

Forbes

Artist David Shrigley and Lee Ranaldo Celebrate New York Art Week With A Jam Session

By Barry Samaha

To celebrate the start of New York Art Week, a hodgepodge of art and music fans gathered at Spring Place, the members-only club in Tribeca, where a performance was held by motley crew of musicians, including Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth and Brian Chase of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, among others. Using instruments designed by noted visual artist David Shrigley, the makeshift band played a set that probably won't top the Billboard charts anytime soon. But that was not the intention. The event was titled "Problem in New York," and the goal was to create a sense of discordancy and friction.

"Art has to propose some kind of challenge," said Shrigley before the show, when a sprinkling of hor d'oeuvres and wine were served to an intimate crowd. "It wouldn't be art otherwise."



Lee Ranaldo and Sarah Lipstate perform on David Shrigley's "Problem" guitars at Spring Place.

With this ethos in mind, he created a set of electric guitars that featured only one string and put the frets in the wrong place. "They are conventional in all other respects," he explained. "But they have to have something that makes them art." He also created a pair of maracas shaped like large closed fists, and a gong that appeared regular enough, aside from the word "gong" painted on it. (A release did say that it was designed to "generate distortion," so maybe there was something in the make).

In recent years, Shrigley has created artworks that, as he says, "have a place in the real world"—albeit with an irregular element. He made a telephone that doesn't have a zero, and a calculator that only subtracts. Indeed, his guitars are in the same vein.

"With the guitars, I subtracted something from them, which limits the possibility of using them," he said. "I like the fact that they beget other art, but, at the same time, deny the means to make it, or make it slightly more difficult. They require other artists, musicians in this case, to give them meaning and purpose."

Though Shrigley had been in a band nearly 20 years ago, and has an oeuvre that is often music-themed, he made it a point to utilize the talents of professional musicians, like Lee Ranaldo, who could give greater resonance to his pieces. "It would have been crazy not to ask him since he is a well-known experimental guitarist," he said. It also makes his "Problem" guitars much more commercially viable when they go on sale at the Independent Art Fair, which will be held at Spring Studios from March 2 to 5.

At last night's performance, Shrigley's instruments came to life in the hands of their holders. Some used violin bows, while others used screwdrivers to pluck the string. Poet Todd Colby was on the microphone, screeching somewhat indiscernible phrases. They all moved around the space in a disorderly fashion, creating loud noises that, after a while, began to form a melody. And though it may have been unconventional, it was still an impressive sight to behold. To be sure, the audience of art professionals found nothing problematic about it.