



Turning a Page | Cara Benedetto at Taxter and Spengemann

CULTURE

NOVEMBER 14, 2011, 4:30 PM

By KEVIN MCGARRY

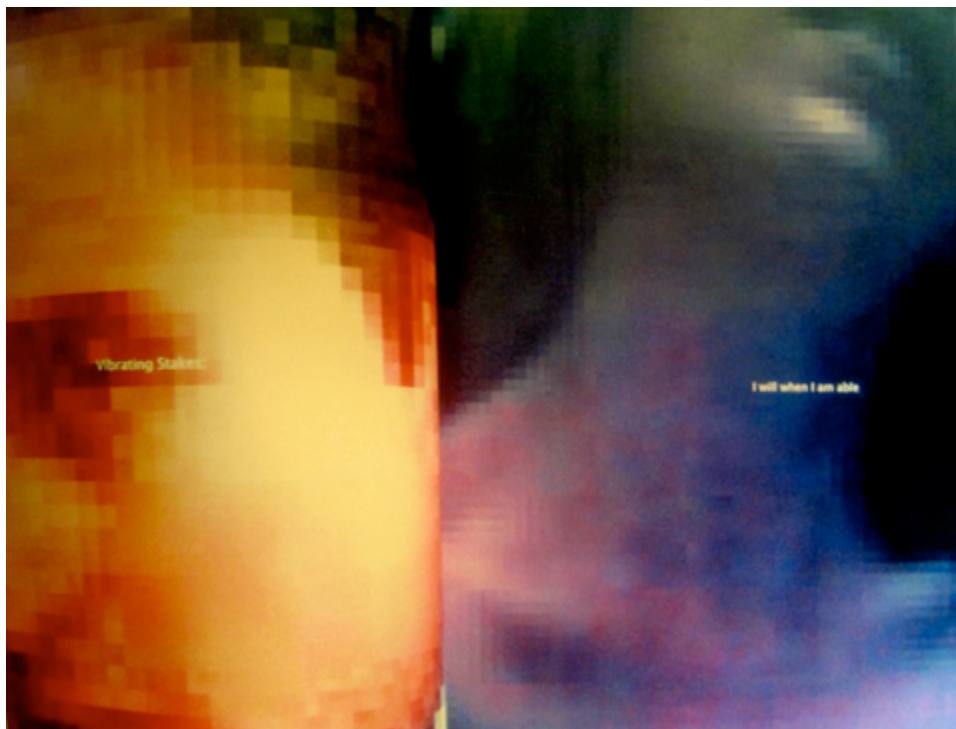


Photographs courtesy of the artist and Taxter & Spengemann, New York An image from Cara Benedetto's photo series, "We clawed the bottom of the sea together."

Cara Benedetto's debut solo show at **Taxter and Spengemann**, "Breaking Waves (How Fake Stakes Ate the Cake)," hard-core in every sense of the phrase, is a puzzling and provocative accumulation of imagined correspondences written and signed by a cast of vivid, often angry authors to the people who have done them right and wrong in life.

A white conference table in the center of the gallery is littered with books: austere chapbooks, weighty coffee-table books and volumes that recall paperbacks, calendars or prospectuses. “I originally made these books because I thought of them as alternative venues for shows,” Benedetto explains. “Each book could be a show. But I also think of them as prologues into one another.”

Wrapped in a hard, crinkly cellophane, the books begin as impossible objects, unopenable and unreadable. Throughout the exhibition, on Saturdays at noon, Benedetto unwraps a selection and reads them aloud. Earlier this month she was joined by her father, who recited a particularly violent piece. The performance illustrated a kind of lived wordplay that extends beyond the page, fusing textual depictions of pain with the visceral discomfort of familial boundaries being tested before a live audience.



With titles like “I M POSTER,” “2 one fat liar” and others far more explicit, Benedetto’s books and notes oscillate between hostility and humor as complementary modes of bombardment. “Quite honestly, I think feminism is not doing a good job within the arts,” she says. “I think what we see as ‘queer art’ could be the natural evolution from feminist tactics, but even that seems to be in a rush to objectify itself just as quickly as every other movement.”

