



ONLINE

Artists taking care of business

Show features entrepreneurs

BY ALEX PLIMACK
[SUN REPORTER]

The setting sun peeks through the large bay windows in the living room of Irene Hofmann's home in Owings Mills. Strewn across the black dining room table are tiny booklets of literature, or lifestyle tracts: a sort of collection of miniature place mats and the food for thought they provide. The brief words on the small folder paper are often satiric in nature, a twist on the Christian tracts that inspired them.

Hofmann, the executive director of the Contemporary Museum, sorts through them with artists Lisa Anne Auerbach, who conceived the collection, and Fritz Haeg. The two artists are groggy from late-night flights into Charm City, but they laugh with Hofmann as she points out certain tracts, including one that features black-and-white portraits of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama adorned with large, cartoon handlebar mustaches and a set of rules with certain matter-of-fact prescriptions, such as "Don't go if Paris Hilton is there. Go if sister Nicky Hilton is there."

"Isn't this great!" Hofmann says.

Together, they are working on the final preparations for *Cottage Industry*, the latest exhibit at the Baltimore museum. Hofmann co-curated the exhibit with guest curator Kristin Chambers, and it will feature the work of Auerbach and Haeg, along with fellow artists Christine Hill, Sean Miller and Andrea Zittel. And in the days leading to the opening tomorrow of the exhibit, Hofmann has opened up her home to the artists and their friends as a crash pad of sorts.

"What we have here is a group of artists where there is already this kind of communal activity that often happens," Hofmann says. "So it made a lot sense with an exhibition that is about this do-it-yourself [Please see COTTAGE, 2C]

»»IF YOU GO *Cottage Industry* opens tomorrow at the Contemporary Museum, 10 Centre St. The opening reception is 6:30 p.m.-8 p.m.

Contemporary Museum explores the business of art

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impulse, and where there are already these different connections, to have everyone together."

The theme of the exhibit, which runs through mid-August, comes from the notion of the artist as an entrepreneur. For example, Haeg continued his national series *Edible Estates*, where he replaces a front lawn with a thriving vegetable garden, as he did in April in Baltimore at a Liberty Heights home.

"I wanted to do a project that somehow addressed how everyone is living," Haeg says. "There is something about the front lawn that cuts across all strata of American society."

Zittel designed a smock pattern that would be reproduced and then decorated by various artists to be sold for *smockshop*, and Hill chronicled 10 of Baltimore's unique mom-and-pop shops for *The Vendor Archive*.

Miller carries *The John Erickson Museum of Art* in small, portable traveling cases that can be exhibited anywhere, at any time.

And while Auerbach's tracts currently reside on Hofmann's dining room table, they will soon be stacked in *The Tract House*, a storefront on Saratoga Street for anyone to come in off the street and pick up the pieces.

Cottage Industry "is the small home-grown business," Hofmann says. "That really expresses what a lot of the artists in the show are doing: creating their own businesses. Not necessarily for a profit, but within the language of shopkeeping, of creating a business."

However, Auerbach and Haeg don't exactly agree with the notion of artists as entrepreneurs.

"The project has the illusion of that," Haeg says. "Some people think it's a commercial business or a whole bunch of people, but it's just me."

"I think [an] entrepreneur is trying to make money. I think of business venture," Auerbach says.

The exhibit was conceived by Los Angeles resident Chambers in 2006. She contacted Auerbach, who in turn brought up Haeg's name, and the two artists, who had met 12 years before, would soon be working together again, along with mutual friend Hill. According to Hofmann, the first year wasn't so much putting the show together as it was determining the exact parameters.

"A lot of times, figuring out what an exhibition isn't helps you decide what it should be," she said. "There are a lot of artists out there, so how do you create this tight grouping of these artists that will be coherent for an audience to understand this theme in contemporary art?"

Hofmann sought to continue the signature of her institution by taking art out of the galleries and to where the people are.

"We are creating exhibitions that are pushing the boundaries of what art is and where it can be seen. Like what constitutes art? If you talk to this group of artists, it's not necessarily an object or something you can sell in a gallery or show in a museum," she says.

Though it is only Auerbach and Haeg at Hofmann's home for the time being, Hill is out visiting friends and Hofmann will later be picking up Miller and his chief of security from another late-night flight. More will arrive, bringing the total residents in the quiet suburban home to nine.

"Artists and shows get together and it just becomes art camp," Auerbach says, laughing.

But Hofmann sees the three of them sitting at her dining room table as nothing more but a continuation of the main themes of

the exhibition.

"It's about an exchange," she says. "It is about an experience with people. There's no exchange of money, there's an exchange of ideas."

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Tiny pamphlets for artist Lisa Ann Auerbach's "The Tract House" sit on Irene Hofmann's dining room table. "Cottage Industry" opens tomorrow.

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