

## MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

# POSTscript: End of an Era for A Downtown Space

Annie Buckley | July 7, 2015



Lara Bank, "predatorXtreme: fox gun," June 2014. Savage Arms Walking Varminter rifle parts from eBay, clay, aluminum foil, wire, pain, glass eyes, paint brush bristles. 35 in. x 8 in. x 12 in. Included in the 2014 exhibition "National Pride" at PØST.

In September 1995, when HK Zamani (Habib Kheradgar) opened the experimental exhibition space, POST, in the city's gritty industrial heart, the area was a virtual desert for art. Housed in a large brick and stucco building on Seventh Place, a street that seemed more like an alley, it was the only artist-run space in the area and provided much-needed community and exhibition space for nearly twenty years. At the time, few collectors would venture this close to Skid Row. Now, two decades on, the area is a flourishing hub of gentrification, with vegan restaurants and artisanal groceries within walking distance and commercial galleries nearby. CB1 and Rosamund Felsen opened on nearby Santa Fe Avenue earlier this year and Hauser Wirth & Schimmel is developing

a building a stone's throw away. In an all-too-familiar urban narrative -- artists revitalize, rents rise, artists move on -- Zamani is leaving the area and POST is in a state of indeterminate flux. The shifting narrative of the much-loved art space on Seventh Place, a street that seemed more like an alley, and the artist behind it holds a mirror to the area's transformation. "PØST was established as an experimental system to suggest that the existing support systems are lacking and require intervention, Zamani says, "a system is always in need of reconsideration, reinvention, and growth."



"Punishment" performance by Martin Durazo at POST, 1996.

Zamani (he reclaimed this family name in 2006 after discovering an grandfather was a painter) is also an artist, working in performance, painting, and sculpture, with an international exhibition record. He opened POST in the same building where he had his studio and the first iteration included a small room upstairs with solo shows and a larger space downstairs with group shows. Initially, he curated both, but before long, he began inviting artists to curate the larger space with an attendant solo show of their own work in the smaller space. "Your own ideas may be exciting," he says, "but as soon as you invite others into the process it begins to grow exponentially." This lack of a

distinctive curatorial voice or authorial power set POST apart from more traditional curation, in particular the recent rise of celebrity curators.

POST began and has remained a fundamentally collaborative artist-led adventure. Prior to what became a two-decade experiment in adventurous art-meets-curation, Zamani had completed a TA-ship in curatorial studies at Claremont Graduate University and a short stint as a curator. After that, he says he realized that "my ideas didn't really work for the institution so I decided that the solution would be start one. It wasn't ambitious in that I wanted the project to be successful [in a commercial sense]. I wanted it to be successful but I am not sure what I wanted that success to be. Maybe it was the interaction with the community. The focus wasn't on trying to sell art. The focus was on trying to have strategies to curate and to share."



Nick Lawrence's "White Cube" exhibition at POST, 1997.

"It became an amazing support system," Zamani says. "This was a difficult time, right after the 1980s. We all had to reinvent ourselves. The decade ended with the crash of the art market and I wanted to create a space that was counter to the market." At the time, Zamani and collaborator in life, the teacher and dancer/choreographer Emma Jürgensen, had a young daughter, Ali, who recently completed an MFA in Art at CalArts. Being a parent also contributed to his desire to nurture other artists. As a busy parent and practicing artist, he wanted to bring the social element of art right to his doorstep. So he opened

the space in the same building that housed his studio. From the start, it was wildly successful on both counts; flocks of artists attended openings and exhibitions received critical attention.

But despite an impressive roster that includes many now well-known and established artists, when I ask Zamani who has shown there, to talk about some of his favorite or most memorable shows, he won't cite any names. "If I mention one," he explains, "I will leave out hundreds." He does mention museums and exhibitions that have gone on to feature the artists that showed with him, such as MOCA and the Whitney Biennial. Detailed online archives of POST and PØST include all the artists and exhibitions included through the years and an extensive listing of coverage in the local press.





Phyllis Green, "Old Shoes," 2011. Mixed media. 35 in x 18 in x 20 in. Included in the 2014 exhibition "Ghost Appendages" at PØST, curated by Jessica Rath.

In 2005, 10 years after opening, Zamani closed the downtown space to focus on his painting but before long, a restless collaborative spirit and another wave of difficult times led him back to the space. In 2008, PØST reopened with a slash through the Ø to represent the new era. Of the first exhibition in the newly reopened space, "Erasing POST," Zamani includes this statement on the website:

*Difficult times demand difficult art. How does one restart a project with a history of success? How can one do the same thing? It has to be different otherwise will be uninteresting. The first exhibit will set the tone. It has to be a difficult exhibit. So this show addresses a history of success, and rejects the idea of building on some safe foundation -- that's more like business than art. The architecture of the space is also geared to be idiosyncratic, materialize and dematerialize with its walls on wheels and hinges.*

*It is not possible to completely erase these works. There are still the ghosts.*

*It is not possible to erase POST. There is still its ghost.*

*This exhibit of Erased works is a Kamikaze (divine wind) show. Lets do only Kamikaze shows.*



Tera Galanti sculpture displayed at PØST as part of a 2014 Kamikaze duo exhibition featuring Galanti and Michael Barton Miller.

Zamani's expansive and experimental approach is probably best summed up in these Kamikaze shows, month-long endurance projects in which a new exhibition is put up and taken down each day. Most occur in July so that, as the majority of L.A. galleries lay dormant for the summer, PØST is a hotbed of innovative energy. Locals and out-of-town guests can attend a new opening

each night. Hardcore viewers commit to seeing every show but even this impressive feat pales in comparison to Zamani's commitment to Kamikazes, and Jurgensen's as well, especially since the couple moved back into the building in 2012.

Opening to a new artist or, often, team of artists every night for a month is as much logistical puzzle as emotional undertaking, not to mention the sheer physicality of moving art and artists, viewers and walls, in and out every day and every night for month. "I have often thought of Kamikazes as my performance-based project," Zamani explains. "I get to perform every night of the month whether it's maintaining the space or the social aspect of the exhibition." Seven Kamikazes have taken place at PØST since 2009. "It's not about expectation," Zamani says. "It's more about sacrifice and abandon for all of us because you can't have the same expectations as you have with a regular exhibition." Now, change is on the horizon again. In the midst of shifting the project to a nonprofit model, Zamani got word of a major rent increase that prompted him to give notice on his lease and PØST is currently in the nascent stages of yet another rebirth, this time as a nonprofit art space that will be located -- sadly or ironically, and maybe fittingly -- elsewhere. As the neighborhood shifts, a defining sentinel for art in downtown L.A. is leaving, long before anyone thought the city, let alone the area, would become an international center.





Gelare Khoshgozaran, "PERSIAN [D]RUGS," 2013. Included in the 2015 exhibition "Black Gold" at PØST, co-curated by Gelare Khoshgozaran and Habib Zamani.

Zamani seems to embody serenity and endurance in the face of whirlwinds of change. Asked about his philosophy, he responds: "We change the world. The world changes us. I think we're influenced by life and the people we meet and the lives that we choose to surround ourselves with." He says his personal story also informs his decisions. "I was born in Iran and came here in 9th grade. In a way, I maybe lucked out. But it makes me kind of, what Joseph Conrad refers to as, a *homo duplex*. There is definitely an east and west in me. POST/PØST has definitely influenced my artistic practice. The idea of reinvention runs through my work."

Today, as downtown L.A. becomes a mecca for contemporary art, the space key to its recent history will be absent -- but not missing. Where will it be? We have to wait and see. With utter calm, Zamani says, "It was always about allowing it to grow."

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