It’s this objectification of style that Benedetto applies as a medium. Her agrammatical prose — lower cased, oddly spaced, i m this and u r that — recalls not only postmodern feminist aesthetics but also the

seemingly illiterate diction of social media: a hybrid that in this context feels at once mockingly jaded and irrepressibly immediate.

On the gallery walls are iPhone photographs of pages from the book “CSM IN CONVERSATION w/ MD,” which pairs grainy stills of Michael Douglas in and out of various roles with close-ups of a woman’s neck and parted lips. Made this summer, before the start of Occupy Wall Street, the recurring presence of Gordon Gekko gives this show about misappropriations of voice (and power) a sinister, oddly prescient subtext.

Prescient or not, Benedetto’s first show is Taxter and Spengemann’s last. The gallery, which for the past nine years has fostered the careers of many daring, unusual young artists, will close its doors at the end of the 2011.

Cara Benedetto, “Breaking Waves (How Fake Stakes Ate the Cake),” is at Taxter and Spengemann, 459 West 18th Street, through Dec. 23.

Art in America

Work It, Working Mother: L.A. Summer Performances

by catherine damman 07/24/13

Summer in Los Angeles is "all about performance," as per the title of a current series hosted by Chinatown gallery Human Resources L.A. (The month-long series includes performances by Linda Montano, Ron Athey and many more.) *A.i.A.* attended two recent L.A. performances that mobilize the genre's own productive frictions as fodder for satisfyingly complex work.



VIEW SLIDESHOW Cara Benedetto, *The Aesthetics of Love* (slide excerpt), 2013, PowerPoint Presentation based on Day Planner, edition of 30.; Cara Benedetto, *The Aesthetics of Love* (slide excerpt), 2013, PowerPoint Presentation based on Day Planner, edition of 30.;

On July 10, the night before [Jay Z transformed New York's Pace Gallery into a music video set](#), James Franco, if only in blurry photographs, turned up in Cara Benedetto's performance *The Aesthetics of Love* at Night Gallery. Benedetto delivered her deadpan, lecture-style performance in front of various cropped images of Franco and friends (Seth Rogen, Jonah Hill and others) culled from the artist's own blurry iPhone photographs of posters for the summer movie *This Is the End*. Despite the ubiquity of Franco and the other (literal) poster children of a tiring genre of pubescent comedy, here they were rendered strange. The grainy portraits seemed softer, stranger and more intimate than the stars' familiar personae.

The artist read scripted text aloud in a low, even tone; phrases such as "after her" and "after you" built a steady refrain. These phrases, suggesting both generosity and protocol, cued an assistant tasked with turning each computerized "page" of the projected PowerPoint. Its structure was that of a day planner, alluding to the calendrical anxieties exploited in the film's end-of-the-world plot.

Superimposed graphics in the software's default anodyne blue palette replaced the corporate content of the archetypal Powerpoint with wry, pop-psychoanalytic commentary. One pie graph was divided into uneven thirds labeled "came," "coming" and ".com", linking the movie's incessant sexual innuendo with the common abbreviation for "commerce."

After the performance came a panel discussion between Benedetto, Emily Liebert (a Columbia art history PhD candidate) and Suzanne Herrera (a Berkeley philosophy PhD candidate) that centered on feminism and "precarity," a popular term in contemporary political philosophy for the conditions of immaterial (and often contingent) labor. Some theorists of precarity take the condition of shared instability as the basis for imagined community. Benedetto eloquently

described her piece as investigating a "being-together that is different than the circle-jerk."

Within and against the masturbatory logic of the film (made literal, in one of its scenes, in a heated debate about the etiquette of ejaculating on your friends' stuff), Benedetto's appropriation reminds us that for all its hubris and jocular immaturity, the movie is a story of shared and inevitable vulnerability: the apocalypse.

By contrast with Benedetto's measured and academic tone, one can count on My Barbarian for a healthy dose of immodesty and spectacle. The Los Angeles-based theater troupe—Jane Gordon, Malik Gaines and Alexandro Segade—are known for their sumptuously playful appropriation and willful infidelity to style. Catapulting the subversive '60s camp aesthetic of Charles Ludlam or Jack Smith into the new millennium, the obstreperous group nimbly cavorts with both high theory and bad taste.

