

Taking the Parrish on the Road

The Parrish Road Show is just the latest in a series of programs Andrea Grover has started at the museum

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Houston may seem a long way from Sag Harbor and the South Fork, but when one starts out in Freeport, it turns out not to be that far at all.

Such is the experience of Andrea Grover, the curator of programs at the Parrish Museum. Brought up in western Long Island by a father who was a commercial fisherman, boat builder, and artist, she has an innate appreciation for the issues and lifestyle that this region holds dear.

She became an art scene insider in Houston for more than a decade by adhering to a straightforward formula: engage the public “with nomadic programs related to the site that feature local culture and history and combine several different disciplines in one evening.”

This was the goal when she started showing films in her own living room in an old church on Aurora Street in Houston. With the Aurora Picture Show, she transformed the sanctuary into a 100-seat venue and started her own nonprofit arts venture. Houston’s freewheeling zoning laws and its artistic subculture made it all possible.

“I would invite different people from the community to program these evenings. Houston had a thriving creative community. It was a way to engage the public in somewhat demanding moving images.” Allowing others to organize an evening of films gave the community a sense of ownership in the venture, and providing other enticements such as shots of tequila or picnics didn’t hurt either.

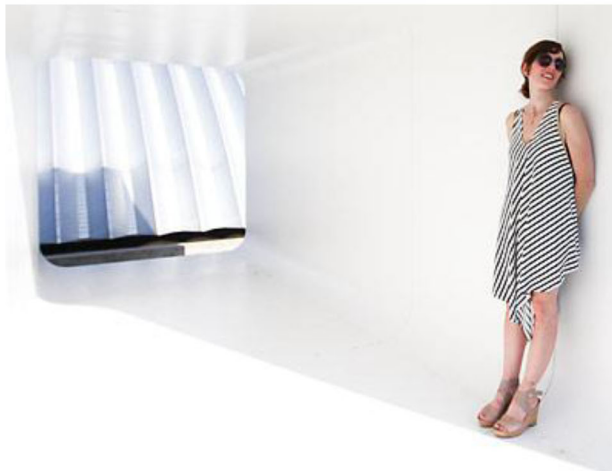
She was soon invited to produce similar events at other venues, initially arts-based, such as the Menil Collection, and then less traditional places like an abandoned junkyard or a floating barge. Her most recent project there involved a series of artist films about boats and maritime history shown on the official tour boat of the Houston Ship Channel.

“The Aurora Picture show became synonymous with roaming, multidisciplinary art platforms,” she said. Now, she is doing the same thing here. The Parrish Road Show is a South Fork version of her series of “nomadic events that engages not just our core audience, but people who have never set foot in the Parrish and people who think they know what the Parrish’s mission and program are, but then we try to tweak that a little bit.”

The idea is to go where the people are, from a private golf club or the historical society in Bridgehampton to the radar tower at Camp Hero in Montauk “to be closer or more convenient at certain times.” Ms. Grover said the Road Show also serves a psychological purpose as the museum begins its plans to move to a new facility in November. “It is a way of moving our patronage out of our present building and toward Water Mill and our future.”

The Eat Drink Local Film Festival, held at Silas Marder Gallery in Bridgehampton in June, was the first Road Show event. Showing films for free and offering tastes from South Fork food purveyors for a fee, the event also included a honeybee demonstration.

A one-night exhibit of work by Jameson Ellis, a Sag Harbor artist, at the Bridge, a private golf club in the hills of



Andrea Grover, inside Maziar Behrooz's "Rapid Deployment Meditation Unit," is untethering the museum in a summer series of on-site events under the banner of the Parrish Road Show.
Sunny Khalsa

Bridgehampton, included pieces inspired by military and industrial design along with a functional and luxurious display case designed and built by the artist by hand. The show included works on paper and a video presentation of photos from the past two years of his studio practice.

This past weekend, Maziar Behrooz brought his “Rapid Deployment Meditation Unit” to a house he designed in East Hampton as part of the Road Show. The unit is a container outfitted for different activities and required a crane and a flatbed to move it on site. A screening of “Pulse,” a video by Matthew Biederman and Alain Thibault, took place on Friday and two guided meditation sessions with Kelly Morris were held on Saturday. On Aug. 12 at 8 p.m. Richard Vaudrey will perform Bach on cello in the unit, inviting the audience to roam inside and around the space.

