Winter — 2018

Cite

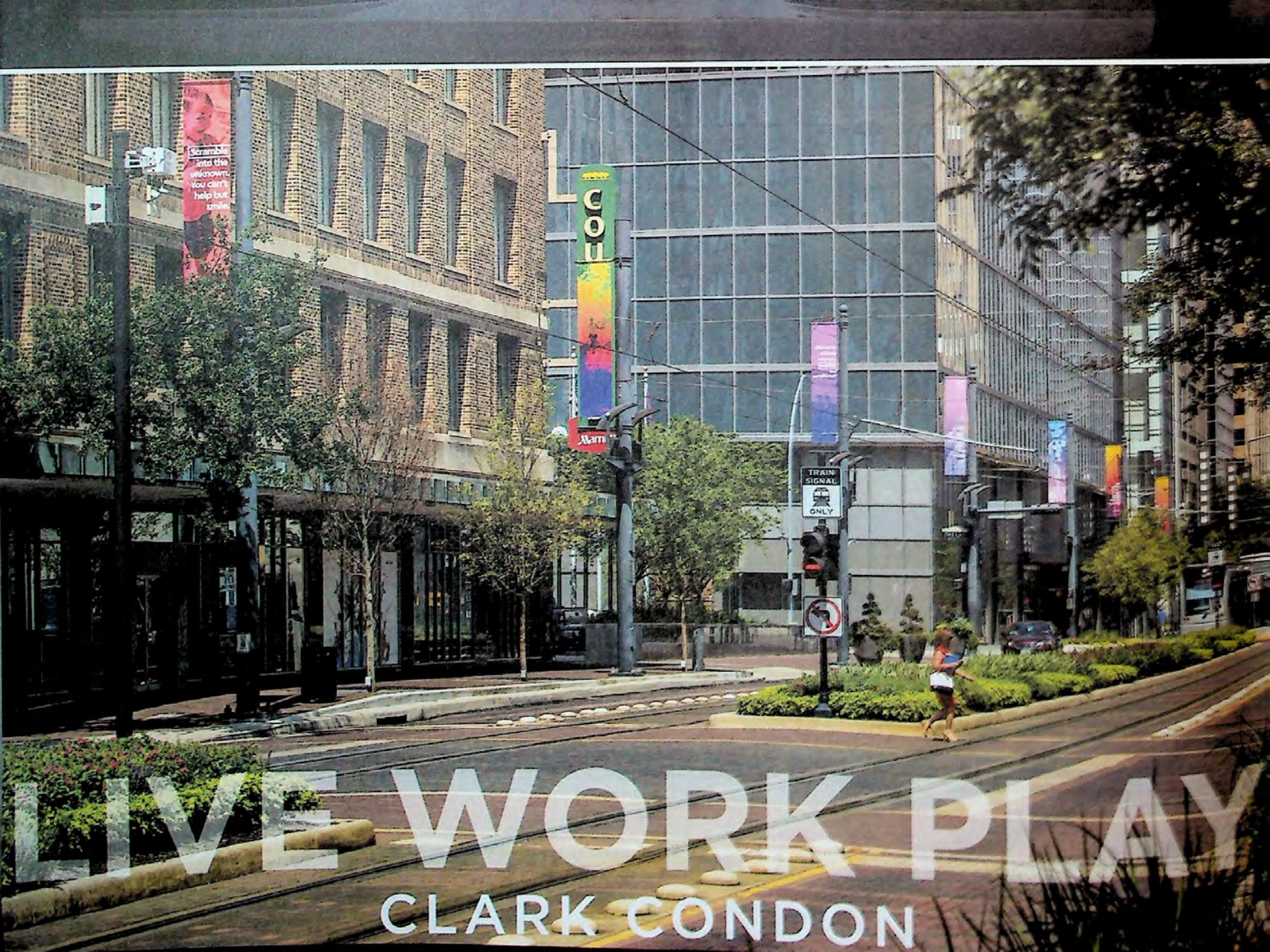
The Architecture and
Design Review of Houston

Sicardi Gallery announces
name change to

Sicardi | Ayers Bacino

The change in name recognizes the seventeen-year partnership of María Inés Sicardi, Allison Armstrong Ayers and Carlos Bacino.

