

There Are No Boys with Frogs Here!

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DNA Artspace is a new addition to London's growing art community. Allison and Damir Matic are passionate about contemporary art and developing a cutting edge exhibition space. Preferring the term 'artspace' over 'gallery,' their vision is to provide a welcoming environment that encourages the public to engage with, question, and discuss contemporary art. With an innovative approach to sustaining London's creative culture, DNA Artspace aims to support the city's vibrant emerging generation of artists and provide a broader awareness of London's established artists. The DNA building was originally designed to house a shoe store and factory for Fodemesi Shoes, a family owned and operated orthopaedic specialist. As an opportunity to conceptually react to the transition of the building from a shoe factory to a creative space, Allison and Damir decided to mark this turning point with a site-specific project, No Boys with Frogs.

For No Boys with Frogs a selection of London based (or associated) artists at various stages in their career were invited to claim an area in the building and create work that responded to the space in an open format. With a two month install period, artists created work that either responded to the interior architecture, commented on the history of the building, or utilized the project and space as an opportunity to test methods and material processes that would not normally occur in their practice. When renovations commenced in mid December 2013, all the work was removed or destroyed. The interior of the building has a rich variety of qualities for artists to respond to. In its current shell of a shoestore and factory, 123 Dundas is full of curiosities: Although built in the 1980s, it was decorated with a fondness for 1970s brown and orange; main floor walls jut out at varied angles; carpeted areas exist in unconventional spaces; there is a room solely designed to inhabit a stock of leather; thick layers of plaster dust cover multiple custom built shelves; faux textile patterned wallpaper seems to be peel off on its own; and the removal of display shelving has revealed hidden patterns of glue reminiscent of the most exquisite drawing gestures.

The title, No Boys with Frogs stems from a visit to the 2013 Venice Biennale. While viewing Shary Boyle's exhibition in the Canadian pavilion Allison and Damir noticed a comment in the guest book that read: "Love the work but where is boy with frog [sic]?" This humorous statement refers to Canadian artist Paul Peel and his painting of a boy observing a frog, *The Young Biologist*. The painting is housed in the Canadian Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and is often deemed a highlight by visitors. Considering the notoriety of this work plus the comment in Boyle's guest book, it appears that this painting is linked to what international audiences might associate with Canadian art. Coincidentally, Paul Peel is closely connected with London, Ontario, his hometown. Operating as a response to the question in the guest book, No Boys with Frogs could be read as: "(There are) No Boys with Frogs (here)" -- a playful critique of the misconception of Paul Peel as London's only famous artist. Which ever way the title is understood, this is an exciting exhibition that foregrounds contemporary art in London and celebrates the non-traditional kind of work one can expect to experience at DNA Artspace.