

LAST DAYS

WHEN THE APOCALYPSE COMES, NEW YORK ARTIST AGATHE SNOW HAS IT ALL FIGURED OUT

Large sea creatures swim through many 19th-century allegorical tales. Think of Herman Melville's ultimate catch, *Moby-Dick*, or the terrible shark in Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. It turns out, they also cruise the waters of present-day New York City. When a 15-ton juvenile whale mistakenly wandered into Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal during a torrential storm last April, it quickly became the stuff of legend. The dark gray minke was given a name—"Sludgie"—and a significant amount of teary-eyed press attention. (The sludge evidently made for a toxic incubator; Sludgie was found dead, beached up on Clinton Street, after a couple of days.) Around the same time, New York artist Agathe Snow was wrapping up an installation in Lower Manhattan that featured a whale sculpture—constructed of steel mesh, cotton padding, duct tape, and wire. It too was meant to look washed up on the shores of NYC after a flood. Thus, the show, conceived weeks before the Sludgie incident, proved somewhat prophetic. The 31-year-old artist wanted her first solo exhibition—hosted at James Fuentes Gallery—to explore the idea of a postapocalyptic New York.

Snow's intuitiveness paid off—rumor has it that London's Saatchi Gallery bought every piece in the show. The artist's other works have all been less tangible, but equally memorable: 2005's *Stamina*, a 24-hour danceathon commemorating the "feeling of carelessness after September 11th," was held in a makeshift club two blocks from the World Trade Center site. She is also the founder of Chop Shop, a Lower East Side art locale turned roving catering service that sold guerilla-style gift items during the shopping days of Christmas; it also featured one of Snow's signature interests—food. In the past, she's offered sweetly exotic or strangely grotesque cuisine in clandestine situations to explore "concepts and evaluations of the eater." "There is always an element of the forbidden, the daring, the anonymous," she says about her work. Culinary art productions have thus far included baby Jesus breads fresh from the oven; sugarcoated chicken feet; dinners where the food consumed was only red and black; "My Snow Dog" stand, where the artist sold hot dogs to New Yorkers on snowy days; and, most provocatively, a backyard "This Is War" series, where Snow served food from a country that the United States is currently at war with on a table shaped like an AK-47 (which sat up to twenty). Getting out of the kitchen, this year she collaborated with light designer Eleonora Meoni on a Valentine's Day project in which they lit the entrance of the Manhattan Bridge—a "present to New Yorkers" on the romantic night.

Love, after all, is a big key to Snow's time in New York. Originally from Corsica (both of her parents are chefs) she came to the city first in 1987 on a part-time basis, and eventually moved here after college. Eight years ago, she became the wife/on-off partner of artist Dash Snow and shares many of his rough-and-tumble acquaintances. That gang, like Ryan McGinley, Dan Colen, and A-ron, frequents a lot of her gatherings while no doubt offering inspiration on renegade art tactics. "We were all very much involved in graffiti in the past," she says. "My work follows along those lines." Her various "nomadic restaurants"—including a weekly stint at the West Village bar Beatrice Inn, which offers a very refined three-course meal—tie in to her interest in public space and communal experiences. So in orchestrating her first show at James Fuentes, she inevitably incorporated elements of the city—at one point hopping onboard a helicopter to film the area around the gallery from a bird's-eye view. The resultant video incorporated shots of downtown streets with Hollywood scenes of destruction and messages explaining that, were she to survive in the refuge of the whale belly, she'd recover some of the good that was in the city before the end.

Celebration and expression in the midst of disaster is Snow's forte. Her show's title sums it up: "No Need to Worry, the Apocalypse Has Already Happened...when it couldn't get any worse, it just got a little better." She opened the show by asking people to meet her underneath the Brooklyn Bridge, a stone's throw from the gallery. The crowd of about forty watched the sun set from this beachlike spot, celebrating their supposed survival after the flood. And when the exhibition closed, Snow held a tribute to Sludgie the Whale, the poster for which included a quote from Mayor Michael Bloomberg: "My thoughts are with the whale."—City Hall, April 18, 2007. **Kate Sennert**

Top: Agathe Snow in a helicopter over New York, February 2007. Photography KT Auleta. Middle, from left: Snow with her installation "Sludgie the Whale" at James Fuentes Gallery, April 2007. Photography Takahiro Imamura; Chop Shop "Santeria" centerpiece at holiday dinner, December 2006. Photography Anne Apparu. Bottom: *Lily*, 2007. Artwork Agathe Snow. All images courtesy of the artist and James Fuentes LLC

