

Sadie Barnette: "Afterglow in Gallery Land"

By Alex E. Jung

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Juana spins at Sadie Barnette's installation *The New Eagle Creek Saloon* at the Kitchen. Photo: Charles Caesar for New York Magazine

**With *The New Eagle Creek Saloon*, artist Sadie Barnette gives her father's gay bar new life.**

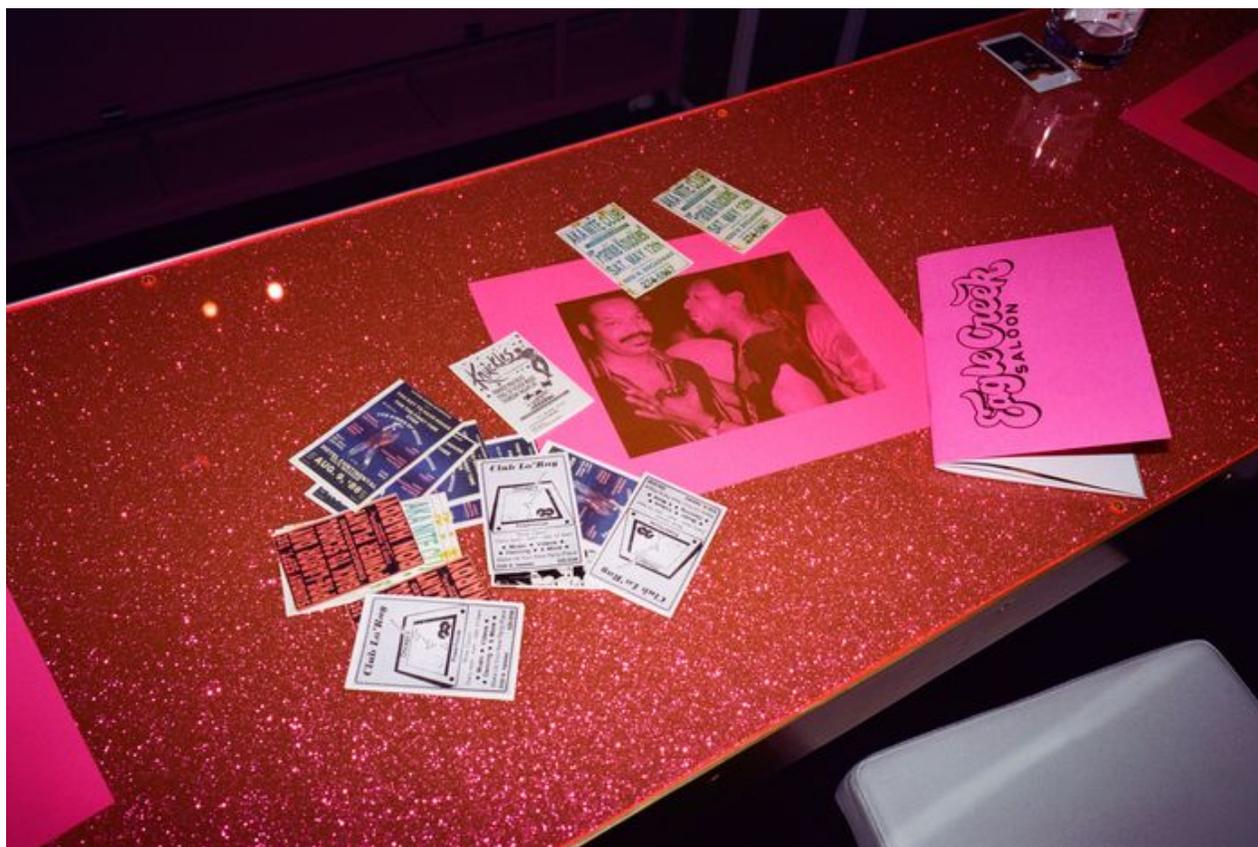
On a recent Saturday afternoon, amid emergency alerts for snow squalls, a dance floor in Chelsea lit up with beats from Chicago. DJ Juana, in a black T-shirt, a black mask, and hoops, spun house records while episodes of the '80s dance show [Attack of the Boogie](#) played overhead. It was all a bit of theater, a bit of simulacrum; the cavernous dark and the bone-penetrating bass line allowed us to pretend it was nighttime at the club and not daytime at an art space near the High Line. We needed some convincing. Most of the patrons stood wiggling along the periphery until Juana

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made a shivering motion, spread her arms wide, and beckoned everyone to come in. There's only one way to heat up a dance floor.

Juana was one in a series of DJs brought in to activate [The New Eagle Creek Saloon](#), an installation by artist Sadie Barnette that reimagines her father Rodney Barnette's bar in San Francisco and is on view at the Kitchen through March 6. The real New Eagle Creek was San Francisco's first Black-owned gay bar when Rodney opened it in 1990. Gone are the wood panels and ceiling fans of the Market Street original; in Sadie's version – which she created in 2019 and staged here in conjunction with the Studio Museum in Harlem – gallerygoers will find a slim horseshoe-shaped bar with pink neon lighting; sleek, geometric barstools in white leather; and modular couches in holographic vinyl. The work is a glittery shrine standing slightly outside time and space, a transmission beam from the past lighting the way toward future utopias.



Chicago house fliers from Juana and a pink booklet of archival images produced by Barnette. Photo: Charles Caesar for New York Magazine

Rodney, now in his 70s, has a biography that has served as a productive source for much of his daughter's work. He founded the Compton chapter of the Black Panther Party, maintained the security detail for Angela Davis in San Jose during her infamous 1972 trial, and worked as a union organizer. When the family filed a FOIA request for his FBI dossier, they received a 500-page surveillance file. Sadie has reworked those documents in various iterations, including in her recent projects [Dear 1968, ...](#) and [Black Sky](#). Last year, she transformed a mug shot of her father and cold,

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bureaucratic documents into [four-by-five-foot drawings](#) made with stencils and powdered graphite and adorned with roses drawn in colored pencil – recuperation through love.

Opening the New Eagle Creek Saloon was Rodney's attempt to create a haven for queer Black people from the racism they and other people of color experienced on Castro Street. In his words, this was to be "a friendly place with a funky bass for every race," proceeding from an understanding that gay Black love needed bars and clubs to thrive. "I assumed that victims of homophobia would be sensitive to the needs of other victimized minorities," Rodney said at the time. "At the New Eagle Creek, Black gays know they can come here and never have to deal with the hassles they have traditionally faced at other gay establishments." It lasted three years but has found an afterlife in Sadie's tender re-creation. Mementos decorate the shelves here. A loving photograph of Rodney with his people sits at an altar with a votive candle, an amethyst, and a charred stick of palo santo; Juana brought her own palm-size leaflets of parties past, stamped on the back with the remembrance black joy lived here.

The DJs at the Kitchen are part of a nightlife residency put together by the critic and academic [madison moore](#). That Saturday, moore was there too, dancing and sending missives through Instagram. On most days, though, music plays over the installation without a DJ. The horseshoe bar sits empty. It conjures up the feeling of ghosts, like photographer Kevin McCarty's [images of empty stages at L.A. queer clubs](#) – a memorial to all of the gay bars that have vanished with time.

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