



## A Ford Models Gallery, Sans Models

By Michael H. Miller  
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Last week, The Observer took the elevator to the top floor of the Warren and Wetmore building on 57th Street for the opening of fordPROJECT, an art gallery started by Altpoint Capital Partners, the same company that owns Ford Models. The people in charge insisted there would be no models in attendance.

"We're not, as you see, bound at all by the constraints of fashion," said Guerman Aliev, chairman and chief executive of Altpoint, gesturing to the model-less room. "We will not have any models coming to see this tonight. I wanted to de-modelize this as much as possible."

What then, The Observer asked, were the new gallery's intentions?

"Right now our M.O. will be to rotate curators every six weeks," Mr. Aliev said. "I like the flexibility of doing our programming—"

"I can afford the luxury of being honest about this: We don't know what our identity is going to be yet."

One thing is for sure: no fashion.

"There isn't a program yet; we're not celebrating our 50 years in existence, but I do hope that we can stay away from the whole art and fashion thing,"

said Tim Goossens, fordPROJECT's creative director, and a former assistant curator at P.S. 1 (before that, he was Klaus Biesenbach's intern at MoMA). "Because it would be too predictable and it's not what anyone is necessarily passionate about."

The first show is called "When the Fairy Tale Never Ends," curated by Lara Pan. There are works by Henry Darger, Gretchen Ryan and Robert Lazzarini, among others. The art focuses on youth, bright colors and the tensions between pristine fantasy and the less thrilling real world. (One piece, by artist duo caraballo-farman, is a video loop of Cinderella turning into a princess and then back into a normal girl.)

The crowd was a strange mix of artists in goth clothing, hipsters in flannel and art-world types in fitted business suits and black dresses. We saw the Haunch of Venison director Emilio Steinberger, in a navy blue suit and tie, chatting with Honor Titus, the singer of the Brooklyn band Cerebral Ballzy, wearing a black cap with the bill folded up, resting atop a head of unruly hair. What did they think of the absence of models?

"My wife sent me a picture of herself and said, 'Remember how beautiful I am when you're partying with models,'" Mr. Steinberger said. "I think I've been brought here under false pretenses."

Mr. Titus smiled and shrugged.

"Hey, lotta hot chicks, lotta booze, it's great," he said and then walked over to examine a Darger watercolor.

It was an uncharacteristically warm January night, so The Observer went out to the gallery's terrace. A voice came out from a dark corner.

"Hey, can I bum a smoke?"

We glanced at our pack. There were three left. The Observer was feeling generous. We learned our new smoking buddy was Ben Bronfman, fiancé of Maya Arulpragasam, a.k.a. M.I.A., and great-grandson of Seagram's founder, Samuel Bronfman. He had a scraggly beard and a motorcycle jacket. He was telling us about a trip to Thailand he took with his fiancée when his sister,

Hannah, walked up, also hunting down a cigarette.

“We’ll share this,” Mr. Bronfman said. “We’re trying to quit.”

“It’s not going so well.”

Back inside the artist caraballo-farman was standing by his photograph of a laser tag arena’s interior. We asked him his real name. With a frown, he said any quote should be credited to “caraballo-farman.” Still, he was happy to have his work on display in the new gallery.

“It’s not like they said if you put your piece in here we’ll parade long-legged Ford models for you. Of course, it crosses your mind. You think, what is this space? I mean, a modeling agency doing art? But we trusted the curator. You know, so much of the art world has become hybridized with fashion, so much of it has crossed over, is this really so different from what goes on in Miami?”

He had on black nail polish, a long black coat and a big gold necklace dangling from his neck. We said we liked it.

“Thanks,” he said. “It’s my wife’s tumor.” The Observer gave a look that must have said, “You’re going to have to elaborate.”

“We’re doing these brass cancer tumors now,” he said. “It’s the 21st-century evil eye.”

In our periphery, we thought we saw a model. It was just a party promoter.



The Honorable Daphne Guinness who attend the opening of fordPROJECT