

Contemporary art show at Vendue reflects Charleston-NYC connections

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“Take One (for Show)” by Jennifer Present.

The alumni and accomplished faculty of the New York Academy of Art tend to show their work in Big Apple galleries, but a little serendipity has sent about 30 works southward to Charleston for an unusual road show at The Vendue, a boutique hotel in the French Quarter that has embraced contemporary art.

The show, which opens May 26 and runs through October, is a fascinating sampling of contemporary realism (mostly) produced by more than 20 artists associated with the famed academy co-founded by Andy Warhol.



“Abraham Lincoln” by Kazuhiro Tsuji. Adam Parker/Staff

It came about thanks to key connections and Charleston's reputation as a burgeoning hub of contemporary art, according to Robert Lange, who with his wife, Megan, curates the art shown at The Vendue.

Rick Davidman, a New York financier who embraced contemporary art and ran the DFN Gallery for a number of years, has long been a big advocate of artists associated with the New York Academy of Art.

A couple of years ago, he was visiting Charleston and met with Lange, who runs a gallery on Queen Street. They hit it off, and when Lange discovered that this was the man who had owned DFN, he nearly lost his cool.

"We became new, instantaneous bosom buddies," Lange recalled.

Soon Peter Drake, dean of academic affairs at the New York Academy, and a successful artist himself, was asking his old friend Davidman to organize a show.

Davidman scanned his hometown and shrugged his shoulders. It seemed like it had all been done already.

But what about Charleston? The city was on the lips of so many New Yorkers in the art world, it was written up in all the travel magazines, it was clearly a destination for food, music, history and, increasingly, contemporary art.

He called Lange with the idea.

Lange, bursting inside with excitement, feigned nonchalance. He negotiated casually. To avoid seeming overeager, he waited a couple of days to clinch the deal.

Davidman sent down a bunch of stuff that would potentially grace the walls of the hotel and Lange narrowed it down.

Drake said he and his fellow artists are excited about the chance to show work in Charleston.

He knows that Davidman and Lange are on the same page artistically and that both admire the work that emerges from the Academy.

Participating artists include Drake, Melissa Anderson, Jean-Pierre Arboleda, Jaelyn Brown, Michelle Doll, Heidi Elbers, Michele Fenniak, Shauna Finn, Alonsa Guevara, Caitlin Hurd, John Jacobsmeyer, Christian Johnson, Casey Krawczyk, Will Kurtz, Lisa Lebofsky, Benjamin Martins, Alyssa Monks, Stefania Panepinto, Jennifer Presant, Jessie Peterson Tarazi (of Hilton Head), Melanie Vote and Annie Wildey.

Lange said the show is the latest indicator that the churn in the local art scene is resulting in "something special." And The Vendue is likely to get more foot traffic than the average art gallery.

"To bring in a show of this caliber is a credit to Charleston," he said.

All of the works are representative and display impressive technical prowess. Most are paintings, but a few sculptures also are part of the show, including a larger-than-life, hyper-realistic bust of Abraham Lincoln by Kazuhiro Tsuji and papier-mache figures by Will Kurtz.

It's all serious stuff, but there's a degree of levity to keep viewers intrigued and happy, Lange said.