For the opening of their mother-themed exhibition "Universal Declaration of Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in the Creative Impulse" (at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, through Aug. 24), My Barbarian presented, on July 13, an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Mother*.

The troupe performed Brecht's 1932 play (itself an adaptation of Maxim Gorky's 1907 novel of the same name) on a custom-built plywood stage. The stage's triangular shape, a subtle nod to Brechtian theory, was left spare, the room well-lit; behind the actors, projected drawings and text indicated changes in scene.

Set in Russia under the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, the play centers on the escalating radicalism of Pelegea Vlassova, mother of a revolutionary. Though at first she is horrified by the dangers facing her son and concerned only with getting dinner on the table, she soon finds herself distributing agitprop pamphlets at a factory (smuggling them in as sandwich wrappers), learning to read, and, finally, marching in protest and taking up the red flag of communism.

The Mother is emblematic of Brecht's *Lehrstücke* (learning plays), which are didactic and participatory, and which foreground their own artifice. In My Barbarian's presentation, rough-hewn masks occasionally indicated new characters, and the trio rotated, all playing each role in turn. The imploring voice of mother Vlassova was at once familiar and hilarious in its various incarnations. Brecht, too, understood the importance of comedy: while learning to read, Vlassova and company are taught "class struggle" and "exploitation" alongside the more basic words "cat" and "tree."

Musical numbers paired odes to communism with a wink and a jazz hand. In true Brechtian fashion, the artists exhorted the audience to join in. The final song of the play had us deliriously chanting "work it / working mother."

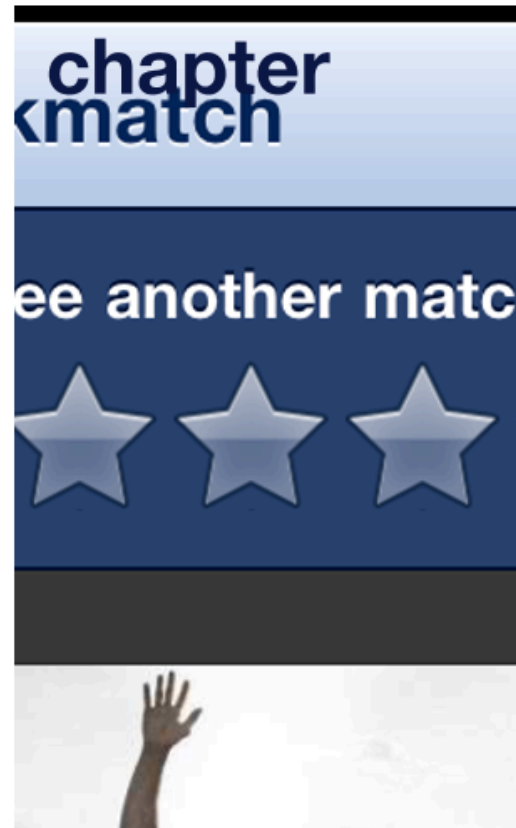
Second-wave feminists first highlighted the "invisible" work of housewives and mothers, important precedents to today's discussions of precarious labor. This trope is taken up in the exhibition's centerpiece, a new video, *Working Mother* (2013), which features vignettes with the artists' own mothers, as well as feminist artists Eleanor Antin and Mary Kelly. The video's tremors of intergenerational lineage and conflict are not limited to the fraught relationships between mothers and their children, visible in the group's coy juxtaposition of Brecht's dogmatic Marxism with today's labyrinthine politics.

