



The Local East Village

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With Seed Money from Playboy, Monet's Garden Blooms on Bowery

By DANIEL MAURER, 20 Cooper Square

It's The Hole's most ambitious installation yet: With funding from an unlikely patron – Playboy – the Bowery gallery has transformed into a fecund, fragrant landscape complete with a bridge and lily pond in the back corner. The indoor recreation of [Monet's garden in Giverny](#) was partly inspired by performance artist and longtime East Villager, Kembra Pfahler, best known as the lead singer of the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black.

At a preview of the exhibit earlier today, Ms. Pfahler, looking vaguely occult in black eye makeup and a hood, sprinkled potpourri over a cluster of flowers that had been transplanted from Long Island. "I'll learn to water them," she promised, "because I do not know a thing about plants. Being in this garden last night was the first time I've been around plants like this."

Not exactly true: in August 2011, Ms. Pfahler traveled to Giverny, France, to be photographed by E.V. Day in Monet's famous garden estate, where the photographer best known for [exploding couture](#) was enjoying a residency.

The experience was another first for the death-rock vixen. “I’m from Los Angeles,” she said. “I used to go to Disneyland once a year – that was as much exposure to Europe that I had.”

She posed for photos topless, clad head-to-toe in the outlandish makeup – inspired, incidentally, by Playboy’s [Femlins](#) – that she wears on stage. “She was really very provocative about asking, ‘Why are you doing this? What’s the impetus for this costume?’” Ms. Pfahler said of Ms. Day. “It helped me figure out what I was doing, having such an intelligent person inquire about things that I just took for granted. Why *do* I wear ten wigs and black teeth?”



Tim Schreier

Kembra Pfahler

The resulting photos are now for sale at The Hole, displayed in a facsimile of the Giverny gardens that took five days of around-the-clock work to build. “The process was bonkers,” said [Kathy Grayson](#), founder of The Hole. It started, she said, with ten people unrolling a 20-foot span of fake grass that had been delivered on a flatbed truck. Fifty bags of mulch were used.

“I can see how people can say this is ridiculous but I totally can’t relate to that point of view,” said Ms. Grayson.

The idea came to her after she heard about Ms. Day's and Ms. Pfahler's photographs. "E.V. and Kembra showed me this project. Maybe it's just the weird Jeffrey in my brain," she said, referring to Jeffrey Deitch, her former boss at Deitch Projects, "but I was like, 'Oh you went to Giverny? Let's show your artwork in a garden. It's not just Jeffrey – it's this impulse I have to do things that are really exceptional that broaden the audience of art.'"

And how: Ms. Grayson said she expected a nudist to show up at tonight's opening, and was hoping "renegade picnickers" would visit while the show is on display, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. On April 13, the space will host a reading of erotic poetry that [Laura O'Reilly](#) of The Hole said involve the release of butterflies brought in from Florida.



Tim Schreier

E.V. Day and Kembra Pfahler

Does all of this seem a bit unnatural?

Ms. Pfahler admitted, "People have asked in the neighborhood, 'Oh my God, you're getting sponsored by Playboy?'" but she said the brand had been a good "art friend" to her, and had hired neighbors like risqué photographer Richard Kern in the past. She also assured that when the exhibit ends, she would replant some of the flowers in the community gardens near her home in Alphabet City.

"Giverny," through April 24 at The Hole, 312 Bowery, 212-466-1100