

SPEAKEASY

JUNE 24, 2010, 11:00 AM ET

'Paper Monet' Features Impressionist Works Painted on Plates, Coffee Cups



Alex Chohlas-Wood

Artist Sean Mellyn's Cabinet: "Paper Monet" 2008-2009

In the hopes of re-creating a familiar atmosphere from his time in Giverny, France, artist Sean Mellyn hired a Mister Softee truck for the opening reception of his "Paper Monet" installation Wednesday night at the APF LAB in New York. The installation assembled Mellyn's work from his three-month residency at Claude Monet's studio, courtesy of the Art Production Fund's Versailles Foundation grant.

Residing in the small town, Mellyn explored the painter's streets, reveled in Monet's water lily studio-cum-gift shop and channeled his shock of the impressionist's house into his work. "I was obsessively going through his house and his collection of Japanese prints," Mellyn said of Monet's homestead. "His collection was really

extensive and rare, and I was struck by the fade to indigo blue."

As the soft serve melted down people's wrists in SoHo, Mellyn, who is based in Brooklyn, flashed back to his residency in the riverside town 50 miles northwest of Paris. He recalled the hundreds of ice-cream toting tourists that descended upon the French impressionist painter's house and gardens daily, the very people that inspired him to create "Paper Monet."

With 102 pieces of painted-on-paper items like dinner plates, serving trays, coffee cups, candelabras and wine pitchers, Mellyn's work is presented in a White Russian plywood cabinet, specially re-constructed from the one in his Giverny studio. On the walls, 72 eye charts with 17-20 eyes on each cover floor to ceiling, nearly doubling as wallpaper. Interspersed between the charts and hung at eye level are six "Monetteantoinette" portraits — images that combine Marie Antoinette's hairstyles with Monet's bearded countenance. Everything is indigo blue, from the plates to the eyes, with the exception of the Monet acid yellow wall that frames the cabinet.

"What happens to all this surplus of imagery?"

Mellyn questioned, as he stood outside in a black, blue and white blazer. He took slow, long, intentional drags on a cigarette. "This project space is purposefully set up in a kind of religious way, like an altar that you have to confront, then separate and contemplate a single image, one piece."

The idea for the medium of paper goods came to Mellyn before he even left America. Shopping for travel size hand-wipes, the artist, who is known for painting stretchers and screen prints, purchased four-dozen paper plates with the thought of creating a roadside pop-up stand in homage to Monet. In Giverny, Mellyn used his fascination with the

juxtaposition of the artist and his home to the unrelenting waves of Monet lovers as the foundation of the installation. Once he returned from France, Mellyn toyed with the known-fact of Monet's late-life cataracts to create the eye charts, which originated as sample prints to locate eyes in his paintings.

"Sean embraced all of it, from the commercial aspect of the site right now to the fascination people have with commodifying everything," said Doreen Remen, one of the co-founders of the Art Production Fund.

Approximately 100 friends and guests of the artist entered the 250-square-foot space with hundreds of blue eyes peering out at them. Whispers indicating shock and conversations of a departure from the artist's norm echoed off the walls. Soft serve occasionally dripped on the floor, with Mister Softee's familiar face and swirled buffon-like hair creating a doppelganger effect to Mellyn's "Monetteantoinette's."

Ranging from \$95 for a hardcover book with a silkscreen special edition print to \$2,200 for a medium eye chart to \$70,000 for the cabinet and everything in it, Mellyn hopes, in the true industry of commodification, that there is something for everyone, right down to the ice cream.

The installation, open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12-6 pm, runs until August 12 and is free to the public.



The scene at Mellyn's opening.