the ART REVIEW
BOOK

THIS BOOK OWNS NO ONE THIS BOOK OWES NO ONE

July 29, 2013

Review by Mieke Marple

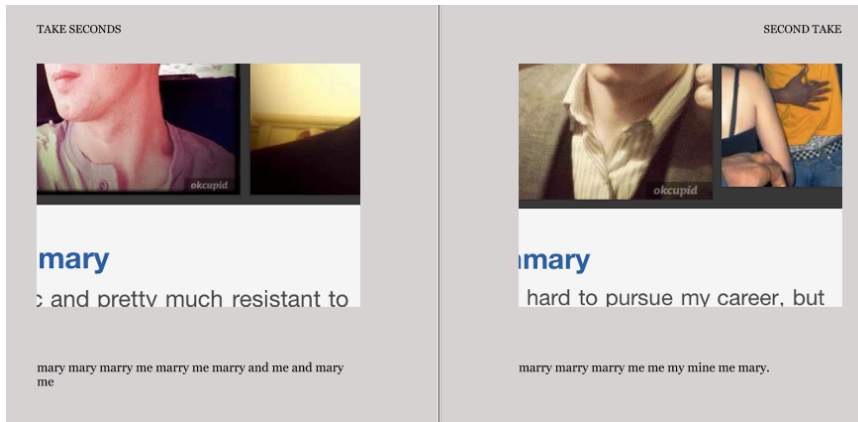


Coupling her poetic verse with iPhone photos and screenshots from dating websites, Benedetto plots an emotionally complex crescendo vérité in *This book owns no one This book owes no one*. With her iPhone realism, Benedetto straddles the line between critical distance and emotional seduction to arrive at a final heartbreak, which (to use Benedetto's words) might otherwise be called "a human screw."

The book begins with the phrase "this book owes no one." Drawn from the first half-of the ambiguous title, its concern with power dynamics is forefront. *This book owns no one This book owes no one* suggests this volume is neither in debt to nor holding debt over another person. Yet, its faultless position only emphasizes people's penchant to falter between dominance and submissiveness. A book is just a book, but people are emotional whips and whipping boards, projecting their personal baggage onto others, their avatars, and even their books.

We see the human capacity for violence reflected in the book's second page depicting a pixelated

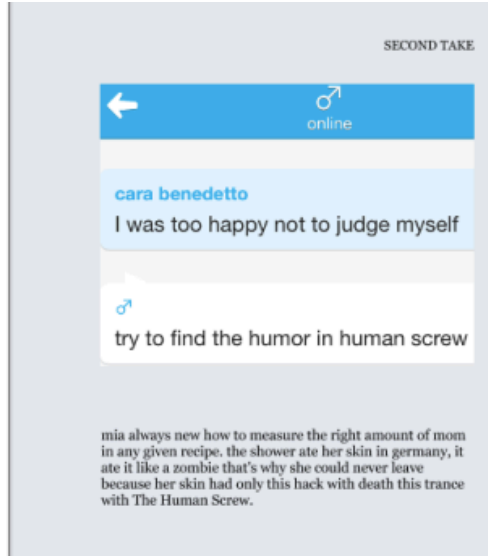
boxer clocking another. On the bottom right hand corner of the image the logo for the dating site OKCupid appears, equally pixelated. Questions erupt from this unlikely coupling. Was this image on someone's OKCupid profile and what was he (assuming it is he) trying to convey? Does he like physical violence, dominance, victory? Is he projecting these desires consciously or unconsciously? Or might this image be more knowing? Perhaps it is from a woman's profile, Benedetto's even? Maybe it is a metaphor, a visual poem, floating inconspicuously in the imagerrehea that constitutes OKCupid. Here begins the spiral into the lush, dirty, and banal world of Benedetto's *This book owns no one This book owes no one*.



This introductory image is followed by a series of short passages paired with screenshots of either text message conversations or dating profiles and their taglines. Isolated from their context, most of these images are humorous in their earnest expression. One man describes himself as “out of place online as I am in a crowd,” an endearing and ironic self-summary to be sure. At the same time, these stolen conversations and profiles are unabashedly trashy, with “trash” referring more to their disposability as images than to their taste level. They are image detritus – a nominal segment of the billions of images generated everyday by social media, dating websites, and mobile technology – as quickly forgotten as the millions of written words exhausted by text messages, emails, tweets, and status updates.

Precisely because these screenshots appear to belong to the generic digital landscape, Benedetto's typed text is blazingly present. Her written words haunt. They access your private parts (primarily your heart) and then play coy or confused. In Benedetto's verses a genuine vulnerability is communicated with a combination of frustration, self-deprecation, and confidence. One of my favorite lines reads, “he ended things by saying things like, you are undatable and no one healthy will want you. He said this, mouth full of gym colored sand.” For a brief moment Benedetto's critical juxtapositions are forgotten as I, the reader, wade in the emotional resonance of these words.

