

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Jerry Saltz, "Conspicuous Consumption," *New York Magazine*, May, 2007

## NEW YORK



Top left and right, installation views of Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled* 1992 (Free) (re-created 2007). Above left and right, installation views of *Untitled* 1992 (Free) and a re-creation of Gordon Matta-Clark's 1972 piece *Open House* (2007), all at David Zwirner Gallery.

### ART

## Conspicuous Consumption

Rirkrit Tiravanija once again makes dinner for gallerygoers—this time, with self-references as a side dish.

BY JERRY SALTZ

**F**OR RIRKRIT TIRAVANAJA, art is what you eat. The New York—and-Chiang Mai–based Thai artist became famous in 1992 when he made *Untitled 1992 (Free)*, a sculpture–performance–guerrilla action wherein he emptied out the office of the 303 Gallery in Soho and installed a makeshift kitchen, complete with fridge, hot plates, rice steamers, tables, and stools. He then cooked Thai curry; anyone could drop in, serve him- or herself, and eat. For free.

Back then, it was disconcerting and thrilling to be this casual in a gallery, to go from passive viewing to active participation. With this simple gesture, Tiravanija (pronounced *Tea-rah-vah-nit*) seemed to bridge a mind-body gap that often exists in Western art. He was a medicine man who literalized art's primitive functions: sustenance, healing, and communion. Subsequently, Tiravanija repeated this cooking-as-art sculpture all over the world—so often, in fact, that by the late nineties he had almost branded himself as the happy Thai guy who cooks. Intriguingly, this was reminiscent of Andy Warhol, who allowed himself to be seen as a village idiot. The disordered, highly social situations Tiravanija set up mimicked Warhol's Factory scene, too.

Although Tiravanija's art never contained the Factory's out-of-control self-destruction and exploration of sexual mores, there has been sex. In 1999, Tiravanija built a full-scale wooden replica of his East Village apartment in the Gavin Brown Gallery. This sculpture included a working kitchen, a bedroom, and a bathroom and was open 24 hours a day. All that summer, people lived, ate, and partied there. Some had sex; one person told me he had group sex there. I went dozens of times and only had lunch. But a lot of Eros emanates from Tiravanija's chaos.

If you want to feel the love, have a free meal, and possibly chat up

RIRKRIT TIRAVANAJA  
AND GORDON  
MATT-CLARK  
DAVID ZWIRNER  
GALLERY, THROUGH  
MAY 19.

Matt Dillon, David Byrne, Cindy Sherman, or Rufus Wainwright—all of whom have dined here—go to David Zwirner's West 19th Street gallery, where you can partake or just gawk at others in a life-size wooden re-creation of Tiravanija's original 303 Gallery potlatch-piece. The original tables, stools, and fridge are here, as is the detritus from fifteen years ago (wrapped, natch). In this karaoke ghost-sculpture, Tiravanija explores what happens when we try to step into the same river twice.

*Untitled* is a time machine that can transport you to 1992, an edgy moment when the art world was crumbling, money was scarce, and artists like Tiravanija were in the nascent stages of combining Happenings, performance art, John Cage, Joseph Beuys, and the do-it-yourself ethos of punk. Meanwhile, a new art world was coming into being. This is the rub: Many of the people who were forming this new world, and who were trying to create a new system, have become the system. The ism Tiravanija and others evolved, which came to be called relational aesthetics, currently dominates international exhibitions. These artists are now flown to far-flung locations, collaborating on shows and curating one another. The low point of this was *Utopia Station*, the awful hippie hangout curated by Tiravanija and two bigwig curators for the 2003 Venice Biennale. What began in 1992 as a shock to the system not only became the system—it's now the academy.

Amazingly, this doesn't negate any of the power or magic of Tiravanija's *Untitled* redux. In fact, seeing it at Zwirner adds alluring new layers. What some will take for a power gallery absorbing a more underground one, and a successful artist allowing himself to be eaten alive, is actually an exquisite symbiosis. Zwirner reveals his scrappy roots, Gavin Brown (who still represents Tiravanija) ups his ante, and Tiravanija, who no longer owns the piece, is just "acting" here. Helping matters is the excellent re-creation next to *Untitled* of Gordon Matta-Clark's 1972 *Open House*, a Dumpster the late artist turned into a homeless shelter. Unlike Matta-Clark, however, Tiravanija has never been able to make a convincing object—unless you call the re-creation a sculpture, in which case he's a really good sculptor. This seeming weakness, however, is a crucial juju in his work. At Zwirner, it's a huge relief not to size up objects or think about sales. Life takes over, commerce fades. Additionally, wasting all this space is an excellent strategy, especially now that efficiency is the norm and many shows look like product. There's not much product at Zwirner, but the processes on hand are deeply rich. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS: CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT, COURTESY OF DAVID ZWIRNER/GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE AND RON ANSTUTZ/DAVID ZWIRNER/GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE (3)