

80 Washington Square East is an address acquired by New York University along with the entire frontage of the eastern side of Washington Square park in 1925. At the time, the school's attendance was growing exponentially, from 500 students in 1919 to over 7,000 by 1929. Additional living quarters and administrative facilities were required, for which 80 Washington Square East was converted to offices and dorms. The building was never fully razed, but gutted repeatedly to the point in which interiors now flow uninterrupted across the city block behind distinct facades: dorm to desk through hallway and 'break-out' space.

Prior to the acquisition by NYU, 80 Washington Square East was primarily residential with units designated for a specific demographic influx of its time: single men. Commissioned in 1879 by an iron manufacturer and Metropolitan Museum trustee, Lucius Tuckerman, the building featured artist's lofts and housing for those enduring bachelorhood, that intermittent stage which makes for unreliable tenants often excluded from other residences. Nicknamed Benedick after the confirmed bachelor of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, the building came to be associated with artists that lived and, more importantly, drank there. Amidst the Greenwich Village scene, fraternal orders such as the "Sewer Club" played out a theater of well-fed bohemianism within its rooms.

In 1974 NYU converted the ground floor into 80 Washington Square East Galleries devoted to solo exhibitions of student work. As part of a billion-dollar decade long redevelopment program, 1987 renovations of the galleries were followed by a new program of already practicing contemporary artists. The campus expansion successfully established the school amongst the nation's elite academic institutions and lead to an increasingly non-commuter student body. Idealized growth fueling a hypertrophy of operational space requires multivalent and transformable redevelopment plans so as to integrate future development. NYU's "current long-term strategic framework for growth" envisages a 2031 horizon. Such projective conceptualization of the future as a space being filled and filling itself is what amounts to a sense of the blurred present in which no definitive image of the city is attainable. Yet the recurrence of narrative and the stories we communicate as history retain agency in shaping the present conception of things. So, is the building still a bachelor, or is it more so now than ever?

To this point, Dora Budor, in coordination with scenographer Andromache Chalfant, introduces *Benedick, or Else*. Conceived as theater, the exhibition follows a five-act structure as scripted remodeling. Prosthetic dry-wall and scenography play protagonists. Architectural corrections have been suggested and access increased for those in the process of completing the perpetual renovation thematizing our empire of blur. Space here is bachelorized, temporary, and unruly as action appears both completed and about to start. Unlike Shakespeare's own fifth act conclusion, there is no

Beatrice to wed, this is *Benedick, or Else*. Here we conclude with anticipated storage and walls stained by the charred breath of prior occupants.

Commissioned and curated by Nicola Lees

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Scenographic assistants: Lauren Barber, Rebecca Lord Surratt

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Props: Owen Bissex

Production: Permanent Maintenance (Wyatt Burns)

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Scenic Painting: Infinite Scenic

Design: Lucas Quigley

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