

INTERVIEWS

Art for the Discerning Drone

by Benjamin Sutton on March 27, 2015

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Drones at Knockdown Center (Illustration by the artist for Hyperallergic)

Is your drone all charged up with nowhere to fly? Impending Federal Aviation Administration [regulations](#) got you down? Fear not, because this summer the [Knockdown Center](#), the sprawling arts space in Maspeth, Queens, will host a drone obstacle course consisting entirely of specially commissioned sculptures. The center recently launched an [open call](#) seeking proposals for the exhibition-cum-obstacle course, noting that “the most comprehensive viewer of the work will be the drones themselves” and encouraging artists to design their works with unmanned aircraft rather than gallery visitors in mind.

In the end, 11 artists will receive stipends to create new works for the obstacle course, which will either be installed inside, suspended from the old industrial building’s 20-foot-high trusses, or in its large courtyard. The obstacle course will be open to drone pilots of all sorts and skill levels so, as the [open call](#) notes, “submissions must thoroughly consider durability ... collisions will occur.” Hyperallergic got in touch with Knockdown Center’s Michael Merck and Vanessa Thill to learn more about the project.

Benjamin Sutton: *Where did the idea for a drone obstacle course exhibition come from?*

Michael Merck and Vanessa Thill: We recently purchased a Parrot Bebop Skycontroller to make a video tour of the space and one thing lead to another as we attempted to learn to fly it up into the rafters, through windows, and down stairs. We had also been discussing how we wanted our programming to develop and the types of exhibitions we could present that would not only work amidst all the different activities we are engaged with but also might not be otherwise possible at other spaces throughout the city ... and voila!

BS: *The open call announcement mentions the possibility of winning the “Eye-In-The-Sky prize”; what factors will be taken into consideration in giving out that award (piloting precision? speed? acrobatics?) and what form will it take — flight certificate, trophy, cash prize?*



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MM and VT: The primary idea is that the viewer of the show *is* the drone. As any viewer of art, an aesthetic judgment is weighed based upon a perspective and a thought process during and after the encounter with the work. To that end, the Eye-In-The-Sky prize (which will assume the form of a trophy) will be awarded to the pilot who submits the most interesting and succinct "reading" of the obstacles via video.



The space at the Rockefeller Center to whom the drone obstacle course will be created (photo courtesy Kristin van Oort)

BS: Is there a particular type or types of existing obstacle courses that are guiding the design and layout of the exhibition, like, say, mini-golf course, boot camp training obstacle course, or horse jumping shows?

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