

The City

CV

Section **14**

LONG ISLAND CITY



Baring All for Art at P.S. 1: Volunteer Bathers at 'Sauna'

One way artists earn their cultural keep these days is by providing, free, luxuries people usually have to pay for. Inigo Mangano-Ovalle, who is in the Whitney Biennial, once offered massages performed by identical twins. Lee Mingwei served dinner to selected art viewers.

In that vein, Pia Lindman, a Finnish-born artist, has built a working sauna just outside the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center. The sauna, which opened in February and will be up at least until mid-May, is the size of a tool shed, with two changing booths and two hot rooms, each big enough for one (or, when demand is high, a consenting pair). It's called "Sauna."

Not everyone leapt at the chance to sweat out their impurities in the name of art. "I took my shower this morning," said Ange Milgrim of SoHo, who stopped by to investigate on a recent Sunday.

Joan McKeown, an artist who lives in Flatbush, Brooklyn, demanded, "What do you clean it with?" The answer, a biodegradable phosphate-free cleanser, failed to persuade her.

Those who did want to bathe — and there have been close to 200 participants since "Sauna" opened — were given a fresh towel, a ladle and a wooden bucket of water scented with birch leaf extract to help them achieve the Finnish sauna experience, in which one whacks oneself with a birch whisk to improve circulation. Users may steam for as long as they like, but they need to enter and exit at least twice, because, Ms. Lindman said, "The second time tastes different."

There was one catch, however: public nudity. The easiest way to cool off between sessions is to step out on the deck, where Ms. Lindman, in white uniform and knee-high rubber boots, douses bathers with cold water.

Saunas evoke democracy for Ms. Lindman. In Finland, which has 1.6



Nancy Siesel/The New York Times

Savoring the temporary sauna in front of the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center.

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT



Nancy Siesel/The New York Times

At P.S. 1, Ars Gratia Sauna

Visitors to the P.S. 1 art center in Long Island City can sweat out those impurities in a real sauna — if they aren't too bashful. With other reports from NoHo, TriBeCa, East Harlem, Chelsea, Times Square, Midtown, Gramercy, Park Slope and Riverdale.

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million saunas for 5 million people, all sorts of people bathe together. Removing one's clothes means shedding one's social status.

Another aim of "Sauna" is to encourage Americans to confront their self-consciousness about their bodies. To that end, Ms. Lindman positioned "Sauna" in full view of the museum steps. The other day, hangers-out drank coffee, squinted, and debated whether Thean Traynor of Astoria, who was relaxing on a bench between sweats, had a hairy back or was just heavily tattooed.

Jesse Epstein of Williamsburg and Alan Jacobsen of Greenpoint were back for their second visit to "Sauna," which is open afternoons Friday through Sunday. On her first visit, Ms. Epstein had brought a bathrobe, but she didn't use it.

"After you go in, you don't care, really," she said. "It feels natural."

Her companion added: "It's neat to be sitting naked in a box in the middle of Queens. It would be great to have one on every corner in Midtown."

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