

An Explosive Conversation at Marders

By Jennifer Landes | October 27, 2011 - 9:52am

Bring two artists together, both sculptural and structural in their approaches, and unleash them on an unusual and open space, giving them few limitations except that their materials must be locally sourced and no more than \$40 in cost. It's an interesting recipe and one that could have resulted in bedlam or, worse, boredom.

Fortunately, the Silas Marder Gallery and the artists Ben Butler and Michael Rosch delivered neither. The installation, titled



"Architecture of a Bomb," an installation dating from August, has attracted enough sustained interest to continue at the Silas Marder Gallery in Bridgehampton through December. *Gary Mamay*

"Architecture of a Bomb," has filled the loft space in the gallery with plenty to keep the eye occupied and the mind engaged, and practically everything in the installation was taken from the Marders Garden Center property.

Mr. Butler, who teaches in Tennessee but spends his down-time in Quogue, works in poplar, cedar, and other woods. With these, he often makes structural forms and objects that have been likened to Tinker Toys in their purer iterations, but which can look more organic and flowing in others. He appears to enjoy playing with the properties of wood, respecting its hardness, but looking beyond it for a softer, and sometimes frailer, construction.

It is he who offers a way into the installation, using pieces of pallets and posts as a kind of corral to lead the viewer into the room and giving it a Western feeling, one evocative of the outdoors and open spaces that beckon just outside in the garden center surrounding the unusually sited gallery.

Mr. Rosch's approach to metal is even more fluid, as if he is attempting to draw squiggles with it or replicate a vine. His artistic scavenging predates requirements of the installation. As an instructor at the former Southampton College, he was showing works with automobile springs or shovel handles. Like the slate that he suspended on top of the springs a decade ago, here, he chooses to mount an old weathered wooden chair, its ordered form contrasting well with the randomness of its curvaceous coil.

Additional order is imposed by the marble slabs he hauled up the stairs of the loft, which form a kind of second floor or pedestal for his springy mash-up. A square of sod placed within the laid-out tilework adds another note of organic contrast, offering a vague hint of regeneration, even while the grass has died. Near the edge of one wall he brings the slab away from its support so that it creates a tension within the piece. A large rock tucked near the corner offers balance. On the opposite corner, he has constructed a room of sorts with casually framed walls covered with a white material that results in a kind of shoji screened-in rock garden with an old dead tree adding a dash of rich rust to the otherwise grayish monotone. Certain squares of material have been cut out to reveal a few tantalizing glimpses of the interior. A low and narrow makeshift doorway confounds all but the

smallest and slightest of entrants.

The main event of the space, however, occupies the center space, with its accretion of hard, random, but affecting matter reaching up to the sky, contained only by the ceiling, and entwining itself around the gallery's industrial light fixtures. Foam strips and plastic drainage tubing never looked so visceral, so much like entrails even with the absence of blood or other coloring. Beneath, there are open-grid trellis walls, rolled chicken wire, arching rebar, and rusty steel ribbons and other forms of fencing. A few old round red signs painted with the words "art gallery" self-consciously add to the rubble.

The title of the installation arose from a coincidence: It was completed on Aug. 6, the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in World War II. The artists used the \$40 they were each given to purchase a small model airplane that hangs toward the rear of the loft, not far from the heaving, allusive waste pile they have constructed.

Mr. Marder said it was his intention to bring the two artists together — Mr. Rosch, who is more free-moving and improvisational, and Mr. Butler, who has a more formulaic approach — to see how they might collude and collide. The result, he said, was a visual conversation that took place over the course of the week they worked on the installation.

The gallery and its audience have found so much in the work over repeated viewings that Mr. Marder will keep it up through December during the next show in the gallery downstairs.