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Art in Review; The Garden Party

By KEN JOHNSON

Deitch Projects

18 Wooster Street, SoHo

Through May 13

"The Garden Party," a crowded group show with some high-profile artists, looks as if it were installed by a college fraternity for its spring festival. It doesn't quite live up to its avowed ambition to update the "f? champ?e" so memorably realized in paintings by Giorgione and Manet.

Hanging a lovely embroidered picture of a tree by Laura Owens and red ink portraits of zany imaginary women by Naomi Fisher on Peter Max-style wallpaper by Assume Vivid Astro Focus is a bad idea. And an installation by Noritoshi Hirakawa in which a sign invites women to doff their white underpants and leave them on display attached to overhead hangers is a really bad idea. There is something to be said, however, for a show that so effectively brings out the tackiness of Vanessa Beecroft's big, clinical photographs of nude female models.

Martin Honert's oversize, molded plastic campfire; Cristina Lei Rodriguez's life-size plastic wisteria tree; and a giant, gold-painted, nude Indian female deity by Ravinder Reddy add to the festive atmosphere. But paintings by Rosson Crow and Cecily Brown become decorative filler.

Two sculptures remain relatively immune to the distracting environment. Olafur Eliasson's "Anti-Gravity Cone" is a wooden pyramid with a cut-off top; look down into it and you discover a surprising overhead view of a splashing, strobe-lighted fountain. And Liza Lou presents a representation of a log with an ax stuck into it, all covered in glittering black and white glass beads. A bit of gleaming, beaded scarlet flows like blood from a split in the log, which is why it is titled "Miracle." Visitors, by the way, are invited to roll down an artificial hillside clad in real grass turf by Paola Pivi. KEN JOHNSON

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