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Agathe Snow (right) and other "survivors" gathered under the Brooklyn Bridge for Agathe Snow's "No Need to Worry" at James Fuentes LLC



**Agathe Snow**  
*The Whale*  
2007  
James Fuentes LLC



Agathe Snow's *The Whale* (2007) at James Fuentes LLC, with Snow's work station visible to the left

## AFTER THE DELUGE

by Mary Rinebold

Agathe Snow, "No Need to Worry, the Apocalypse Has Already Happened. . . when it couldn't get any worse, it just got a little better," Mar. 11-Apr. 21, 2007, at James Fuentes LLC, 35 St. James Place, New York, N.Y. 10038

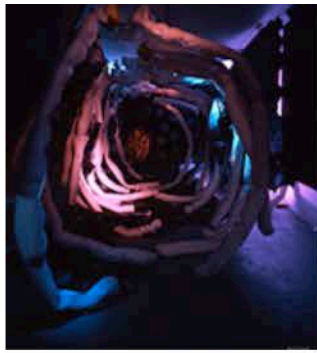
For most of spring 2007, the art dealer James Fuentes let the young New York artist Agathe Snow convert his new gallery, recently opened on St. James Place deep in New York's Chinatown, into a fantastical structure -- the belly of a whale. Just as spring marks a time for rebirth, so Snow's installation was the site of a hypothetical renewal, a story in which Manhattan had been ravaged by a flood, leveling every building and other signs of civilization and leaving nothing but a beached whale carcass. In a five-week-long performance, Snow converted this haunting structure into an imaginary home base for survivors of her fictional apocalypse.

For James Fuentes, who is used to ambitious projects, Snow's installation provided an opportunity to gather friends and collectors at his new space. Fuentes opened his first New York gallery on Broome Street in SoHo in 1998 when he was 21 years old. In 2000, after showing artists such as Jonas Mekas, Amy Granat and Cheney Thompson, he closed down and went on to stage a series of exhibitions as an independent curator. In 2005, while serving as director at Deitch Projects, Fuentes co-created and co-produced *Art Star*, a reality show which tracked the rise and interaction of a group of up-and-coming New York artists under the watchful direction of Jeffrey Deitch.

After eight episodes of *Art Star* aired in 2006, Fuentes decided to go back out on his own, and in January of 2007 he added James Fuentes LLC to the small but growing number of galleries located in Chinatown and the Lower East Side. His first exhibition presented works by Brian DeGraw, an artist and member of the band Gang Gang Dance, and for his next show he and his friend Agathe Snow agreed to flood Manhattan and build the whale.

For the opening of "No Need to Worry," Snow produced an online video invitation (visible [here](#)) that collages together film and news footage giving the impression of a New York City ravaged by flood and disaster, and directing people to gather underneath the Brooklyn Bridge on the East River waterfront. About 25 people showed up and, after lighting sparklers in celebration, the group followed Snow in a procession through lower Chinatown and toward the nearest safe spot -- the whale at James Fuentes.

Entering through the back door of the gallery, we stepped into Agathe's whale, a room-filling



Night lighting on Agathe Snow's  
*The Whale* (2007) at James  
Fuentes LLC



**Agathe Snow**  
*Untitled*  
2007  
James Fuentes LLC



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**Agathe Snow**  
*Untitled*  
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**Agathe Snow**  
*Untitled*  
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James Fuentes LLC

construction of painted tarp, industrial cloth, rope, mesh and foam-core. The mood was celebratory, and each "survivor" marked his or her name on a registry, along with a brief account of how he or she lived through the disaster. I said I had slept the entire time.

The next day, Snow was on site at the gallery, adding more painted black tarp to the whale structure and consulting with Fuentes on lighting and other questions. Visible out the gallery window, a light drizzle of rain was falling on a piece of tarp stretched in the back courtyard where Agathe continued to work. The precipitation caused the white paint she used to contour the skin of the whale to run and gather in pools on the tarp. Snow didn't mind -- after all, she said, the whale is a creature of the water.

In a kind of spontaneous post-apocalyptic potlatch, Snow would exchange gifts with visitors to the show. I gave her some bangles that I happened to have with me, and in return received a paper suit in a shrink-wrapped box, a retail item traditionally used for Chinese burials and available throughout Chinatown. In Snow's fiction, it became a survival kit for post-disaster living. Other visitors received other items, all part of Manhattan Island's new economy, which turned the show into a center of imaginary commerce. Snow called these daily exchanges "the survival pawnshop," a collaborative element that lent the exhibition a lively and playful air.

The whale also doubled as Snow's studio, and there she made a series of assemblage sculptures using found objects, i.e., debris from the flood. Clearly disaster-inspired, these objects combine natural materials like twigs and sand with household flotsam, and pointedly suggest that in the future everyday items could well become as rare and valuable as art. However, unlike the paper suits, these sculptures were not available for trade. Fuentes sold them for \$2,500 each, and many were acquired by Charles Saatchi (presumably to help in his survival).

Snow's playful approach to art-making echoes elements of Fluxus events from the early '60s, and her ongoing public spectacle has garnered a loyal following -- she has collaborated with Rita Ackermann, Alex Arcadia, Michael Portnoy, Emily Sunblad and other young artists on the Manhattan scene. She was also married to artist Dash Snow. But while Agathe's association with this fashionable bohemian set might suggest that her disaster pantomime is ironic or even cynical, in fact her approach is earnestly conceptual. She was committed to the whale both with her presence in the gallery for commodity-exchange each day, and with her personal explanation of the story for every visitor.

People made repeated visits to the gallery as her installation continuously evolved during its five-week run, not only to see what she would do next but also to be near her infectious and charismatic personality. In a culture where news of impending disaster is always close at hand, Snow's invocation of the stories of Noah's Ark and Jonah and the Whale hits a responsive chord.



**Agathe Snow**  
*Untitled*  
2007  
James Fuentes LLC

At the end of April, a real-world event dovetailed with Snow's art project after a storm threw a baby minke whale off its course, stranding it in Gowanus bay in Brooklyn. Dubbed "Sludgie" by the local press, the whale died. At the closing of her show, Snow once again gathered "survivors" inside her whale installation, both to commemorate Sludgie's death in Brooklyn and to mark the end of the time of her own sea mammal at James Fuentes. Guests were encouraged to offer ideas for the post-flood reconstruction of New York, and the show closed as it had begun, an amalgam of performance, storytelling and celebration.

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