

FREE BEER, TOMORROW

APR 01, 2025 | BY MONSTER CHILDREN



Images by Chloe Flaherty, Max Lavinsky, and Shaquille Waite.

Pictured above: Spurge Carter (left) and Michael C. Thorpe (right).

Simultaneously of more stature than a dive bar and less stuffy than a gallery show, *Free Beer Tomorrow* at Mews, the newest installation by NYC-based artist Michael C. Thorpe, is a piece of work that you get to hang out in.

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amateurism and the stage at Sotheby's. Mews is a platform for the next generation of artists; the most crucial, and because of rising rents and spacial limitations, the most under threat. Mews, with its low overhead for presenters, reverence within the community, and openness to immersive experimentation, is a vital home for youthful mixed media, quickly becoming an institution.

'When I came in, they said they might want to do a record store, but it was sort of like, 'we don't need that.' Their whole thing is community building and if you've ever been in a record store, there aren't really people hanging out and talking to each other.' explains Carter. Partisan took over the lease because they were excited about the opportunity to have an art space, but were unsure exactly how to utilize it, and therefore it lay empty for upwards of a year, until they approached Carter in the summer of 2024 with an imperative. 'Tim [Putnam] was like, 'I'm not worried about making money right away, I just want to have some sort of impact.'"

'People are starting to come around to this space and getting excited about it.' says Carter, and it shows. *Free Beer Tomorrow's* opening night was packed, and with ongoing events, installations, and parties, and all with unique opportunities for creative innovation - mostly promoted via word of mouth - the space has developed a devoted and organic following. 'To me that's the spiritual imperative of a space like this: doing things that are for the community. I resonate so much with this concept of Black architecture; of figuring things out and making it work. For me, this space is one where I want people to have the space to fail, because if they *feel* they have that space to fail, most of the time they won't.'

Free Beer Tomorrow - an immersive community-centered concept - is the space's most recent installation and the first to utilize not only the front room, but the hidden and exceedingly large rear facility. To find the exhibit takes a bit of daring. You have to walk through what appears to be a small gallery/party space - the contents of which are often changing while open, sometimes storage, sometimes with art on the walls, sometimes with a DJ performing - and pass through curtain slats into a kitchen. Pushing through the crushing feeling that you're somewhere you shouldn't be, the space opens up to reveal couches, mood lighting, works of art on the wall - the selection of which is comprised of local artists ranging from textile work to paint on canvas, all of which were curated by Thorpe - and a bar, which does, in fact, serve beer.

The pieces on the wall, the bar, the people, the host - these are simply the components of the larger concept, which is a piece of art you get to be inside of rather than look into. It is a place to hang out, to drink, to look at art, to talk about art, or to talk about nothing. It is whatever you

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The architecture of the bar is shabby - juvenile, even, and it reminded me of the sort of intuitive engineering that teenaged skaters apply to things found on the street that would yield the day's ramp - and Thorpe would be the first to admit it. In fact, he did, which is where we begin.

FREE BEER TOMORROW IS ON VIEW UNTIL APRIL 27TH 2025 AT MEWS:

281 N 7TH STREET

BROOKLYN, NY



Wait, I should be recording this. Rewind ten seconds and go.

Totally, sure. I did not grow up skateboarding, but I wish I did. I always admired the attitude. That being said, there's this idea behind 'Black' architecture, where like- you know, I don't want to generalize too much, but White people might do like a measure-twice-cut-once kind of thing - very precise - but when you don't know what you're doing but have certain skills, there's this belief that nothing fits but everything works. My buddy who is a fabricator and a sailor who can do basically anything on planet Earth, I was asking him how to make it actually function, and I remember flipping the bar over and it was totally solid but like half of the legs weren't touching

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The Hawaiian phrase for that is ‘hamajang’. You don’t know exactly what you’re doing, but it works. Like some Kids Next Door 2x4 technology.

That’s not the aesthetic I’m going for, that’s more just the reality of it. The inspiration came from this spot called Roth Bar made by this artist called Dieter Roth. I saw that and was like, ‘this is the coldest shit ever’. But then I took a step back and added pieces that made it more me. I think the best motivator is time, and I only had two weeks to do this. For two weeks I was in here until four in the morning making something that I don’t know how to make, and then we were here working until right up to the opening.

