this evening: Put a bunch of esoteric rappers in a blue chip gallery. Have them sing karaoke over pre-recorded beats. Have them sit in a plastic folding chair, inside of an installation of a bus station with pigeon spikes, bass guitar in one hand, laptop in the other. The situation isn't totally random. A few days ago, on Thursday, the artist Mark Leckey opened his new show, 3 Songs from the Liver, here. He's a famous trickster of contemporary art, originally from the north of England. His work spans sculpture, performance, film, and sound. He comes from a dance music background, from a UK rave background. A happy hardcore breakbeats background. He's hosted an NTS show for the past few years, playing hyperpop and sludge. Rage rap and glitched out noise bursts. To produce tonight's show, he teamed up with Kieran Press-Reynolds, a Pitchfork (and i-D) contributor, who co-curated the bill. They split the duties in half: Leckey picked Im and Nebula. Press-Reynolds picked Ja66, Chinapoet and Bobbyhorror.



When I arrive, Leckey is DJing. Hunched over the CDJs. The crowd isn't dancing yet. They're all self conscious, standing there in their outfits. I meet a person in a Yankees beret named Miles, also fitted in Margiela. I ask them why they are there. They say they are here to see Chinapoet and Bobbyhorror, who have just gone on — a duo playing songs they produced. They are from something called the "ambient plug scene." I ask them what they think about the show and they joke about hating the west side of Manhattan, but liking the space's brutalism. Ejun and Drew are both 23 and are here because they go to HellTekk shows (I have literally no idea what they are talking about) and this show is apparently HellTekk adjacent. Cadion is 20 and is here to see music he usually sees online in person.

Ja66 goes on next. It's his second show ever. He is not working the crowd. He stands there muttering into the microphone. His music is bracing, beautiful and vulnerable and weird. I notice that next to me, there is a man in a blue mohair gnome hat. Behind me, a man who is about 6'5 pogos up and down, mullet bouncing with him, in an otherwise sullen crowd. Another guy stands there in the front of the crowd, with a pair of huge Audio-Technica cans strapped to his ears, recording the entire set in landscape on his phone. When I ask Ja66 what he thought about the show, he says "This shit — it felt so natural. It's so funny to see them turn up, all of these artsy people."



I go back into the crowd. The musician Umfang is here, who tells me she ended up at the show because she knows the production company that did the space's sound installation. The art dealer Gavin Brown is here, but I can't find him. I am introduced to Billy Grant, who is one of the co-founders of the gallery O'Flaherty's. He tells me it is nice to be introduced and I respond, bafflingly, by saying, Thank You. I meet the most beautiful exterminator I've ever seen in my whole life. A white guy who manages a bunch of rappers tells me he likes my outfit. He is also wearing Margiela. He tells me he has a bunch of Hedi Slimane era Celine.

I see a guy in a pair of Tripp pants and a spiky felt hat. I see a guy in a ridiculously long and skinny sequined black scarf and he says: this place is crazy! All of the zoomers think the whole show is old as fuck art world people. All the old as fuck art world people think it's all zoomers. One of the old as fuck art world people is a guy who is like 32, and he tells me the crowd looks "valid". I am somewhere in between, since I'm 28. The whole room begins to smell like

an Elf Bar. I cannot for the life of me figure where to get a beer, so I don't drink. I write a note in my phone that says: subwoofer going crazy!!!! And another one that says: bich im trying.



I talk to Leckey about his night, leaning over the booth while he scrolls through songs to play in between sets. "Music is a much more open space than art is," he says, "The art crowd is hermetic and can be difficult to access in a way that music isn't. You can toss around all these complex ideas equal to art that everyone can participate in. Right now, I like music more than art." I ask Press-Reynolds the same question. He refers to the vibe as *liminal*, says he likes how the sound is *suffocating, debasing* the vibe of the gallery. "It's a vibe collision," he laughs, "A hodgepodge of cool art world people and cooked zoomer artists." It's the first real show he's ever curated. He's not stressed. He thinks it's funny, and cool, to do rap beats in a gallery setting.

Matt Weinberger — the photographer I've been paired up with for the evening — tells me we should go outside. He takes a few more pictures. I write down more notes. The music is ending. The crowd pools out. I am standing out in the wind wearing a velvet blazer and a mini skirt. *It freezing*, I think, *fucking cold*. I press my body up against the wall and look up at the sky. There are no stars. We go to one of the diners and get a beer. It is populated by Broadway gay guys and botoxed septuagenarians. Then I walk to the train. I do not speak to anyone. I go to bed. It is Saturday night in Chelsea. I have no impulse to party.

