

# ARTNEWS

## Office Space: Artists Take Over 19th Floor of Times Square Building for Three-Week Residency

BY ***John Chiaverina*** POSTED 05/25/16 10:15 AM



Cyril Duval (a.k.a. Item Idem) in his office, as part of Work In Progress.

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Unlike most people living in New York, I enjoy the insanity of Times Square. I'll take any chance I can get to go up there. Dipset reunion concert at B.B. King's Blues Club & Grill? Sure. *Mad Max* in 3-D at AMC Empire 25? Count

me in. Sometimes I'll straight up hit the train alone just to go to Tim Hortons, the beloved Canadian donut shop known for their much-appropriated maple bar. So I was thrilled when I got word about Work In Progress—a last-minute, three-week artist residency going down in a soon-to-be dismantled office space on the 19th floor of a Times Square building on 43rd and Broadway.

After moving through hectic Times Square streets and eventually the building's pristine lobby, an elevator shot me up to the 19th floor so fast that my ears popped. Curator Tiffany Zabłudowicz, of the Zabłudowicz Collection, greeted me there and took me on a tour of the office, which until recently was operated by a real-estate company of some sort. (Also on the 19th floor: the communications company Etrail Trading Solutions; Zabłudowicz told me they have been very generous with their Wi-Fi.) The residency has seven participating artists—Brad Troemel & Joshua Citarella, Violet Dennison, Haley Mellin, Sarah Meyohas, Cyril Duval (a.k.a. Item Idem), and Sigrid Lauren—spread throughout the stripped space, taking up their own barebones rooms and filling them with however much (or little) they want.

“All of this is going, that's why it's OK that [the artists] write on the walls and sort of mess it up a lot, which is great,” Zabłudowicz explained. She was approached only two weeks ago by the managers of the building, where the Zabłudowicz Collection staged shows in the past, though never in the context of an actual office. The space is to be gutted and demolished in early June; its final days will be spent filled with artists.

Troemel and Citarella were working collaboratively from a corner office on two computers facing each other. As *Rumors* by Fleetwood Mac played softly in the background, they explained to me the focus of their residency: the duo's conceptual Etsy store, Ultraviolet Production House. The store composites images from warehouse-based websites like Amazon Prime and Alibaba into mock-ups of highly conceptual, often absurd objects that don't actually exist in real space until they are purchased. “So we have no physical interaction with any of the materials we work with, it's a purely image-based practice,”

Citarella told me, calling it a “model for an art practice where the artist does not need to assume debt in the production of the artworks.”

Since they started the store in late 2015, they have sold around 50 products. Items for sale have included a leather couch embroidered with patches from crust punk bands and a fund whose donations supposedly went toward the anonymous release of wolf spiders into the NADA art fair. The two have been arriving promptly at 9 a.m. every day. Although Troemel told me he has availed himself of the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company, in actuality they have been eating mostly jerky and sandwiches brought from home. A Planet Hollywood trip is purportedly in the works.

Violet Dennison’s office looks more in line with what the layperson might scan as an “art studio.” Earthy sculptural assemblages dot the wall, and the floor is cluttered. “I had some friends over last night,” Dennison said, explaining that the room’s currently a mix of “art things, but also the reminder of hanging out.” She has been coming to the space a lot at night. “Taking in the atmosphere in here has been really cool,” she said. “It’s really been informing the work I’ve been making.”

Item Idem has a showroom full of inflatables, bootleg gear, and religious trinkets, many of which were sourced from China (the artist is currently at work on a documentary about the factories where a lot these products are made). During his residency, he will be doing a fashion editorial on the streets in Times Square, posing with clothing and using Snapchat filters. “We’re keeping it busy, so we’re trying to do as much as possible,” he explained. He too had been staying until the night. “That’s the best part of it, actually. It keeps on changing. During the afternoon it’s great and at night it’s totally different, too.”

Other rooms are being used in different ways. The dancer Sigrid Lauren’s is mostly bare save for a desk and a chair with wheels that is constantly being rearranged. Haley Mellin’s focus is on printmaking. Sarah Meyohas is using the clear doorway of her office as a white board of sorts, part of a larger

project in collaboration with two scientists from the Aizenberg lab at Harvard. Her focus for this project is attempting to make a “layer of direct opals using two different solutions of colloids” within small cylindrical vases, she explained over email.

The ability to spend your days and nights making art in an office building in Times Square is a weirdly special thing, the view alone made my experience more pleasant than most studio visits I’ve ever been on. It seems like none of the participants are taking this idiosyncratic opportunity for granted. “I think all the artists have built up a really good conversation together,” Zabłudowicz said. “The experiment seems to be working.”

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