That’s how it always is.

Well, but that’s funny because it’s not like that with gallery shows because you send them the work like a month in advance. I used to do stuff like this, but then you get to the point where you don’t have to work this hard.





What do you mean by that?

It's much more curated when you get to the point of being like a showing gallery artist. You work really hard but you don't work all the way up until the deadline because they don't allow it. This is just my experience so far in the gallery and museum world, but they have their own deadlines and if you want to work in their space then you have to work around the deadlines, and you have to *respect* those deadlines.

There was someone who was telling me I should just push a week and make it even sicker, but if I'm like, 'yo let's push it back,' I'm not respecting Spurge's time, or myself, and at the end of the day, nobody knows if this is not done or not put together well, but it works, and that's what's exciting about it.

The more time you spend with something, the more it will change, and you'd be delivering a different product. So this room is kind of separated from the street, you have to walk through the front gallery to get here. A bit of a secret. Was that purposeful?

That's been a whole different experience. Last night there was something happening in the front room that was completely separate from me, so people had to walk through that to get back here. It's kind of a speakeasy. I didn't think about that when making this, until the opening when I

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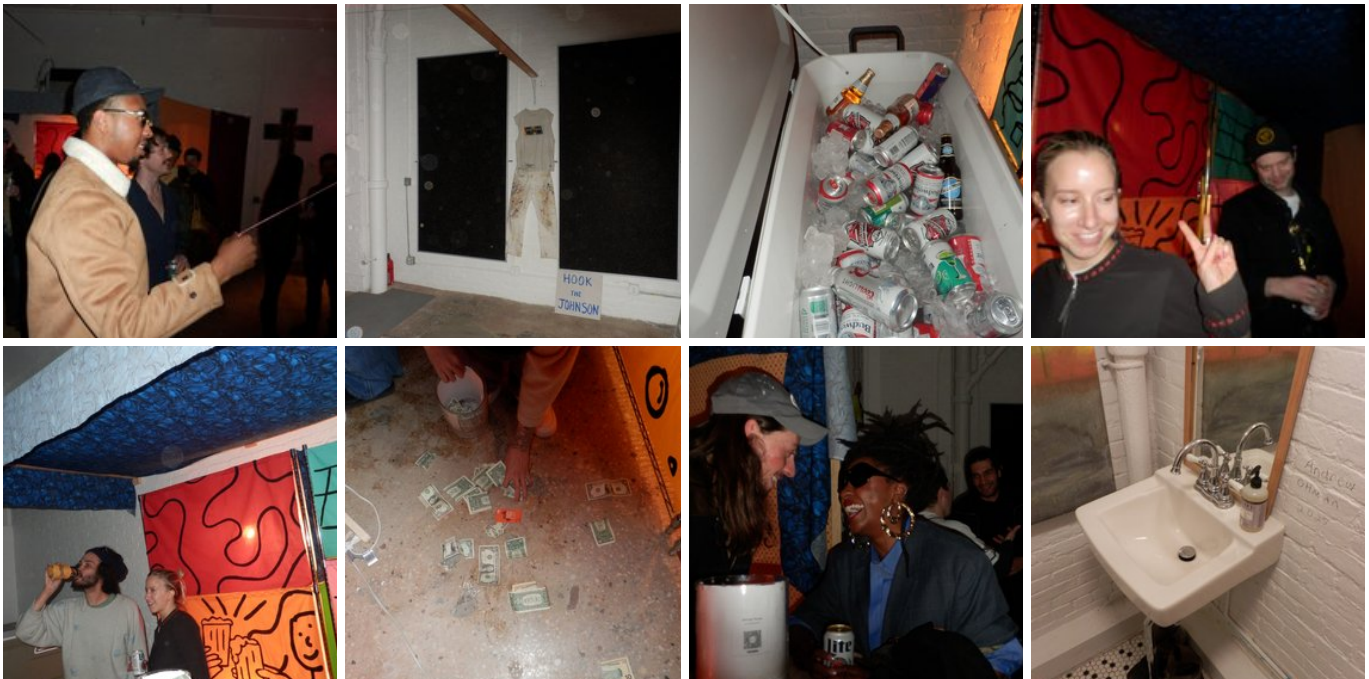
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[Spurge] It felt very like this weird liminal office space, just stuff out there, but there was kind of an order to it. Initially I was kind of like I don't know about this, but what I think is cool is that it feels unordered, you have to choose your path through this junk, and when you make it through you see a big TV and you see that you were on camera and being observed, and that observation created more purpose for that entrance way.

