

# Three Heads Are Better than One

By Emiliano Burr Di  
Mauro

April 28, 2015



Eric Saudi

The 4th Ward Project Space, situated on 54th Street and Kimbark Avenue, proves that young, underrepresented artists in Chicago can exhibit their work as long as someone is willing to exhibit it. In the case of 4WPS, those dedicated to supporting such artists are three Chicago artists themselves: Mika Horibuchi, James Kao, and Valentina Zamfirescu.

“Part of the goal is to build a coalition—another place for Chicago artists to show work,” Kao told me at 4WPS last week. “We see it as our responsibility. If we have the means to do this, it’s sort of the right thing to do.”

The most recent exhibition, by Eric Saudi, is as overwhelming as it is inviting. “Marginalia” is the fourth in a string of single-artist shows 4WPS has exhibited since opening last year. The show focuses on Saudi’s upbringing in the Bronx in New York City and explores themes of sexuality, religion, and violence in his community. The exhibit includes drawings on flesh-like materials, which are interspersed throughout overlapping party-like banners whose phrases reflect on the darker side of his neighborhood. A new exhibit by Alberto Aguilar will begin on May 3.

As professional artists who have a strong background in painting, Horibuchi, Kao, and Zamfirescu select their artists from a variety of sources. Some they hear about through word of mouth, and others they stumble upon online. After they select someone, the trio is with that artist through every step of the process, from the first gallery visit to installation. But

essentially, as Kao put it, they give them the keys to the gallery and try not to step on their toes.

“They were very helpful, but more importantly they allowed me to use the space without any fear of interference,” Saudi said. “It was so nice to have support while I was trying to explain things that were not in existence to demonstrate, were not fully planned out, and were very new processes to me and them.”

The artists’ assumed role as directors at 4WPS requires a degree of separation from their art—they say their curatorial work is independent of their own work, and that they plan never to exhibit themselves at 4WPS. As they shift from artist to curator, however, they inevitably call upon their personal aesthetics, this time for the purpose of assisting someone else’s attempted artistic concepts.

“You get to this point where you know your work better than anyone else will ever know, but you also kind of lose sight for your own work,” Kao says. “I think that’s helpful for the artist to get a new pair of eyes looking at it in that context.”

The three assist artists in any way that they can, each taking turns going through an exhibit before it opens and offering feedback, and subsequently transforming the space with every artist who comes through 4WPS. This kind of conversation which occurs between the four artists throughout the exhibition process, bridges the usually accepted disparity in communication between artists and commercial curators who commodify art into a product rather than see it as “something that someone has spent a lot of time developing, thinking about, failing at, and something that they want to share with the world,” Kao says.

4WPS is almost completely hidden from the public eye. Located in a small room within a residential building, the gallery is defined by its urban surroundings. As one walks from end to end of the one-room exhibition, muffled conversation and even the familiar barking of a dog are all part of the atmosphere just as much as the art itself. These are not distractions, nor should they be viewed as such. Rather, they are reminders of what kind of role 4WPS should play within the Hyde Park and greater South Side communities—as creative space for artists, students, and community members who may not be interested in the typically pristine nature of curatorial production.

“There’s a huge community of artists in Hyde Park, and by means of building a relationship with them or simply working with them and interacting with them, we can better legitimize ourselves as a center for art in the neighborhood,” Kao says. As the 4th Ward Project Space continues to find innovative ways to engage with artists, they will continue making progress toward that goal.

*4th Ward Project Space, 5338 S. Kimbark Ave. Upcoming exhibition “de.ma.rc.at.ed.” by Alberto Aguilar, May 3 through May 31.*