

ARTFORUM

JONATHAN HOROWITZ

Jonathan Horowitz discusses his *Free Store* at Art Basel

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Left: Jonathan Horowitz, *Free Store*, 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable. Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York, 2010.
Right: Jonathan Horowitz, *Free Store*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2009.

Jonathan Horowitz is a New York–based artist known for his often-sardonic examination of value systems in media, culture, and politics. Here, he discusses his Free Store, which he first presented in 2009 at Sadie Coles and has since recreated several times. The latest iteration of the store will be on view as part of Art Unlimited at Art Basel from on June 10 to 16, 2013. Horowitz will open an exhibition of new work at Barbara Weiss in Berlin on June 21, which will be on view until August 3, 2013.

I ALWAYS HAD MISGIVINGS about hosting a Free Store at an art fair. I originally conceived of Free Store in relation to the pristine, highly controlled environment of an art gallery—I wanted to open the doors and invite anyone in to contaminate the space with junk. For this first incarnation, I made a series of modular pedestals from recycled plastic. When turned upside down, they acted as bins and put the earth on a pedestal, like Manzoni’s *Base of the World*. I was thinking of the earth as being like a free store—historically, people have thought that they can take whatever they want from it without consequence. Now we know a social contract is necessary for it to survive.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

Free stores have existed at least since the late 1960s, when San Francisco–based art and activist collective The Diggers started one in Haight-Ashbury. They conceived of it as both a form of social service and as a happening. My versions have been more about infiltrating spaces that don't feel free. In theory, art fairs, which exist to sell things to very rich people, would seem ripe for infiltration. So when asked to present Free Store at the 2012 Art Basel Miami Beach, I decided to just go with the flow—it seemed in keeping with the project. With sponsorship by an online luxury retailer, however, there were inevitable conceptual clashes, including barriers to entry. At the end of the day, it wasn't clear who had infiltrated who.

Perhaps though, it just came down to an inflection of tone. It's impossible to ignore the fact that art is a luxury good—hopefully amongst other things. And the sort of contradictions that the Miami Basel store elicited are in many ways the standard fare of this industry. So when asked to present the store again at an art fair, I thought twice and decided to go a little less with the flow. My condition for presenting the store was that it must be open to the public free of charge. For me, it's important that the project engage the local community who wouldn't necessarily come to the fair otherwise, as well as the art fair tourists who would never come to Basel otherwise.

People say that art fairs have killed art exhibitions, but exhibitions are just another construct. It's a relief sometimes not to have to fit artworks into “shows” like so many puzzle pieces. For my exhibition at Barbara Weiss, my starting point was just making work. A number of the pieces will be Coke/Pepsi themed, which I see as a broad metaphor for capitalism and personal choice. In many ways, the works are about absolute control, which is opposite to Free Store, which is about endless possibility. Coke and Pepsi present an illusion of choice but you're more or less choosing between the same thing. I have to say though, I prefer Coke to Pepsi—I imagine there actually is a difference, even if I can't articulate what it is.

— *As told to Allese Thomson*