

New York

CRITICS' PICKS



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SARA TECCHIA ROMA NEW YORK
529 West 20th Street, 2nd Floor
April 15–May 27

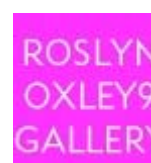
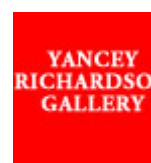
In September of 1972, Gordon Matta-Clark, with a group of friends, wheeled his *Fresh Air Cart*, 1972, out on to Forty-second Street and invited passersby to try it. The contraption delivered pure air—a mix of oxygen and nitrogen, without the usual New York seasoning of toxins and smog. Those who tried it generally agreed it was a pleasant experience and that they felt a bit better afterward, but Matta-Clark seemed at least as interested in the encounter as he was in the environmental statement. Like his "Fake Estates," the *Fresh Air Cart* investigated social spaces, both fixed and mutable, within a city.

One of Matta-Clark's cohorts invited Richard P. Rubinstein to film these various encounters, and the grainy black-and-white video footage is on display in this gallery's back room. *Breathe Deep NYC No Charge*, 1972/2006, is a gem not only as a record of one of Matta-Clark's urban projects, but also as a measuring stick for how life in New York has and has not changed. The reactions of the people on Forty-second Street—many nonplussed, a few curious, most opinionated—remind us that New York in 1972 was nowhere near the theme park it has become today, in which artistic wackiness is precisely what people wander around downtown looking for. In the days of mean streets, you might just think twice about taking a hit from a canister offered by a stranger, and the old-fashioned wariness of people who distrust things offered for free is somewhat bracing. One suspects that today, even in our contemporary atmosphere of fear and skepticism (biological warfare, elaborate cons, predators of all stripes), Matta-Clark and company wouldn't have any trouble finding willing participants.

—Emily Hall



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