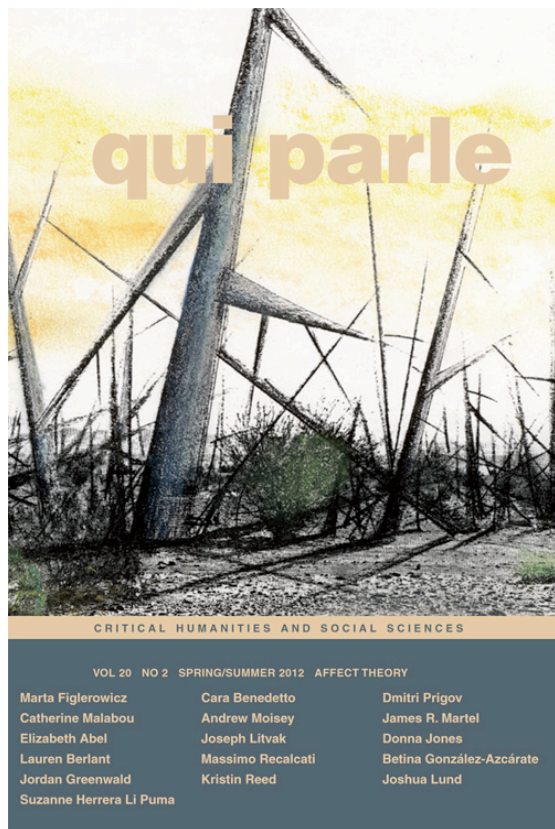
Halfway through the book, images of Benedetto appear in the appropriated screenshots and iPhone images. Now there is a face, an age, a body and hair type the reader can associate with these written verses. This act also allows Benedetto to align herself with the online daters whose images and text messages she poaches. However, Benedetto remains firmly positioned in the camp of the informed as someone aware of her own disposability as image (or person, even). We cannot assume the same for the men profiled in *This book owns no one This book owes no one*, which places Benedetto at a distinct advantage. Yet, this critical awareness does not make her disposability any less real and I am left with a general feeling of melancholy for how can the reader not apply the same logical extension to him or herself?



As the book bottoms out we are greeted with a final helping of humiliation and humor. Textual murmurings about marriage “Mary marry me” are followed by back to back pages of male profiles, rated and ranked, which could be seen as an oblique suggestion that, for even the most enlightened beings, what it all comes down to is the size of your wedding ring or penis. Status, sex, competition, humiliation. Feeling good. Feeling bad. These are eternal themes. The final image in the book is of a dwarf pony in a doghouse, a comical and seemingly innocent vision. But this pony is a sad animal, the butt of a joke for which the poor beast is not even aware. The pony suffers from a humiliation only an unknowing animal can withstand—except that joke must inevitably be reflected back upon us. Whether you use metaphor or mirroring, it is clear that a dwarf pony in a doghouse is a greater reflection of the human condition than that of any animal. We can only walk the line of existential awareness for so long before laughter or tears bring us reeling back to our general myopia.

Cara Benedetto, This book owns no one This book owes no one, (Self-published, 2013) Images: Cover and interior of This book owns no one This book owes no one.

Category : Art, Artist Book, Photography
 Tags : 2013, Cara Benedetto, Mieke Marple



Special Dossier: Affect Theory

December 03rd 2012

Issue 20.2 of *qui parle*, "Affect Theory" is now available in print through the University of Nebraska Press, and online through Project MUSE and JSTOR. The Spring/Summer 2012 issue includes:

Marta Figlerowicz introducing the Affect Theory Dossier

Catherine Malabou on Following Generation

Elizabeth Abel on Skin, Flesh, and the Affective Wrinkles of Civil Rights Photography, with supplementary images on the *qui parle* website

Jordan Greenwald interviews

Lauren Berlant on Affect in the End Times

Suzanne Herrera Li Puma introduces the work of **Cara Benedetto**

Color plates featuring work from **Cara Benedetto's Body Bags**

Andrew Moisey on the Desire to Mark our Buried Nuclear Waste

Joseph Litvak examines Resentment in David Copperfield

Kristin Reed introduces

Dmitri Prigov's Versographies

James Martel on Nietzsche's Cruel Messiah

Donna Jones on the Continuous Career of Living Things in Bergson, Iqbal, and Scalia

Betina González-Azcárate and **Joshua Lund** on Mining the Topics

A Nice, Clean Space for a Panic Attack

Notes for Cara Benedetto

SUZANNE HERRERA LI PUMA

I feel like people are afraid to talk about language.

