

VOGUE

"In Washington, DC, Artist Sadie Barnette Transforms Her Father's Former Gay Bar Into an Immersive Installation"

By Cassandra Pintro

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A view of Sadie Barnette's *The New Eagle Creek Saloon*, installed in The Kitchen, NY, 2022. Photo: Adam Reich

This past weekend—just in time for [Pride—Stable Arts](#) in Washington, DC, welcomed artist Sadie Barnette's migrating presentation *The New Eagle Creek Saloon* (2019) into its gallery space. The saloon is quite literally a life-size bar, created to commemorate the historic San Francisco venue that Barnette's father, Rodney, founded in 1990. For three years, the original Eagle Creek Saloon served as a first-of-its-kind haven for the BIPOC queer community near the Mission district; at other local watering holes, it wasn't uncommon for Black people to be "asked to show three forms of ID," Barnette says. "It wasn't that [my father] had this idea, like, 'I want to be an entrepreneur, and I want to start a bar.' Really, it was because of the experiences that he and his friends were

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having in San Francisco of going to these predominantly white-catered bars and being met with racism." The Eagle Creek Saloon felt like a "necessity," Barnette says; its cheery slogan was "a friendly place, with a funky bass, for every race."

In her creative practice, Barnette has often examined Black life through the lens of her own family; [The FBI Project](#), which she began in 2016, dissects the dossier that the FBI opened on her father, who founded the Compton chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1968. With *The New Eagle Creek Saloon*, the 38-year-old Oakland native revisits a personal history in order to resurface the power of a joyful, intentional space for non-white queer people. Prior iterations of the installation have popped up at the Lab in San Francisco; the Institute of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; the Kitchen in New York; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

At Stable, *The New Eagle Creek Saloon* is made up of a U-shaped bar and a neon sign, complete with 12 functional stools and vintage photographs; on its opening night, a bartender was on hand to serve drinks. Barnette conceived the work as a call to engage and convene. "The project was always designed to be activated," she says. "It was always meant to be a stage, a platform, an invitation for things to happen."

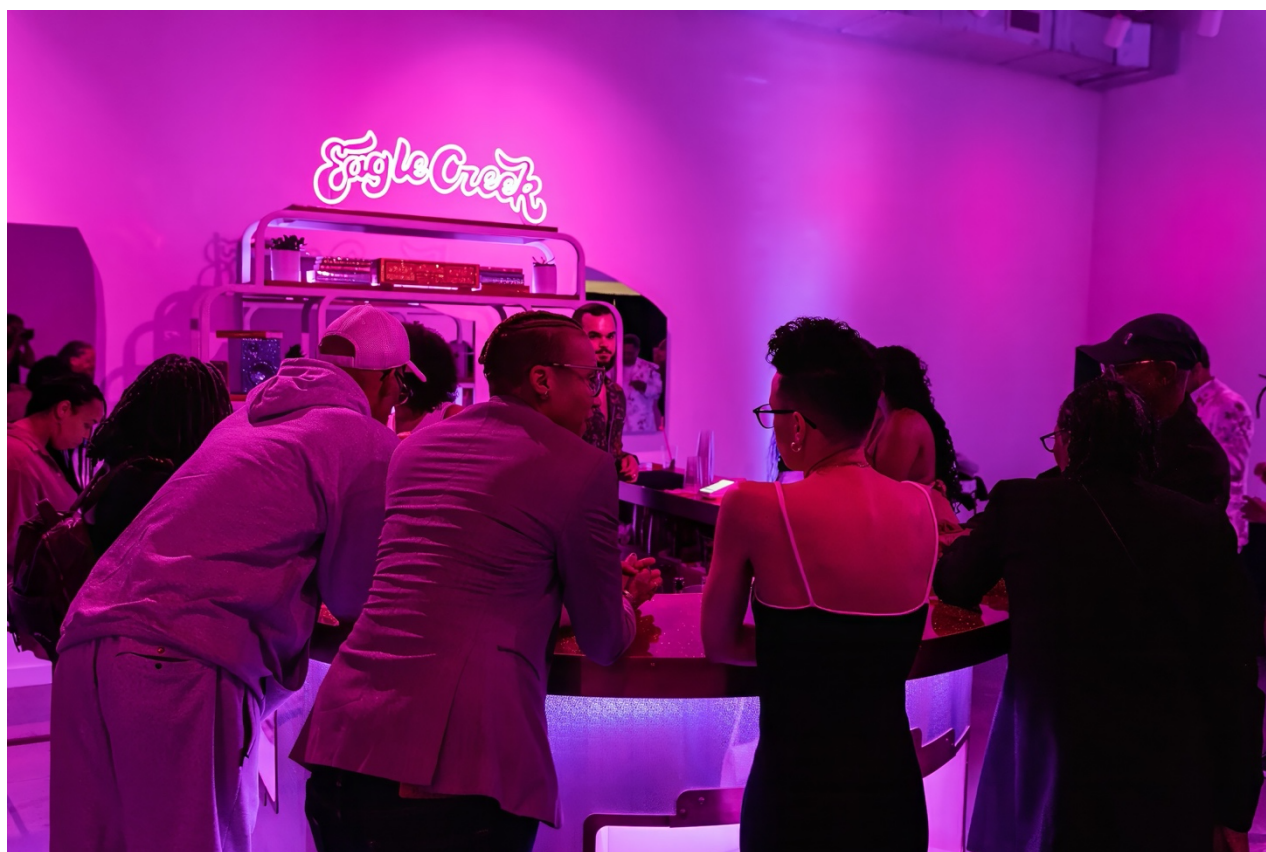


Photo: Mike Harrison

Indeed, a robust slate of activities and programs has been planned around *The New Eagle Creek Saloon* during its tenure in DC, including a QTBIPOC happy hour, a Beyoncé-themed yoga class, a

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film screening, a live podcast recording, and panel discussions about the history of Black queer life in the area. "This exhibition invites in queer Black communities—it does not mandate or limit the stories and experiences deemed valuable and worth celebrating by outsiders," says Stable Arts curator Maleke Glee. "The exhibition is an invitation for communities to share and define themselves and, by virtue, educate and share with those who are not immediately involved with the community."



Photo: Mike Harrison

With the original Eagle Creek Saloon now all but lost to time, Barnette's work also allows that space's legacy to live on. "That's one of the beauties of the *Eagle Creek* project—all these opportunities for exponential connecting," the artist reflects. "This train is going and pulling more and more histories on top of it."

The New Eagle Creek Saloon will be on view with community programming at Stable Arts until July 8, 2023.

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