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***Chalet Dallas* Presents More Questions Than Answers In A Beautiful Setting**

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By Lauren Smart



In the corner of a secluded, street-facing gallery in the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#), a young Indian man sits under a sign that reads, "I am hear for you. I will listen to you." He's Maneesh, aka "the listener," and he's inside Piero Golia's social sculpture, *Chalet Dallas*, to do exactly that. When you step through the red velvet curtains into the art, he's also one of many signals that you're not about to have a typical museum-going experience.

To get to *Chalet Dallas*, you must first stop at the Nasher admission desk. Pay \$10. From there, it's a quick walk through an exhibit by Italian artist Gieuseppe Penone. Then, ramble past work by Jeff Koons

and Alberto Giacometti, arranged in front of a bright pink Alex Israel backdrop. Turn right through a set of doors and enter through the red curtains, as if entering the stage from the audience of a Broadway show.

You've arrived at Golia's *Chalet Dallas*. The gallery has been architecturally transformed into a luxurious space. A modest number of grand artworks are found in the room. A Pierre Huyghe aquarium, complete with a floating sculptural rock and a hermit crab in a silver shell, fills the space with the tranquil sound of flowing water. There's a Mark Grotjahn painting on one wall and a photograph by Jeff Wall on another. The interior space, designed by prominent international architect Edwin Chan, is a series of interwoven beams of white oak, which simultaneously fill and open the room, allowing it to feel neither empty nor crowded. These beams sprout into benches and end tables throughout. There are also comfortable leather chairs and a few designer pillows to add a bit of cushion to the space.

If you breeze into the space without first reading the wall text, it likely gives off the vibe you've stumbled into an exclusive members' lounge. This, of course, isn't so far-fetched, as many museums have rooms dedicated to their elite supporters. But *Chalet*, which the Nasher imported from Los Angeles, is meant to be an inviting space, a place for conversation and reflection.

The first conception of this piece by Italian born, Los Angeles-based Golia was in Hollywood. Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions loaned Golia two old storage rooms, which he transformed into what the *LA Times* described as an "art speakeasy." It was open for about a year in these spaces, but it was only activated when Golia could afford to throw parties. There it was a public place run by a private person who invited his friends and their friends and anyone else who heard about the parties to attend them. It was meant to be difficult to find, but inclusive to anyone who found it.

Brought to the Nasher by Director Jeremy Strick (who himself is one of Dallas' finer imports from LA), the *Chalet* is part of his ongoing interest in the evolution of sculpture. *Chalet* combines elements of social sculpture, happenings and architectural detail. And the hope was that it would recreate the experience it had provided in LA: The *Chalet* would become a community center for Dallas' artists and artistically minded, and anyone else who was curious, all of whom would gather in the space whenever there was an event, or just when the mood struck. But doing this in an open, equitable way is proving to be a challenge.

The *Chalet* opened October 7 with a series of what were effectively private events. The night before it opened there was a dinner for the donors/committee that helped to bring the *Chalet* to Dallas, then there was an unpublicized party the day of the opening. At least, I think that is the order of events. Because this is where it gets tricky: The *Chalet* isn't a huge space, so who gets invited? When the project was reconfigured for Dallas, Golia stayed very much involved. He wanted this space to be as special as it was in LA. He did extensive research on Dallas, and wanted each event to feature a different aspect of the city's cultural makeup. With help from the Internet and a number of artists with Dallas connections, he discovered, among other things, a mariachi band, a country singer, a gospel choir and a marching band.

He planned each event with care, pairing an award-winning Texas chili chef with the country singer, for example, in an affectionate tribute. But what he didn't anticipate was that each selection would be scrutinized by the Dallas culterati, particularly events like the one where a predominately white crowd sipped Champagne and watched, glassy-eyed, as a mostly black high school marching band, or, on

another occasion, a gospel choir, stepped into the party. These events become the subject of heated Internet debates about the purpose of these displays. Were they exploitative? Were they intentionally marginalizing?

The main problem with this line of questioning, which has a healthy intention, is that it fails to align artist intention with execution, context and final output. In many ways the *Chalet* doesn't belong under the auspices of a museum, particularly one that charges admission and is known to host private events that block off large sections of the garden, or even the entire building. With that in mind, it demands unrelenting curiosity and boldness to approach an event in the *Chalet* without an invitation (although that curiosity would be rewarded, as when an event happens in the *Chalet*, no one is turned away). But more important, *Chalet* is an unblinking reminder of the flaws in the Dallas art scene, which continues to be the playground of rich, white people. Is it Golia's fault that a horde of drunk white people were the only ones who wanted to spend an evening drinking Champagne and listening to a gospel choir? Sometimes art offers answers; sometimes art just presents questions.

I spent an entire Friday observing the *Chalet*, hoping to engage someone new in a conversation about the space or about art or just about the weather, which was poetically overcast. I was alone for much of the morning, just me and the hermit crab in Huyghe's aquarium. People would wander in, but no one lingered. After lunch in the cafe, I returned to an empty room, until I emailed the space's curator, Leigh Arnold, to come visit. Artist Randy Guthmiller also came to visit with a cup of coffee and a large chocolate chip cookie, which we shared. For the next two hours or so, we discussed the failures of the *Chalet* event, the dynamics of the art scene in Dallas and what we were going to do with our weekends. The day slipped by. I was totally comfortable, moving slowly, thoughtfully — exactly how Golia might've hoped. Maneesh had that Friday off, but still I left feeling as though I had listened and been listened to. In *Chalet*, the art isn't just hanging on a wall, insisting you engage with it; in *Chalet*, the art surrounds you, if you let it.