

Still no plan for Richard Prince's house

The artist's fire-damaged Second House environment faces an uncertain future

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It has been two years since a lightning strike burned down Richard Prince's Second House, a walk-in white-trash environment the artist created in 2003 near his studio in Rensselaerville, NY, 200 miles north of Manhattan. He donated the four-room shack and 80 acres to the Guggenheim Museum, which had agreed to open the house to the public for at least a decade. His dealer Barbara Gladstone sold some of its contents—including ten of 11 automobile-hood sculptures—to Guggenheim trustees and other collectors who promised to donate them to the museum. But before the Guggenheim worked out how to provide public bathrooms and access for the disabled, the July 2007 fire wrecked the building. Now, the museum is discussing with the artist what will become of the erstwhile Second House.

“Our discussions have ranged from leaving it as it is, to building another structure on the site that would somehow memorialise the fire,” said Nancy Spector, the Guggenheim curator who organised the Prince retrospective that opened two months after the fire. The notoriously press-shy artist was unavailable for comment.

The ten privately owned hood reliefs were in collectors' homes or in storage at the time of the fire. Another that the artist kept for himself was damaged along with other components of the installation, including a “Joke”

painting, a tyre planter, a basketball backboard table, and a photograph of Sid Vicious. The museum is in the process of making insurance claims.

“We have pretty much determined we would not try to bring together those hoods in that building,” said Spector. “This would not be the Second House again. It would be a third house.” But Prince—whose First House, 1993, in Los Angeles has since been dismantled—has created a number of site-specific projects in Rensselaerville, including a two-storey Library, 2006, filled with pulp fiction and books by or about Vladimir Nabokov, Raymond Chandler, Larry Clark, Helmut Newton, Martin Kippenberger, Andy Warhol and others that collectively serve as Prince’s self-portrait.

Nearby is a studio he calls the Body Shop, 2006, where he works on car pieces and displays “Joke” paintings. “He is sorting out what to do with these projects,” said Spector, adding that she can imagine them as “a Marfa-like experience of different environments”.

Prince has not proposed what to do with the site and remaining components of Second House. “It’s something we want to resolve, but these things take time,” Spector said. “We want to do what makes sense for the art and for the public, but it’s an work of art in the end, so it would be what Richard wanted and we will work with him to try and realise it.”

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