

New gallery opens with a 'BLAST!'

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On March 11, The New York Times front-page headline announced a deadly bomb explosion in Spain. Margaret Roleke responded by pasting the headline on a blank postcard and mailing it to the Branchville Gallery, recently purchased by her friend, Brian Sullivan. This and the postcards that followed were taped to the gallery window as they arrived. In this manner, a piece of mail gave birth to a guerilla-style art show celebrating the grand opening of a cutting-edge gallery.

"BLAST!" is the title of Roleke's mail art installation in the front window of the gallery introducing the inaugural exhibition of the same name. Facing outside are the backs of the postcards with newspaper photos of war and turmoil.

REVIEW The other sides form a photo collage of the artist celebrating with family and friends. Roleke also sent mailing tubes, which could be mistaken for rockets, plastered with photos of people wearing face masks evoking memories of 9/11 and the terrorist environment.

Roleke began her current art as a response to Sept. 11 in a storefront East Village gallery where she exhibited photographs of everyday people wearing face masks. While guerilla exhibitions have the agility to respond to real world events, often their edge is undermined by favoring the instantaneous contribution of friends rather than a more detached and measured approach to exhibiting art.

However, built into the theme of "BLAST!" is getting friends together to celebrate creativity. Roleke has assembled an eclectic group of 10 local artists who speak to the alarming state of the world in original ways.

Nearby, an untitled drawing by Chris Durante enters the dialogue with an internal view of what appears to be a colon erupting. Eva Lee's lyrical drawings relate to explosions in space. Adding more tension is Amy Allen's wall installation of 2004 burnt birthday candles.

"The Insanity Series" by photographer Osker Martinez addresses emotional breakdown through a stylized aesthetic that is both truthful and visually compelling. The iconic image of the physically bound/emotionally free woman struggling in a straightjacket derives tension from its subject matter — the chic body, slick hairstyle and full facial makeup of a fashion plate — making this work positively revel in the compelling dichotomy of the exhibition theme.

What's the alternative to feeling? Brian Sullivan offers a futuristic view of armored woman with his android babe figures with missile breasts, zoned out, electrified and deformed.

A David Cramer assemblage in the shape of a cross sums up our cataclysmic age of transition. The fish body of the Piscean Age gives way to the Aquarian human head topped by a cowboy hat. "Mel" seems to be alerting us to an undeniable truth: we can no longer blame the gods for our troubles, but must look inside of ourselves.