

The Art Tourism Party is Over

By [Kate McGraw / For the Journal](#) on Fri, Jan 6, 2012

One of the most delightful manifestations of Santa Fe's new art zeitgeist was the opening in September 2010 of Axle Contemporary, the unusual mobile gallery mounted in a refitted 1970 Chevy step van.

Artists Jerry Wellman and Matthew Chase-Daniel refurbished the van as an expression, Wellman said, of many notions of "mobility."

He said that included movement around on wheels, yes, but also the idea of taking art across economic borders ("We want to take art where galleries haven't been") and taking the art itself across the limits successful artists impose on themselves when they have to meet regular galleries' overhead.

If you go

WHAT: "The Party Is Over,"
installation by Ted Larsen

WHEN: Today through Jan. 29;
reception 4 to 6 p.m. today.

WHERE: Railyard Plaza, Alcadesa
Street

CONTACT: info@axleart.com

Their artist pal Ted Larsen gets it. Gets it so well, in fact, that Larsen has created a special installation opening today while the van is parked at Railyard Park. The idea of mobility is one he's playing with, Larsen, a regular artist at the gallery Eight Modern, said.

"I think a lot of artists use galleries as a kind of upward mobility, so to have a gallery that in itself is mobile is kind of fascinating," Larsen said. "I love the metaphor of moving devices."

Larsen is creating an installation that gallery-goers will look in upon through Axle Contemporary's vitrine, as Wellman and Chase-Daniel call it – the 4-by-6-foot window in its side. Larsen is exploring perceptual experience in the installation, Wellman wrote. "Both embracing and subverting 'totemic hierarchical structures,' he uses repetition to change perception, creating new and unexpected sculptural forms built from simple and recognizable shapes and materials."

Larsen has used black-and-white Christmas giftwrap to line the interior walls of the van-gallery and suspended shapes that "kind of" resemble streamers from the walls. The suspension wires and the shapes are fabricated of galvanized sheet metal. The whole installation illustrates the theme of his exhibition: "The Party Is Over."

“It’s an accumulation of shapes repeating; formation, surrealism and repetition are primary in my work generally,” Larsen said.

“In this case, the work is not precisely pristine,” he added. “I didn’t go after perfection. Thematically, it want to be tight and cohesive, but not perfect.”

“The Party Is Over” is Larsen’s commentary on the over-inflation and breakdown of social, financial and art-world structures. “The art world in Santa Fe is so tourist-driven and in these economic times, it’s been licking its wounds a little,” he said. “Tourism as an engine for art consumerism is problematic, as many have found.

“On so many levels, the party is over and that’s not necessarily a bad thing,” the artist said. “What replaces it is the big question mark – and it’s up to us to make the decisions. This installation references a kind of ridiculous festive situation that has kind of gone away.”

Axle Contemporary seems the perfect place to make this installation, Larsen said.

“As artists we get into the habit of producing work for specific installations and exhibitions and we need to get outside of that,” he said. “It is important to reconnect with our younger self when we thought, ‘It’s not about the money; it’s about ideas and theory, and putting something out there that has a message, but is not necessarily didactic.’ ”

Working with the Axle owners has been liberating, Larsen said. “I love the metaphor of a mobile environment that we can look in at, but can’t go in.”

As is true of all Axle shows, the Larsen show will move around the city. The exhibition continues through Jan. 29 all over town; would-be viewers can visit axleart.com for daily location updates.

From now until June, Axle Contemporary will host a series of art installations and performance art in the mobile gallery. The gallery will be parked most days in high-traffic areas: near grocery stores, restaurants, movie theatres and often in the Railyard. Wellman and Chase-Daniel can be contacted for more information by emailing info@axleart.com.