Cara Benedetto, conversation with the author, July 29, 2011.

Cara Benedetto often speaks of her work in the language of encounter: sometimes a handwritten note, sometimes a list, sometimes a photograph with writing on its surface. These textual encounters set up a confrontation with the spectator by means of the text's "self-reflexive voice," a voice that contains a critical turn even as it engages in an apparently straightforward form of dialogue and address.¹ The materials Benedetto employs to set up such encounters are primarily (but not exclusively) the materials of language itself, scraps of everyday communication: receipts, fragments of conversation, text messages, letters, informational posters. Benedetto appropriates the syntax and rhetoric of these communicative forms and stitches her textual inventions into all manner of paper, book, photograph, video, and sculptural object. Speaking with wit, sarcasm, or deliberately flat-footed prose, Benedetto's texts underline the stubborn exclusions, assumptions, and fraught social relationships embedded in the discourse(s) that they critically mimic. But these texts also recast their original material with a degree of opacity, so that the language they ventriloquize becomes as disorienting as it is engaging.

Artist Flips the Conventional “Benefit Gala” on Its Head

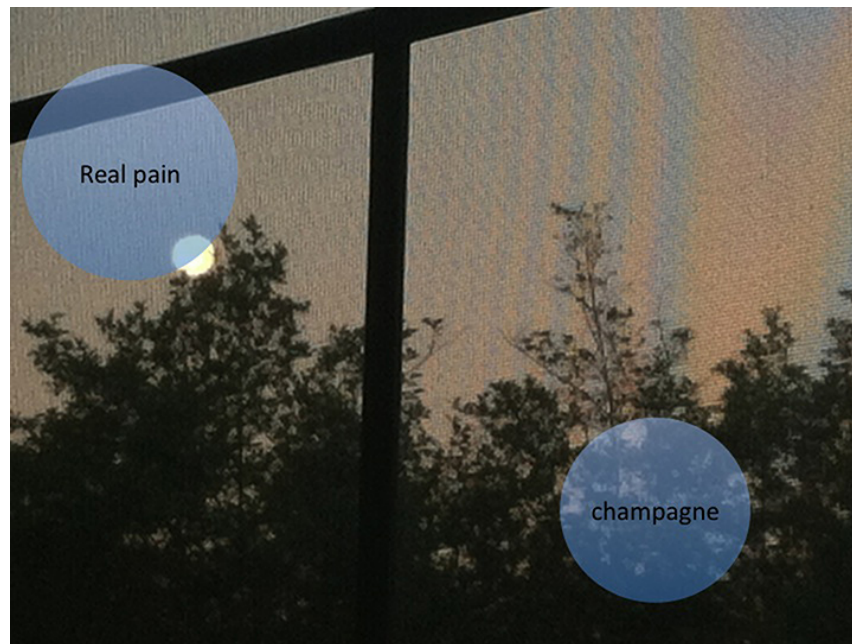
Cait Munro, Thursday, September 18, 2014



A typical benefit gala. Photo: © 2014 Patrick McMullan Company, Inc.

“Feeding the hand that bites you” is how **Cara Benedetto** describes the experience of working as an artist today. After I thanked her for this incredible soundbite, she elaborated. “Artists are getting into these relationships with corporations and collectors and galleries that are altering the way that we make,” she told me. “And both not-for-profit, gift-giving art institutions and the commercial art market cater to the 1 percent. Institutions don’t give anonymously, and these gifts often come with restrictions for how the money should be used. That changes what and how you’re able to make as an artist. Artists aren’t making work that threatens institutions, but critical artwork is absolutely imperative. If you lose that, you’re losing a huge part of what drives you to make.”

