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Koenig of the Catskills

Delaware County is such a lovely place I don't think I'll tell you where it is. Not that we're talking Shangri-La or anything. The north end of Appalachia would be more like it, what with the single-wides and the tag sales of old Tupperware. The best place to eat is likely to be the local luncheonette, which closes before dinnertime. But the place has got a few dairy farms left, and plenty of green meadows under turquoise skies. And briefly, during this late segment of August 2008, it has a satellite branch of Leo Koenig, Inc.

Though everyone knows Leo from his gallery on West 23rd Street down here in New York City, I first ran into him upstate two years ago, at the Delaware County Fair in Walton, N.Y. We were just hanging around the 4-H tent, gawking at the prize-winning roosters and rabbits -- you could buy yourself the cutest little bunny for \$15 -- and there he was with his gal, Meghan DellaCrosse, herself a county native. Small world! But hell, that's nothing, I ran into the *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl in the parking lot of the Great American supermarket in Delhi the first weekend I went up there, several years earlier.

Anyway, it turned out that Leo had bought a nice Victorian house on Main Street in Andes, a little town founded in 1819 up in country so hilly that they thought it should be named after some famous mountains. Out back is an impressive hand-hewn wood-beam barn dating to 1845 or so. "It can be a gallery," the irrepressible art dealer proclaimed. "It's perfect for Julian Schnabel sculptures!"

Well, I don't know about the Schnabels, but last Saturday, as part of the official Andes Community Celebration Day on Aug. 9, 2008, Leo Koenig, Inc., did open a group show in the barn called "Between Us. . ." that included paintings and sculptures by many artists from the gallery stable. The building has been wonderfully refurbished with planks and beams of blonde hemlock wood -- "light and strong," Koenig said -- with not one but two stories of sturdy lofts, reached by wooden stairs.

I have to say, a lot of avant-garde art doesn't do that well against raw timber, though a few of the artists definitely get the upstate sensibility. Greg Bogin's 1970s-style supergraphic, an oversized 3D construction of pink carpet and chrome sitting in the middle of the straw, has a definite flea-market feel, though the way things go up here in these shops, you rather expect it to be tagged "1930s." And the ensemble of gold-encrusted creatures by Aidas Bareikis definitely gets that crusty-thing-out-in-the-shed esthetic down pat.

Also good are the black-wash images of wolves by Anke Weyer, which look like they could be illustrations clipped from the original magazine serialization of *The Call of the Wild*. Most appropriate of all are Tony Matelli's polychromed bronze weeds, installed inside the barn at floor level. Their trompe-l'oeil is so convincing that Leo had to post signs reading, "Don't pick the weeds."

Sales aren't entirely out of the question, I suppose. The pictures of wolves are \$2,000 each, and Bareikis' piece is \$20,000. "I sold a larger group to an Austrian collector for \$70,000 the other day," Koenig said. "I don't know what I was thinking." For more info, see www.leokoenig.com.