

## *Escape Room*

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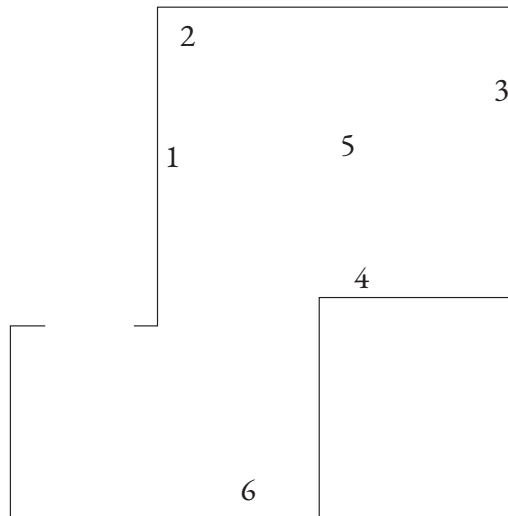
In 1991, the prominent still life photographer Jan Groover left the Bowery in New York and moved to Montpon-Ménéstérol, France, after feeling demoralised by what she would later describe as an overwhelming turn toward political conservatism in the United States. Her art is meticulous and disciplined, and maybe for some, a bit repetitive. When I learned of her death in 2012, I was told by a student of hers that the actual reason she had relocated was because she loved to smoke; so much so that when New York State implemented the Clean Indoor Air Act in 1989, she couldn't stand to live and work any place that wouldn't allow smoking indoors. This story wasn't entirely true; but the obituary portrait of Groover published by the New York Times, in which she is holding a cigarette and seemingly upset by the procedure of the image in process, was convincing enough to build a mythology around the story. Surely, such a bohemian life was the hallmark of a totalising openness of that which yields a free-flowing and captivating production of things/thoughts negotiating the world.

Decades can go by and one day you might naively wake up in a happenstance social network that you once felt was a valuable site of cultural production with nothing to show for. And there is a part of yourself that begins to mourn the time lost within an interior space where you could have spent such moments cultivating that distinct voice. A fugue state might be a bit dramatic, but it is scary when you have realised that you have misunderstood something so badly, and through omission, placed an embarrassing emphasis on positioning oneself as an artist within a social fabric. Looking back on the story of Jan Groover, it made much more sense that Groover relocated due to capitalistic conservatism of the likes that historically defunded the National Endowment for the Arts in the US; She was an artist who gave herself over to the formalities of still-lives, in an almost aggressively boring way, in order to contribute to a posterity beyond herself. Completely opposite to the hazy post-studio mysticism that prioritises smoking at a bar and trying to remember what it was to be materialised.

In culture, as attention spans become more brain damaged and dopamine looped, a critical public is disappearing. This trickle-down of outsourced and consolidated content farming can be abstractly felt in the current desperation of artists to find affordable studios here in London. In 2023, the 25 artists that occupied Zona Mista, FKA. Westminster Waste, a not-for-profit studio community and project space in the post-industrial center of South Bermondsey – soon to be renamed New Bermondsey for its new inhabitation - were evicted to make way for future flats and an escape room. Anna, Neil, Lewis, Luana, Tim and I were amongst them. For each of us, Zona Mista signified and functioned as something entirely personal, but for me it marked an emotional permission to participate in discovery and sharing once again. The French critic Nicolas Bourriaud wrote in *Relational Aesthetics* “for anything that cannot be marketed will inevitably vanish,” yet we go on constructing new and more elaborate ways to create dissonance in an all too rhythmically melodic city.

Between the work here, there are some nice tangential visual harmonies, but I'm loath to spell them out or be more subjective than I already am. They give a body to conflict let's say, in spite of the next looming speculative real estate venture. In time I can only hope to carry studio walls across main roads with them again.

*Text by Daniel Browne*



## Work List

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| <p>1. <i>07718 915854 (broken cup)</i><br/>Daniel Browne<br/>165 x 139.5cm<br/>2024<br/>Archival Inkjet Print (Hahnemühle Fine Art Baryta 325gsm)</p> | <p>5. <i>At Laughter We Meet</i><br/>Luana Duvoisin Zanchi<br/>4.5 x 4 x 3cm<br/>2024<br/>Unfired clay</p> |
| <p>2. <i>Once comfortable, now confusing</i><br/>Tim Zercie<br/>2017<br/>T-shirt (size medium)</p>  | <p>6. <i>Fracture</i><br/>Anna Ill<br/>150 x 5 cm<br/>2024<br/>Found metal weight, cotton thread</p>       |
| <p>3. <i>Tangerine Reflection</i><br/>Neil Raitt<br/>100 x 70 cm<br/>2023<br/>Oil on canvas</p>   |  |
| <p>4. <i>TPA (APT backwards)</i><br/>Lewis Henderson<br/>47 x 39 cm<br/>2016<br/>MDF, woods, filler, plastic, section of wall, screws, pins, glue</p> |  |