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Home is where the art is

Ever heard of a yurt?
Art Sites exhibits define 'home' through new and ancient techniques

BY JOYCE BECKENSTEIN | CONTRIBUTOR

"Welcome to my yurt, friend. Please, warm yourself by the fire, enjoy some tea."

When ancient wanderers traveling the snow-blanketed plains of Central Asia eyed a distant huddle of yurts, they knew they had found refuge. The yurt, a circular, teepee-like portable structure, was home. And home is the theme that ties together two parallel exhibits at Art Sites in Riverhead, a gallery that embraces the unconventional as the grassland Siberian shepherd welcomed the nomad.

"YC3" (Yurt City 3) is an outdoor collaborative installation on Art Sites grounds, set against a grassy bank of the Peconic River. "Home," inside the gallery, is a two-person show of works by Ted Victoria of New Suffolk and New York City, and Southampton artist Darlene Charneco.

"The combination was not deliberate," says gallerist Glynis Berry. "Darlene and Ted's art seemed to fit: They both deal with lightness, darkness and domestic issues. Then along came Sheila Ross and Laura Ten Eyck with "YC3", their third Yurt City project installation. The indoor and outdoor shows seemed to work together."

And they do, blurring the lines that distinguish permanence from impermanence, desire from control, self from community.

Inspired by ancient settlements, the Yurt City installations were originally conceived by Ms. Ross and Ms. Ten Eyck as a call to action for displaced New Yorkers and their need for housing. Nestled within Riverhead's bucolic river shore, this current version of Yurt City — a 12-piece assortment of works that includes eight yurt-inspired tents — puts a different spin on the original message. Here, humor fuels the divide between "leave me alone" and "let's be good friends and neighbors."

Some of the wittiest pieces are made from embellished store-bought nylon camping tents, camouflage sleeping bags and Tyvec-covered PVC pipe. Each dwelling suggests the human need to make even the most temporary space feel like home.

Ms. Ross has attached a pair of nylon pup tents into an expandable ranch of sorts, titled "Junior One Bedroom." There's no plumbing or heating, yet the place sparkles with individuality: a bright, white picket fence, blooming miniature garden



BARBARAELEN KOCH PHOTOS

Sheila Ross creates a garden next to her tent home as part of the 'Yurt City 3' exhibit at Art Sites in Riverhead. Her installation is titled 'Junior One Bedroom.'



Brent Timbol and Darlene Charneco step up for their encounter inside the 'Meeting House' built by George Schmidt.



Artist George Schmidt of Brooklyn inside his 'Meeting House.'



Darlene Charneco's 12-inch-by-12-inch piece "We Are/Were/Will be Here (Riverhead)"

and proud pair of pink plastic lawn flamingoes. But beware. We can adore this whimsical comfy abode until refrains of Katrina and Andrew whisper in the wind: "You are all potential displaced persons."

Ms. Ross and Ms. Ten Eyck, wishing to extend the nomadic tradition of sharing to artists in need of exhibition space, invited others — Fletch, Todd Knopke, Jose Krapp, Ted McGurn, George Schmidt and Derrick Wilson — to contribute their unique structures to "YC3".

George Schmidt's hilarious "Meeting House," an elongated birdhouse structure, sits atop a pair of ladders. To "meet," visitors climb up and place their heads

through openings on opposite ends. But heads are too large, the space too small. The experience highlights the relationship between people and their settings, and, says the artist, "the power of architecture to shape and define social interactions."

Inside the gallery, Darlene Charneco and Ted Victoria offer different perspectives of "Home."

If "YC3" is about dislocation, Ms. Charneco's works are about location, location, location, but with a twist. Using maplike iconography, she charts places where physical, psychological, political and organic forces intersect. Her mixed-media works combine green houses and red hotels from Monopoly games, LEGO pieces and other game parts with nails, glitter, enamel and acrylic. These materials, applied to wood then coated with layers of resin, suspend "organic" and manmade forms in a gelled state. It's like looking into a petri dish to see protoplasmic globs representing the eternal brew of creation, growth, death and renewal.

A small pair of works, "We Are/Were/Will be Here (Riverhead and Southampton)" generally refers to

'Home' and 'YC3'

ART SITES

651 West Main Street, Riverhead

Home: works by Darlene Charneco and Ted Victoria. On view through June 7.

YC3: Collaborative project by Sheila Ross and Laura Ten Eyck, with Fletch, Todd Knopke, Jose Krapp, Ted McGurn, George Schmidt and Derrick Wilson. On view through Oct. 18.