

Artist of the week 42: Agathe Snow

Continuing her series on contemporary artists, Jessica Lack looks at the work of Agathe Snow, whose crucified animals and neon signs celebrate the spirit of downtown New York

Jessica Lack

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Abstract, apocalyptic ... Cross on the Left with Spider Web is one of selected installations by Snow at the Saatchi gallery

Agathe Snow's name has been synonymous with New York's Lower East Side underground art scene for several years, but it's only recently that she has begun calling herself an artist. The Corsica-born 33-year-old was the rogue female in a group of artists famed as much for their wild antics as for their art. Dan Colen, Dash Snow (to whom she was married for nine years) and photographer Ryan McGinley became notorious for producing work that was provocative and obscene. Colen and Dash Snow's drug-fuelled installations consisted of trashing gallery spaces and hotel rooms until they resembled litter-filled "hamster nests". Colen also did a nice range in dribbly abstracts designed to look like bird droppings. The group's antics were photographed by McGinley, who became their unofficial biographer, revealing their hedonism to be a part and product of their art.

Agathe Snow

Abstract America: New Painting and Sculpture

Saatchi gallery ,

London

Starts 29 May

Until 13 September

But perhaps it was the egocentricity of her male counterparts that led Agathe Snow to keep a semi-detached distance from the collective. Instead, she pursued her own offbeat performances that involved cooking for hundreds of people, or marathon dance contests where she invited participants to keep going as long as their bodies could hold out. She never thought of these happenings as artworks; her drive was her immediate community, and celebrating the spirit of the Lower East Side.

Then, in 2007, art dealer James Fuentes invited Snow to convert his new gallery space in New York's Chinatown. In response, Snow imagined a waterlogged Manhattan, in which survivors built a home for themselves in the belly of a whale. The sculpture evolved over the duration of the exhibition as Snow incorporated objects brought in by visitors. The results were critically praised and led to an invitation to show at Peres Projects in Berlin. The show I Don't Know but I've Been Told Eskimo Pussy is Mighty Cold was another apocalyptic sculptural installation featuring crucified animals made from neon signs, finds from flea markets and assorted junk. She later showed at Peres Projects in Los Angeles, driving a truck from Chinatown in New York to Chinatown in LA, stopping only to eat Chinese food on the way. The sculptures made on the journey were exhibited at the gallery on her arrival.

Why we like her? For Total Attitude Work Out Video, 2008, a film featuring a troupe of models dressed in Jane Fonda-style leotards, acting out their five-point plans for surviving awkward situations. They range from How to Get Off Easy when Pulled Over by the Cops, to How to Behave when Meeting Jesus.

Community art: Snow's love of group performances came from her early childhood experiences of downtown New York, where her mother ran a not-very-profitable restaurant called La Poème. Her mother semi-adopted the neighbourhood's graffiti kids and the restaurant became a place to hang out; it was there that Snow first met Colen and McGinley.

- Agathe Snow's sculptures can be seen at the Saatchi gallery as part of Abstract America: New Painting and Sculpture, which runs from 29 May to 13 September.