

NEW YORK

Because This Gallery Can Get Stuck in Traffic

By Andrew Russeth Published Dec 13, 2015



(Photo: Matteo Prandoni/BFA.com (RV exterior); courtesy of Jared Madere (RV Interior).)

Last year, when the artist and gallerist Jared Madere decided to move out of his Bed-Stuy apartment, two ideas came to mind. One was to head far out – to, say, Coney Island. The other was to move into a large truck. But since he wanted space for Bed Stuy Love Affair, the gallery he had been running out of his home for about a year, even the city's outskirts were looking pricey, and so the other option won out.

“For \$2,300, I’m a homeowner!” Madere said joyfully, recalling the moment he bought the RV (off Craigslist) that he and his gallery called home for much of the past year. He had taken the rather unorthodox approach of doing a benefit auction to raise money for the move, selling pieces donated by fellow artists. (The idea was ‘Let’s slut it up,’ he said.)

“I had never been in an RV in my life,” Madere, who is 29, told me, eyes wide, in rapid-fire patter, which is how he usually talks. “I just knew – the rent is too high, and the equation needs to be balanced somehow.” It was a rainy weekday night, and he was sitting in a cavernous former taxi workshop deep in the Bronx that he’d recently rented as a work studio. Southern rap was blaring, and video games and books (*Sex Lives of the Roman Emperors*, a Tiepolo catalogue) were scattered about. He was wearing his standard uniform – white Air Force Ones, hoodie, shaved head – and his RV, a hulking, 30-foot-long behemoth from 1978, was parked across the room.

By the time Madere got the truck, Bed Stuy Love Affair (named after a cocktail at the southern restaurant Peaches) had won a following for shows with a mélange of adventurous young artists, whose works were scrappy, wildly diverse in terms of interests and materials, and often darkly funny. Sam Anderson presented a sprawling set of tiny sculptures with clay, coal, and frog skeletons. Andrew J. Greene offered a long table, with chains as legs and a top of resin, filled with peanuts. “The sensibility, materials, and conceptual approach were so different than what we were expecting to see from young artists in the past few years,” says Christopher Y. Lew, an associate curator at the Whitney Museum who was intrigued by the “gnarly grittiness” of the work Madere exhibited. “I made it a point to try to catch every show that he was putting up there.”

Madere’s plan was to move a show of work by Jacob Cruzen and Joseph Geagan from his apartment to the RV, drive down to Miami Beach for last year’s Art Basel fair, and sell some art. With help from friends, he spent a solid month outfitting the ramshackle vehicle, painting it black, ripping out the interior, installing a bed in back, and chaining metal fences over the windows. The result was very Mad Max. The artist called it “a goth carni bus.”

Madere, joined by his girlfriend Jenny Cheng and Cruzen, ended up leaving late, making repairs along the way (bathroom sunroof, among other things), and sleeping in the parking lots of Walmart (“They have a policy that you can live there indefinitely”). “You’d wake up, drive to a hardware store, work there, then drive to Chipotle at the mall, and that was the circuit,” Madere said. “We weren’t showering for a long time.”

But they made it all the way to Miami – five days late, granted – and parked across from the hotel hosting the NADA fair the day before it closed. Kate Hillseth, a Los Angeles–based dealer who has worked with Madere, recalled spotting the RV out of the windows of her room. “Jared was showering with a jug of water in his white basketball shorts,” she said drily. “There was no separation between art and life.” The trip was something less than the moneymaker that Madere had hopped (just the cost of gas proved formidable), but they eventually managed to pilot the RV back to New York.

Back in the city, Madere camped outside of the Lower East Side’s Tomorrow gallery, where he staged a massive group show with the Los Angeles curator Bobby Jesus that stretched from the storefront into the truck. “He was battling New York parking laws, so it would always be a game of moving the RV and swooping back in the a.m.,” Tara Downs, Tomorrow’s owner, said. For a stretch, Madere parked underneath the Williamsburg Bridge. “He was a man in a van down by the river,” she said. “In every sense.”

BSLA has since done shows all over town – outside a Long Island City strip club with Darja Bajagić for one, next to an East Village bar with Maggie Lee and Robert Bittenbender for another, and in front of the Whitney during a block party, during which visitors could play video games inside his home. (Madere currently has his first U.S. solo show there, and had the museum redo the RV’s floors in stone as part of the production.)

For a while, Madere stayed at Cheng’s place, but her roommates tired of him being there, he said, so it was back to the truck. “This is so much sicker than some dumpy Brooklyn apartment with neurotic roommates,” he said. “To be the king of a land yacht – it’s so much sicker.”

Though Madere conceded that the RV lifestyle does have some downsides. He figures the truck gets only about seven miles a gallon. “That thing is a beast,” he said, “and at one point, every time I started it, I had to call a car service to get a jump. I was living with no heat, no electricity.” (A new mechanic – “He is the engine whisperer” – has worked miracles.) Also, while it is not appropriate to stare into apartment windows, the situation is apparently a bit different out on the street. “Everyone in the neighborhood wants to come talk,” Madere said.

For now, Bed Stuy Love Affair is closed for business, and Madere is taking a break from the nomadic lifestyle. He uses a beat-up little white van to get around these days, and sometimes wonders what life would have been like if he had bought one earlier, instead of moving into an apartment after arriving in New York from Chicago in 2009. “I could have gotten so much done!” he said. “For someone leaving home, that makes a lot of sense. You just put a mattress in the back.”

The RV, Madere emphasized, was just a means to an end, a way to show art while not paying rent. However, he said, “I am interested in the idea of showing art in a vehicle like a cruise ship or like a Snowpiercer kind of scenario – like you have a glass train that never stops and you have work hung from wire on the ceiling. That would be fantastic.”