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Hell's Kitchen Gallery Lets Visitors Take Poster Art Home With Them

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New gallery show in Hell's Kitchen features thousands of stacked prints, which patrons can take with them.

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By Tara Kyle

DNAinfo Reporter/Producer

MANHATTAN — Your average art exhibit doesn't ask gallery goers to dismantle the installation and walk away with a souvenir, but that's exactly what happens at one new show in Hell's Kitchen.

"All We Ever Wanted Was Everything," showing at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space, features original posters by nine internationally-acclaimed artists. The thousands of prints, stacked neatly atop each other at 323 W. 39th, are free for the taking, because the exhibit's curators wanted to explore how a work of art can change its meaning as it enters new contexts.

"It could wrap a present or get thrown away, or get framed and past on through generations," said Julie Spielman, who curated the exhibit through the Galeria Perdida artists cooperative. "I sort of hold on to this hope that one person might cherish it."

The show's organizers also hope that the give-aways will help expose a different group of New Yorkers, who might not already be rabid art lovers, to the mix of artists.

One poster, an extreme close-up of snow and a few small twigs by American installation artist Spencer Finch, initially seems meaningless — until you realize that this particular patch of snowflakes was photographed in front of Emily Dickinson's home. Another, by Gonzalo Lebrija, is a snapshot of a field in Spain, captured by the Mexican-born artist as he ran with his camera in hand.

The most popular poster since the show's Friday opening has been one by Danish conceptual artist Joachim Koester. His symbol, which

"You feel like you recognize it or it's something you've seen before, like it's a secret club you aren't a part of," said Michelle Levy, director of the EFA Project Space. "It could spread and take on a new meaning depending on where it winds up."

The potential for visitors to interact with the art in that way was a source of appeal to Levy. Because the EFA Project Space is in Hell's Kitchen, located nearly a mile uptown from the heart of Chelsea's gallery scene, she can't depend on foot traffic alone to get newcomers into the gallery.

"We are always making sure to have new reasons to bring people back over and over," she said.

And because posters are so inexpensive to produce, Levy explained, they are, as art forms go, particularly democratic.

"It's something that's so low in monetary value and easy to acquire," she said. "You're referring to propaganda, or you're referring to advertising, or you're referring to commercial culture, but you're also subverting it in a sense."

"All We Ever Wanted Was Everything" runs through Dec. 4 at the EFA Project Space, on the second floor of 323 West 39th St.

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