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Julian Hoerber: "Art, Lovers - Romantic Teamwork in Bushwick's 'Swingers WKND'"

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"Swingers WKND," a pop-up exhibition on view Friday through Sunday at 2 St. Nicholas Avenue in Brooklyn, brings together the works of 11 artist couples. Curated by married collaborative duo Tribble & Mancenido, and running in tandem with Bushwick Open Studios, it's a loose reprisal of a similarly themed 1949 show, "Artists: Man and Wife," which featured Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, and the de Koonings, among others. Much has changed in the decades between the two shows. The earlier exhibition was "riddled with gender politics," Tribble & Mancenido noted. "All of the male artists' careers overpowered that of their female counterparts. . . . [In contrast] "the women artists in our show have been successful simultaneously, or even more so, than their male partners." Which is not to say that all is happily ever after. "[W]omen still have a long way to go, in the art world, and the world at large," the curators added, citing as a case in point the perennial grumbling from George Baselitz regarding the inferiority of female artists, and the fact that women generally command less money for their work than men.

Gender politics aside, what is it actually like being an artist who is dating, or married to, another artist? "The best part is being so close to work that is very different from my own," said "Swingers WKND" participant Graham Collins, who is known for his sculptures incorporating window tint, glass, and wood and whose wife, Jennie Jieun Lee, won recent acclaim for her large ceramic pieces resembling abstracted human faces. "Jennie works in ways that are completely alien to me from a 'studio practice' perspective but that I understand almost intuitively on an emotional level." Lee's take? "Usually Graham tells me to try something, then I rebel and make something else – and then try his suggestion last," she said. "Yes, his opinion is probably up there near the top two, but it doesn't mean it's always right.

"I love my wife and I love her work, and those things overlap all the time," said Julian Hoerber, who is married to photographer Heather Rasmussen. The two met at Blum & Poe, in Los Angeles: Hoerber was represented by the gallery, and Rasmussen worked there. "I was immediately attracted to Julian when I saw him walk in," she recalled. "At the time, he had just made a video that had people kissing, and all of them happened to be friends we had in common." For "Swingers WKND," the pair have collaborated for the first time, consciously adapting elements of their individual practices and creating a gradient-pigmented cement sculpture of Rasmussen's leg. "I realized lately that there are some ideas that I've forgotten if they were mine or Heather's," Hoerber said. "I find her way of working – the forthrightness, the way she works through an idea for a long time until she gets everything out of it she can, her lack of fussiness – to be something I try to imitate, but I usually come up short. We mostly agree about other people's art and about movies and furniture. Heather's opinion of my work matters tremendously to me. She'll almost never tell me something stinks, but I can tell by the tone of her response if something is really good, if it's really working. The depth of her understanding of what I do makes her opinion matter more, but I also suspect she's unreasonably biased in my favor."

"I know for sure that I wouldn't date an artist if I didn't think his work was good," Sun You told me. She's a sculptor who creates jewel-like assemblages of paperclips, screws, beaded cord, and other baubles; her partner is Ethan Greenbaum, whose practice merges photography and sculpture and often focuses on common bits of the urban landscape. "The best part about being involved with a fellow artist is not having a bored partner at openings and events," Greenbaum said. "It's great to be unapologetically obsessive and enthusiastic about your passions in the same field." The only downside might be the shared bank account: "The difficulties and obstacles arise from not having a partner who brings in the salary of a doctor or hedge-fund manager."

Often artist couples feed and tweak each other's practices directly. "I wouldn't be a squeezer without Russell's influence," Trudy Benson joked, referring to her husband, Russell Tyler, whom she met at Pratt, and to her penchant for letting entire tubes of pigment gush onto the surface of her paintings.

Painters Holly Coulis and Ridley Howard have had similar back-and-forths about their craft. "When Holly and I met, she was making sculpture," Howard said. "They were supersmart and played with image in ways that influenced how I thought about my paintings. I've been following her around ever since." For "Swingers WKND," the two artists – who run an art space of their own in Brooklyn, with Mitchell Wright – are showing small-scale works that had been hanging side-by-side in Howard's studio.

Romantic/artistic collaborations don't always work out – just look at Matthew Barney and Björk – but "Swingers WKND" aims to capture the collective buzz generated when two people's passions intertwine, passionately. The art world can be a confusing, frustrating, insular place, and having a likeminded companion can make it easier to traverse that terrain. "I think it would be difficult to be in a relationship with someone who didn't understand my main interest, and vice versa," Coulis said. "If I were a mathematician, I would want to be married to a mathematician."

"Swingers WKND" opens Friday, June 5, 7-9 p.m., and is on view through Sunday. In addition to the artists mentioned above, it features work by Ryan Steadman & Gina Magid, Carrie Yamaoka & Joy Episalla, Jennifer Coates & David Humphrey, Saira McClaren & Mike Hein, and Tamara Zahaykevich & Grant Huang.