I was also really interested in who interacted with that room as part of the art piece. Some people were observing the chaos in there and some people were scared off by it thinking they had the wrong place.



Do you view that as like a barrier that you have to get through to get the reward of this space?

I think it's part of it, but I don't think of it as a barrier. You have to give up your idea of what I make as art, and especially when there are other things happening in that front room, you have to surrender to engaging with what is up front in order to get back here.

It's called *Free Beer Tomorrow*, and it's a little hidden away back here. People make secret bars and speakeasy's as like an exclusive money making enterprise with the idea

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I mean, I wanted to make a bar, but I knew there was no way I could sell beer back here. You think of going to a bar and getting a free beer, but when people were actually getting it for free they were like, 'what? No way.' I mean, even though it's called *Free Beer Tomorrow*, it's *conceptually* a bar so if we didn't get to give away beer it's whatever it's not the end of the world. But then we got so much beer, and me and my wife were working behind the bar and nobody knew that I was the artist, that was sick. When people come into an art space, they see you're the artist and they treat you a certain way, but when you're just the bartender, it's a completely different interaction.

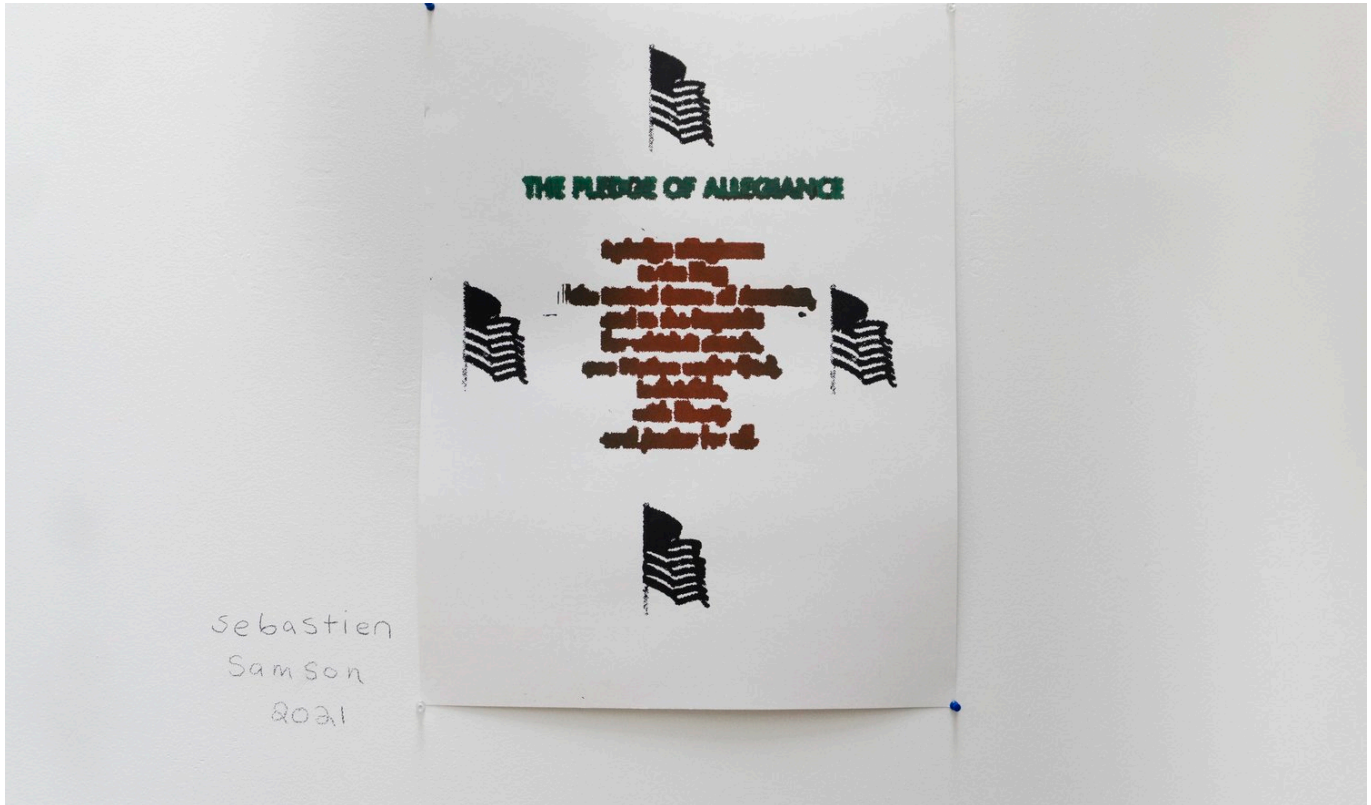


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When I saw the title, I thought there wasn't going to be free beer. I thought it was like a Fluxus style thing where people come and every day you're like, 'nah man, tomorrow'.

I saw this photo of this shanty and the sign said 'free beer tomorrow' and I thought it was a genius concept, where it's perpetually tomorrow. But tomorrow comes and there's actually free beer. It's a really fun play on words in all of that Dada, Fluxus ideology.

So this is a space for people to hang, to have a beer, to be a community, and it doesn't cost anything, and it's public, but this space was technically given to you to be your sculpture studio, right?

Yeah, but now it's exciting because I want to be here all the time. I want to work here and have people come through. Being an artist is a very solitary occupation. I have another studio in Ridgewood that is very private, you can't get in without me. But this is like a community studio. I've come in at night and been like, 'who the fuck are you guys?' And that's adjusted my way of thinking about the arts. And it's not just like *anybody* is back here, it goes through a filter of Spurge or somebody, but it's open- a free flow of ideas and people. That's been really cool about interacting with this space.

