

Jim Pirtle
Curated by The Art Guys

September 4 – October 11, 2008
Opening Reception Thursday, September 4, 6:00 – 8:00pm

“Jim Pirtle has worn many hats in his life and because of this, he has presented audiences with an odd and unique view of the world...but notsoH, Jim’s functional, experimental, social/sculptural urban environment, is his supreme art/life work.”

—The Art Guys

Installation detail of notsoH
Photograph Courtesy of John Powers



Societal paraphernalia like high heels, records made by one-hit wonders and vintage clothing not only make up the ephemera of our popular culture, but serve as the building blocks for the artwork of Jim Pirtle. He has inherited and collected a wide range of materials, resulting in an amalgamation akin to the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp and Claes Oldenburg, but with a touch of sentimentality for the past that these objects connote. The line between his life and his artwork is blurry at best, founding a work-meeting-living space in the heart of downtown Houston in 1996 called notsoH, “Houston” spelled backwards (at left). Purchased from a failing entrepreneur who

tried a bevy of ventures in the space, leaving many of the remnants behind, the building now functions as a studio, bar, music venue, performance space and living area for Pirtle and the other local artists and eccentrics of the Houston scene. But the building does not just house art and artists, it has *become* art in its own right. A vibrant, active microcosm, constantly evolving while still retaining the material accouterments of the past, it has become the “eye of the storm,” bringing together people, installation, music, performances and happenings.

Pirtle’s statues made out of old bottle corks, portraits painted on gaudy polyester shirts and video of the artist as Forest Gump combine with walls of shoes and album covers, old mannequins, bicycles and various other kitsch to create this truly inordinate environment. Much of Pirtle’s work reflects this sense of overindulgence and unconventionality, teetering along the line between art and mass-consumerism and exemplifying our innate desire for accumulation. Pirtle has also at times donned an alter ego, Stu Mulligan (bottom, right), a masochist who consumes mayonnaise and hot sauce until he vomits, jumps from the tops of buildings and shows images of generations of his family on his stomach. While there is definitely insanity, there is also sentimentality. Pirtle offers viewers a unique look at the things and people of the past while forcing the participant to step out of the bounds of the present. Rejecting the postmodern world, Pirtle finds his peace through creating his own reality – through intermixing art and everyday objects, the distinction is blurred to the point that the whole becomes art in its own right; art and life are one in the same.

On view at CUE Art Foundation, Pirtle’s first solo show in New York, will be a smaller version of Pirtle’s infamous building, notsoH. Transported across the country, Pirtle will bring with him an assortment of works and performance documentation from throughout his career. Portraits of friends on polyester shirts, wallpaper, a collage of photographs taped to the floor, antique auditorium seats and faded accounting ledgers to name only a few. The show will not only be a nod to the life and work of Pirtle, but to the past we all share and our innate desire to create something of our own.



Jim Pirtle as Stu Mulligan, New York
City Buskers Festival, 1993
Photograph Courtesy of George Hixson

(More, over)

For additional information, please contact Ryan White, Programs Assistant, CUE Art Foundation, 212-206-3583, or email ryan.white@cueartfoundation.org

Exhibition-related Programming:

To accompany Pirtle's exported recreation of notsuoH, he has invited to accompany him to New York some of the people who make the space so special. These travelling companions will include a swamp jug band, a poet and a ballet dancer.

ARTIST'S BIO:

Jim Pirtle was born in Houston, TX in 1960. In High School he was selected "Most Nonconformist." He went to Baylor University in Waco, TX and received a BA in history but more importantly was a member of the NoZe Brotherhood. The group was an underground mask wearing secret society of satirists that through writing, campus interventions and performance art exposed the hypocrisy of conservative Baptists. After college he moved to Austin, TX and got a job as an orderly at the Austin State Hospital. This was a crash course education in the extremes of human behavior. After two years in the locked up insanity of collecting urine, breaking up fights and mopping up spontaneous miscarriages he jumped to the other extreme, moving back to Houston and becoming a Kindergarten teacher for 10 years – innocence and hope.

During the mid 80's he was becoming an obsessive painter and found the local art community. He moved into an artist warehouse and got his formal art training from Nestor Topchy and Mark Flood. A thrift store addict, he wore only polyester for seven years which eventually became his canvas. He also developed his trademark performance art persona, Stu Mulligan, a man that ate mayonnaise and chug-a-lugged hot sauce and mimicked the behaviors of the mentally ill while singing lounge music. He co-founded a theater and performance space with Nestor Topchy which began the concept of notsuoH – an 1893 building of 15,000 square feet that became a monumental social sculpture on Main Street of downtown Houston – it attracts the extremes and in-between of a community to interact and be whatever it is to be human.

About CUE:

CUE Art Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit forum for contemporary art and cultural exchange that provides opportunities and resources for under-recognized artists. We value the astonishing diversity of creativity that artists provide and the importance of their activity in the social context of the city.

CUE provides artists, students, scholars and art professionals resources at many stages of their careers and creative lives. Our programs include exhibitions, studio residencies, publications, professional development seminars, educational outreach, symposia, readings, concerts and performances. Since 2002, we have operated from our 4,500 square foot storefront venue in the heart of New York's Chelsea Arts District.

CUE exhibiting artists are chosen by their peers and a rotating group of advisors and curators from across the country. This pluralistic process ensures that CUE consistently offers diverse viewpoints from multiple disciplines of artistic practice.

Simply put, we give artists their CUE to take center stage in the challenging world of art.

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