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Jamie Burkart, *Great Accomodations*, Installation view, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, Photo Julia Fredenburg.

Big Wheel Keeps on Turnin' and the River Keeps on Rollin' Along



Jamie Burkart, *Great Accommodations*, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, Photo Julia Fredenburg.



Jamie Burkart, *Great Accommodations*, Installation view, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, Photo Julia Fredenburg.

The Paragraph + Project
21-23 East 12th Street
816-221-5115
Kansas City
Jamie Burkart
Great Accommodations
September 1-October 3, 2009

By BLAIR SCHULMAN

A recent conversation with some online friends brought us to a standstill when someone declared a co-worker in her twenties didn't understand the significance of The Beatles. Who sang, what instruments did they play, why was John Lennon's death such a big deal, ad infinitum, until the teller of this tale was ready to explode all over her keyboard!

What made The Beatles significant was that they wrote and played their own music at a time when everyone else was using teams of arrangers and producers. Brian Amiedi, Managing Director of WildClaw Theatre in Chicago, said this: "Motown had teams upon teams, right down to choreographers for the stage shows ..."

What is strikingly significant in a variety of arts disciplines is that more and more people are staying true to their own compositions and arrangements, restoring a valuable period of trust between the artist and their audience. This is where Jamie Burkart comes in. While we live in a world of conveniences that demand a dry and dust-free (antiseptic) environment, Jamie Burkart is an adventurer. He gets his feet wet, literally, on his journeys down the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, manning a raft handcrafted from the detritus of our conveniences. A risk-taker in a world that shields and incessantly protects itself with laws and political correctness, he dares to betray this need for cocooning, instead, living in the world as it was intended. As artist Bruce Nauman, an avid horseman, once said "I don't know if there's a connection, but I started to give up control when I was learning about horses," he said. "I think the work got richer." The same can be said about Burkart, who learned to give up control and let human and actual nature mark his destiny.

His most recent endeavor, worthy of kudos from 1960's grassroots sociologists like The Diggers, is *Great Accommodations* "... a participatory exhibition project ...



Jamie Burkart, *Great Accomodations*, Installation view, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, Photo Julia Fredenburg.

that highlights the Missouri River within Kansas City, utilizes the central rivers as a social network, and imagines lifestyles for cities on the water." The exhibition ran September 1-October 3 at Paragraph + Project Space, 21-23 East 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri with support from the Urban Culture Project. "An initiative of the Charlotte Street Foundation (www.charlottestreet.org) Urban Culture Project creates new opportunities for artists of all disciplines and contributes to urban revitalization by transforming spaces in downtown Kansas City into venues for multi-disciplinary contemporary arts programming."

As Burkart explains it, he is interested in how the river itself connects people, rather than separates them. His exploration of river travel asks "strangers to trust themselves and each other, and which represent themselves live, in real time."

The Paragraph + Project Space was transformed into something resembling a womb. Lined in pink vinyl, one gets an impression of being undersea. The floor below you is covered and terraced in tile held together with blue painter's tape. For the uninitiated, if you've never walked on the floor of a body of water, the sensation felt true. It was difficult to navigate; slippery, rising and falling in places you didn't expect. One guest made the mistake of attending wearing a pair of spike heels. Luckily, Burkart and



Jamie Burkart, *Great Accomodations*, Installation view, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, Photo Julia Fredenburg.

his mother were strategically placed to help visitors up an unforgiving rise into the next room. No one was hurt during this installation! However, a lesson learned is that water, whether it is a pond, lake, river or ocean, can be as unforgiving as it is soothing. One needs to trust their instincts and accept the help that is offered, which may be a point Burkart makes in his scenarios. He wanted the "river's capacity to connect people, places and ideas. *Great Accommodations* challenges friends and strangers to 'stretch with the river through dynamic situations, massive collaborations, daring feats, and handicrafts.'"

At either end of the installation were piles of salt water taffy treats. Burkart says in a letter to potential collaborators, "We drifted from Kansas City, down the Missouri and Mississippi rivers (in a bicycle-powered paddle wheel raft project), until the water tasted like salt." This, one could say, was our reward for having maneuvered the installation, but it seems putting your trust in another human being was the much greater reward.

Jamie Burkart,
*Great
Accommodations.*