It's with that in mind that **Benedetto** has embarked on a multifaceted project that began with an installation at Chapter NY and will culminate on September 21 with a party at the home of well-known philanthropist, art collector and investment banker Christopher E. Vroom. A riff on the traditional benefit gala, the evening is slated to include a variety of strange happenings, nonsensical toasts and roasts, and vulnerable situations (as opposed to your usual drawn-out speeches and boring small talk). The benefit committee is comprised of artists, writers, and friends, most of whom will enact some kind of performance piece during the event. A press release for the soirée contains the relevant information in terms that are poetic, obscure, and slightly perverse.



Cara Benedetto, *Measuring Them Self* (2014). Courtesy of the artist and Chapter NY.

But the evening isn't about cynicism or even poking fun. It is a benefit for art, and for artists. It's about providing a space for unbridled creativity and, as **Benedetto** put it, "highlighting the interaction between artists and their systems of support." Ticket buyers will be provided with an app that will generate a notification every time an artist they have supported makes a purchase. Whether or not this information is real or fictional is unclear, but by allowing them to see "exactly what happens to their money," **Benedetto** hopes to undermine our assumptions about transparency and where money goes once it is donated. This is something that many artists and other people not on the donating end of the income spectrum often fail to consider, yet it has a direct effect on what type of art gets made, and by whom.

Up for auction at the benefit will be the works from **Benedetto**'s current installation at Chapter NY. These are juxtapositions of beautiful

landscapes, cheesy Powerpoint grids, and poetic words about love, sex, and modern romance. The works showcase her talent for bridging disparate ideas. The focus is on the experience of sex from the perspective of both genders, and on the misguided social emphasis placed on orgasm. Benedetto feels that sex has become commercialized in much the same way that art has.



Cara Benedetto, *Measuring Him Self* (2014). Courtesy of the artist and Chapter NY.

“The work is very much about the erotics of consumerism and the patriarchal culture of sexual encounters where things are built around the isolated experience of a giant eruption,” she said. If you’re not sure you buy it, take a look at the cover of almost any women’s lifestyle magazine and see what they’re touting alongside this season’s new boots.

In reference to the installation attendees of the event will get to explore, the benefit is called “Come Early and Often,” and Benedetto hopes that mentality will be adopted throughout the evening.

Tickets, while limited, are still available, but beware: at this party, you’re not just a guest, you’re a participant. “Anything can happen,” the artist said, “Everything is contingent on the way that [participants] treat one another. ”

Cara Benedetto’s “Come Early and Often” benefit takes place September 21.

Follow [@caitmunro](#) on Twitter.

Sex at a Benefit: **Cara Benedetto** and Chapter NY Throw ‘Come Early Come Often’

By Zoë Lescaze | 09/23/14 4:23pm



Cara Benedetto (back left) snuggles in bed. (Courtesy of the artist)

“Things are about to happen in the bedroom,” whispered the artist Paul Heyer, who was rocking a tattered clown suit, tangerine wig and flashing red nose. It was a hot tip given the nebulous nature of the event—a simultaneously playful and thought-provoking benefit-cum-artwork by **Cara Benedetto** that explored, over the course of Sunday evening, various aspects of sex. The event was the climax (sorry) of “**Come Early and Often,**” Ms. **Benedetto**’s installation at young Lower East Side gallery Chapter NY, and the artist’s students, collaborators, former teachers and friends turned out in force, performing throughout the cosy South Williamsburg apartment of Christopher Vroom, the investment banker and Artadia founder. There were surprises around every corner. Artist Corban Walker, who repped Ireland at the 2011 Venice Biennale, was tending bar.

In the warmly lit bedroom, writer Hossannah Asuncion firmly instructed her audience to climb into bed and cuddle while she read two pieces. One, an explicit account of a ménage à trois, and the other, a reflection on the erotic functions one's subletters might find for one's bookshelves, set the tone for the evening.

“There’s a lot happening, half of which I don’t know about,” said Nicole Russo, who founded Chapter NY last fall. Just then, artist Liam Gillick announced himself as Mr. Vroom and launched into speech we’d later learn was written by Ms. **Benedetto**. An hour later, artist Aura Rosenberg could be found wrapping objects—a communist puppet, somebody’s watch—in pornography (a healthy range of Internet screenshots and 1970s nookie books littered the coffee table).

“There’s supposed to be a go-go dancer in the bathroom, but I haven’t seen him yet,” said Ms. Russo.

