

# ARTFORUM

## Justin Cooper and Ross Moreno

02.08.14— As told to Alex Jovanovich



Justin Cooper and Ross Moreno, *Yeti and Firebush Present: Ross Ta-dah and Prickly Perry Present!*, 2013. Performance view, New York. Photo: Carrie Schneider.

*Artist-comedian Justin Cooper and artist-comedian–professional magician Ross Moreno are the coconspirators behind Chuckles+, a comedy/performance project they commenced in 2011. On February 9, 2014, they will perform at Harbor Gallery in Queens, New York. Here, Cooper and Moreno speak about their upcoming performance and its hybridism.*

**CHUCKLES+** began as a simple framework to explore different approaches toward performative projects; since 2011, it has evolved into an ongoing investigation into the intersection between comedy and art. We think conventional “showbiz” structures—the variety show, the comedy club, the telethon, etc.—are beautiful sorts of

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things unto themselves. But they're also fantastic vehicles for far weirder impulses, such as experiments with duration, repetition, and disjointed narrative. The name Chuckles+ implies that our project will deliver on the funny but with an addition. The definition of this "plus" is what we attempt to articulate with each new event. The experience is deeply rooted in the history of performance art, but it's also a place where one can laugh.

For the next iteration of Chuckles+, we have been exploring the dynamics of the host-performer relationship. In it, the "next guest" introduction will be repeated over and over again and the traditional roles associated with the variety show format will constantly shift. Our long-time music collaborator, DJ Joey B, and April Bruckner, a talented ventriloquist, will also be part of the performance, which is really like *A Prairie Home Companion* on acid.

We've been fortunate enough to perform at various major institutions—Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; SculptureCenter, New York; Neues Museum, Nuremberg—but these opportunities have not necessarily carried more importance than our performances at our friends' backyard birthday parties. There's no hierarchy for us. We bring the same level of gravitas to each performance because what we do can be shaped to fit virtually any kind of venue and any type of audience. We don't ever want Chuckles+ to classify our viewers, like the "art" audience versus the "mainstream" audience, for example. If we're successful, each type of audience will take away something unique and deeply personal—a curated emotive experience that has played with their expectations. With an art audience, we've found that there is a collective sigh of relief when they realize we're out to make them laugh. There's so much tedious, tortuous performance art out there that it's pretty easy to get those people onboard if they know we're going to be funny.

In David Robbins's book *Concrete Comedy*, he outlines a definitive history of "high entertainment" but does not present strategies for the artist-cum-comedian-practitioner. We recognized that a viable place for a pure hybrid of art and comedy hadn't really been established at the start of Chuckles+. Now there are a few others, like Scott and Tyson Reeder, the creators of Club Nutz—the world's smallest comedy club, held in spaces like broom closets and booths at the Frieze Art Fair. They, as well as Jim Drain and Naomi Fischer, have been great allies and collaborators. There's certainly no dearth of talent out there to invite to the "clubhouse," so Chuckles+ will always have a built-in refresh button.