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At the end of the day, I make art and I don't think I care if other people see it. My whole practice is self discovery and gaining insights, and with this, the thing that I accomplished for myself is finding out that I enjoy working with wood. The artists and the things that I'm most excited about, they aren't easy to find. Anything good, you gotta work for it. If we never advertised it and people just came upon it, it'd be even more special for those few. What's really exciting is word of mouth. I was on set yesterday and a couple of people were like, 'didn't you do the thing?' and that was so sick. I can see as you were saying about speakeasy's being really elitist and so I tried my best to be really generous with sharing it. I don't want to be gatekeeping in any way, but at the same time, we were joking about how if you build it, people will come. I want people to see it, I'm not gonna act like it's not giving me goosebumps. If you're an artist and showing, of course you want people to see it and like it, but if three people see it or three thousand, I'm happy with it.



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nan, not even. Four hundred. we put up some beer but people also just donated so much more. We started with four kinds of beers and by the end of the night we had way more than when we started. People started getting picky about it and asking for specific beers. I was like, 'man it's free, you get what you get'.

You guys should just junglejuice it and pour it all into a barrel.

Wow, that would be sick. That'd be wild.

What qualifies this as being a success?

I think it's about readjusting your idea of success. I came into the space thinking about how many pieces I sell as the barometer. Even this one, I still have to let it flesh itself out. I think that so many people have this idea of success embedded in them, but they need to take a step back and decide what that means to them. For me, I grew up playing basketball and the idea of success for me was being a professional basketball player. I thought I was a failure until someone reevaluated that for me, telling me that I played high school ball, college ball- if I took a second to reevaluate the reality of what I did, I'd have been so much happier. Going from that and thinking about art, the only goal is to get something done, and then move on to the next thing. Just get it done. Make something. Especially with art, nobody knows what you wanted to do or didn't do unless you tell them. Someone came in when we were building the installation and was like, 'oh, if you told me this was done, I'd say it was great,' and I thought that was sick. Do it, be proud of it, and move on.



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