The unit has been exhibited before, but not outside, where sound travels through it like a megaphone and it “favors deep bass-y sounds,” that Ms. Grover said are also present in the video project and the cello piece. These tones are felt deep down to the bone. The video projection was done through the unit so that the images ended up on the roof of the house.

Still to come is a bike tour of Springs on Saturday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. for \$39 that is co-presented with the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center and Amagansett Beach and Bicycle Co. The stops will include the Pollock-Krasner House, Green River Cemetery, Pussy’s Pond, and other artful places in Springs. It is the only event that has an admission fee.

The remaining exhibitions are Alice Hope’s “Under the Radar” installation of ferrite magnets on an asphalt strip near the decommissioned radar tower at Camp Hero, which is on view through August. Another piece, “Satellite,” is on view at Nick and Toni’s during the same period.

Finally, Jill Musnicki will have an installation in the engine barn of the Bridgehampton Historical Society on Aug. 18 and 19 called “What Comes Around,” a series of images taken with motion-activated cameras placed in uncultivated landscapes throughout the South Fork to capture both animal and human activity. Most of the still images will be looped together in videos projected on screens on three walls to make it an immersive environment. Other framed still photos will be displayed on the walls.

Terrie Sultan, the executive director of the Parrish, recently announced that the Parrish Road Show will continue every summer. Inside the new building, Ms. Grover said a curatorial program called “Platform” will take a similar approach. “We will invite an individual artist or collective to consider the whole of the museum as a potential space for a project. These will take place in the building’s interstitial spaces: the spine galleries, its cafe, the covered entries, grounds, the car park, all of it.” They will become the setting for audio works, performance pieces, interventions, installations, and whatever else comes to mind. This will be in addition to more opportunities for performance, dance, and live music in the new space.

A curator of programs is a curiously open-ended title. Ms. Grover said that in her preliminary talks with the Parrish, she too wondered what she would do here. Ms. Sultan’s response was “do what you do well,” i.e. “bring in this kind of adventurous, risk-taking programming, and connect it to the local community and history of artists on the East End.”

The Parrish Road Show is just the latest in a series of programs Ms. Grover has started at the museum. Over the winter months, many attended the Lightning Rounds she organized, which featured 10 people given six minutes and 10 slides to describe what it is they do here. Artists, farmers, poets, designers, foodies, and some who were all of the above have participated in three such evenings, fueled by beer and wine and a kind of show-and-tell bonhomie that put the presenters, some not at all familiar with public speaking, at ease.

Although a new concept to many on the South Fork, Ms. Grover said that “pecha kucha,” or chit-chat in Japanese, has been a staple of presentations in creative circles for many years and it seemed a good fit for the kind of engagement she wanted to foster here. The Parrish was recently recognized by the PechaKucha Foundation in Toyko. Future Lightning Round events will be called PechaKucha Hamptons, which is now the official name.

Her evenings of East End Stories on Screen have included short films and videos from local media archives, such as LTV. “They are from amateur films, home movies, newsreels, and unedited footage from cable access programs,”

she said of many of the sources. “They are things that don’t necessarily make it into documentaries or nonfiction films, but hold a lot of substance and first person accounts by the artists themselves.” Examples include the late Alfonso Ossorio giving Elaine Benson a tour of the Creeks, his house in East Hampton, or an Andy Warhol video diary from 1970 at a Montauk beach with Lee Radziwill and John Kennedy Jr. Guest speakers discuss the clips and are drawn from their relationship to the material, be it as filmmaker, scholar on the particular artist, or steward of an archive.

Although her most recent work involved curatorial fellowships from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts in New York, resulting in an exhibition and a book written with three other authors on the intersection of science, technology, and art, no one should fear that her approach to art presentation will be too didactic. “I’ve always operated from a street-level perspective of culture,” she said. Despite working from within the institution, she is still seeking an interactive experience in the types of programs and exhibitions she wants to present. “I don’t think I could operate from a position of institutional authority. It’s just not in my nature.”

And despite a bit of culture shock, the transition to Sag Harbor, where she lives with her husband, Carlos Lama, and her daughters Lola, 10, and Gigi, 7, is working out just fine. “My daughters can now ride their bikes in the street. The fresh air, vitamin D, and the local produce and fish are a huge improvement.”

Except where noted all Parrish Road Show programs are free, but some require reservations. Additional information on programs and registration is on the Parrish Web site, parrishmuseum.org.

About the Author

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