We mentioned this dancer to Taylor Trabulus, the director of Martos Gallery in Chelsea. “I wouldn’t call it go-go,” she said. “It scared the shit out of me!”

Off to the bathroom. Ominously, the door was closed. We tentatively cracked it open, and found a tall young man wearing a black ski mask and little else grinding with a woman gyrating on top of the toilet. The lights were off and some satanic sounding beats were emanating from the shower. We closed the door.

“He doesn’t usually do it in an art context,” explained Ms. **Benedetto**, a tall, hyper-articulate blonde who was wearing a vintage black dress she found in Pittsburgh, where she recently began teaching at the Carnegie Mellon School of Art. According to the dancer, who eventually emerged unmasked and fully clothed to grab a drink, his kitchen is the usual venue.

Ms. **Benedetto** worked the room barefoot as art world supergroup The Cornichons, a band featuring artists John Miller, Jon Kessler, Ms. Rosenberg and Servane Mary as well as dealer Jose Martos began to cover the likes of Leonard Cohen and The Rolling Stones. The artist has thrown events involving multiple performances before, starting in 2010 at artist Kara Walker’s studio, though “Come Early and Often” was her first benefit-style venture. The funds she raised through the event will go to an organization in her home state of Wisconsin that provides transportation to abortion clinics. “I call it artist as direct-action philanthropy,” she said. She was also launching an app that will allow benefit patrons to track how their money is being spent by potentially real, potentially fictional artists.

The shifting pieces of Ms. **Benedetto**’s benefit resist easy categorization, but that’s kind of the point. Drifting between the interactions playing out in various corners of the apartment felt like turning the radio on and off: one kept landing on different songs, but it was all the same station. “People are smart,” said Ms. **Benedetto**, referring to the advantages of making fewer connections (or making connections less obvious) and allowing participants to weave together the fragments.

Not that this is always easy.

“Don’t you feel like you don’t understand Cara’s work?” asked Mr. Kessler, who taught Ms. Benedetto at Columbia University, as he packed up his guitar. “We had to grow so much to try and understand her work,” he said, going on to describe its frequently non-material nature and psychological sophistication.

As a student, he said, Ms. Benedetto was “much how she is now: eccentric and off the grid.” After all the toasts given that evening, he was ready with even higher praise.

“No student I’ve ever had,” he said, “is as astute as Cara.”

Read more at <http://observer.com/2014/09/sex-at-a-benefit-cara-benedetto-and-chapter-ny-throw-come-early-come-often/#ixzz3EodHth00>

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ARTNEWS

REMA HORT MANN FOUNDATION NAMES 2014 NEW YORK ARTIST GRANT WINNERS

BY *Andrew Russeth* POSTED 10/08/14

The Rema Hort Mann Foundation has named the 2014 winners of its \$10,000 unrestricted emerging artist grants in New York. The grantees, many of whom will be familiar to regular gallery-goers in the city, are:

Abigail DeVille
Sara Magenheimer
Dora Budor
Mary Simpson
Kameelah Rasheed
Maia Cruz Palileo
Cara Benedetto
Yevgeniya Baras

The foundation, which has a long track record of providing early support to major contemporary artists (prior recipients include Sanford Biggers in 2001 and Dana Schutz in 2002), also awards annual grants to Los Angeles-area artists.

If you're in the mood to see some work by those artists in their home right now, **Cara Benedetto** has a show at the Lower East Side's Chapter NY gallery, and Abigail DeVille has an incredible kinetic sculpture (don't want to give away more than that) in the basement of SculptureCenter's recently opened "Puddle, pothole, portal" exhibition over in Long Island City.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Museum & Gallery Listings for Oct. 17-23

Cara Benedetto: ‘Come Early and Often’ (closes on Sunday) These nine banal but attractively framed color C-prints — mostly landscapes — have titles like “Measuring Her Self” and “Measuring Harm Self” and were featured in a quasi-fictive art benefit. Each is appended with elliptical phrases and cursory diagrams that convey a surprisingly sharp, usually feminist critique that is funny and sad and surprisingly resonant. Chapter NY, 127 Henry Street, Lower East Side, chapter-ny.com. (Smith)