

# Los Angeles Times

## Art on a train exhibit kicks off in New York

By Alana Semuels

*September 7, 2013 | 11:38 a.m.*

NEW YORK -- In this cosmopolitan city it's not unusual to see people sipping wine and listening to a live band as they did Friday night on the waterfront of the East River in Williamsburg.

Less traditional were the brightly colored yurts, African headresses and vocal auctioneers that also surrounded the crowd throughout the evening.

The event was the kickoff of "Station to Station: A Nomadic Happening," a project from artist Doug Aitken. It features artists and performers who will take a three-week journey across the country by train, stopping in Pittsburgh; Chicago; Minneapolis/St. Paul; Santa Fe, N.M.; Barstow; Oakland; and Los Angeles. In between the stops, artists and musicians will make art on the train as it journeys across the continent.

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At each stop, different musicians and artists will showcase their work in what Aitken calls happenings, essentially big parties in train stations and other venues that will unveil unique art.

The New York event kicked off outside with a drum corps dressed in red and white marching band uniforms with pink pompoms. Directed by an energetic leader, they danced and drummed, surrounded by the crowd, and then marched into an indoor performance space where their drumming performance led directly into a set by the Los Angeles band No Age. A video installation on three screens featuring trains played behind No Age.

As the bands on stage changed, people milled about, popping their heads into two indoor yurts, buying food and drinks, and watching the sunset along the Manhattan skyline. They also wandered in and out of four outdoor yurts which will travel on the train.

The yurts will be shown at each train stop: artists Kenneth Anger, Urs Fisher, Liz Glynn Carsten Holler and Ernesto Neto were asked to create yurts that could travel. Inside, each yurt is different; one has a video installation, one features a crystal ball and fog, another has holes through which a frisbee can be thrown. With bright lights trained on the red, white, yellow and black tents as the sun set, the yurts looked almost like alien spaceships that had landed peacefully on the East River.

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"It's totally overwhelming, but awesome," said Michael Vahrenwald, an artist standing outside the yurts. He'd been asked to take photos of the happening as part of the event, but said he hadn't yet decided what to shoot because at every moment there was so much going on.

Aside from the bands on stage and a rotation of video installations, there was performance art as well. At the beginning of No Age's set, people wearing black jeans, white shirts and solid colored headdresses walked three times in a circle around the band. Later, in the middle of the cavernous indoor space, two auctioneers yelled out numbers as a man with a whip whirled and cracked it. The auctioneers have been featured at other Aitken installations.

Aitken, who is based in Venice, is well-known as a video artist. But he's done collaborations before. At an exhibit at the *Museum of Modern Art* in New York he brought together street drummers, storytellers and musicians into a performance. To accompany a video installation he did on the Greek island of Hydra, Aitken arranged a series of performances on a barge at sea.

Photographer Willa Nasatir said she was excited to participate in the collaboration. The New York-based artist will be traveling on the train across the country, and while she doesn't know exactly what she'll produce out of it, she said that's half the fun.

"Most of the project is rooted in spontaneity," she said.

There's no assigned seating on the train, and nor is there much of a schedule, she said.

"It's good not knowing what's going to happen," added Felix Melia, a photographer and sculptor who will also be on the train.

Some events will occur at each happening. At each stop, the procession of people wearing African headdresses will walk through the crowd. And chef Alice Waters will create "culinary interventions" both on the train and at the stops.

But some will be completely unique. In Barstow, for instance, at a happening to be held at the Skyline Drive-In, Beck will perform something he created uniquely for the event, and a UFO installation by Peter Coffin will be unveiled, along with a Technicolor smoke installation. Beck will also perform a unique piece at the Los Angeles event.