

ARTFORUM



Carlos Reyes, West Side Club (detail), 2018,
salvaged cedar, glass, birch, hardware, dimensions
variable

Carlos Reyes

BODEGA

167 Rivington Street Lower Level East
March 2–April 1, 2018

The bathhouse’s conflation of recreation and sex is closer to the raw spirit of 1960s gay liberation than to the slew of tedious apps and websites for hooking up today. The West Side Club in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood bills itself as the city’s “premier social relaxation club for gay and bisexual men.” For his installation here,

West Side Club, 2018, Carlos Reyes reclaimed cedar planks from the club’s old sauna, converting the timeworn wood into elegantly austere sculptures. The inscriptions on the vintage planks aren’t completely dirty; only one picture of a dick is immediately visible. But we do read an array of cities and countries: Istanbul, London, India, and Sri Lanka, among others. Perhaps they’re memories of travels past or dreams of future trips—a different set of desires and experiences. Names and dates also appear. We don’t know who left them, but excavating the emotion of these messages is part of what makes Reyes’s installation so intriguing.

West Side Club joins a string of artworks that evoke queer social spaces, most obviously Tom Burr’s recreations of cruising grounds and Times Square porn theaters. But there’s a distinction, as Reyes makes abstract objects out of elements from the original site. His approach, though memorial in its way, is not mimetic.

The artist’s materials speak volumes about the need for contact without the hindrance of a digital membrane, of going out into the world to talk to, touch, or flirt with a real person. So, leave home, be vulnerable, take a risk. Arenas for lived interactions persist, and there is hope in that.

— *Nicholas Chittenden Morgan*