The gallery, founded in 1994 by María Inés Sicardi, will continue its commitment to promoting Latin American art, remaining a stimulating platform for intellectual debate and creative exploration.



Leo Tanguma painted "The Rebirth of Our Nationality" in 1973 with spare house paint. Over time, the East End mural at 5900 Canal Street faded. In 2018, under the direction of Tanguma, the mural was repainted by Mario Figueroa, Jr., also known as "Gonzo247." Photo by Tom Flaherty.

LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY IS RIFE WITH INJUSTICE, UNCERTAINTY, AND CHAOS. IT IS FOR THIS REASON ALONE THAT IT BECOMES IMPORTANT TO FIND MORE CONNECTIONS WITH ONE ANOTHER, TO CREATE A GREATER SENSE OF COMMUNITY, AND IT IS THROUGH ART AND DESIGN THAT WE CAN ACHIEVE THIS GOAL.

In the caves that early humans painted tens of thousands of years ago, our earliest form of lasting self-expression was born. Our prehistoric ancestors marked the spaces they inhabited with art and transformed them into places with a unique resonance. When art is situated in the world, it can transform a space into what might be considered a "marked site." When we inhabit such a place, we feel a sense of belonging, because we have created a connection not just to the place but to the people around us. When we feel those bonds of community, we get a sense of our own self-worth: I matter to others, I am important, I matter to myself. When we feel this self-worth, we begin to create the meaning in our lives. We are shaped by the people and places all around us. In this light, we can see art and design as a poetics, a "harmonic reason" that guides our hands, to achieve a suitable and specific praxis of art, of building. As we create, we seek to "let-dwell" the conscious ideals, identity, and culture of a place. Plato understood poesis as a process that makes visible or brings into existence what is otherwise invisible or non-existing—it is a revealing. Aristotle describes poesis as a productive activity that has an end or value beyond itself—a transcendence. Through this process of revelation and transcendence, the meaning in our lives emerges. This is why art and design is not just important, but necessary. The articles in this issue are about why and how we can incorporate art into our lives, into our places, into our communities and why this is necessary: so we can continue to grow, thrive, evolve. Life in the United States today is rife with injustice, uncertainty, and chaos. Negative aspects of individualism are rampant. It is for this reason alone that it becomes important to find more connections with one another, to create a greater sense of community, and it is through art and design that we can achieve this goal. This issue of *Cite* is about Creative Placemaking, a term which is culturally complicated, but which, in the end, simply tries to talk about how we can integrate art into the fabric of our lives in a meaningful way, with joy and pride that allows for greater, better connections with one another.

—Ernesto Alfaro and Marie Rodriguez,
Guest Editors, *Cite 101: Be Here*

Houston Art Car Parade,
April 2018.
Photo by Tom Flaherty.

Ernesto Alfaro is a Senior Associate at SLA Studio Land where he works in planning and landscape. He is also a Lecturer at Rice Architecture.

Bill Davenport is an award-winning artist and former editor of Glasstire.com. He arrived in Texas in 1990 with a mattress strapped to the top of his truck, and he's still here.

M. Lawrence Dillon is an industrial designer, writer, and architecture nerd living in Houston, Texas.

Stephen Fox is an architectural historian, fellow of the Anchorage Foundation, and lecturer at Rice and the University of Houston.

Daniel Garcia-Prats is an engineer/entrepreneur who has worked for a Silicon Valley medical startup and a local Houston oil and gas manufacturer.

Mark Garcia-Prats has dedicated 8 years as a teacher and principal at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic School. He is currently an MBA candidate at University of Houston with a focus in Commercial Real Estate.

Thomas Garcia-Prats has spent the last 8 years working on farms in throughout the U.S. and Central America, developing a passion for farming and a desire to expand and share his experience and knowledge.

David Leftwich is a writer interested in the intersection of food, culture, history, and immigration. His work has appeared in the Houston Chronicle, Sugar & Rice, Edible Houston, My Table, OffCite, and Food+City.

Raj Mankad has served as Editor of *Cite* since 2008.

Lynne McCabe is an artist & curator working in gestures of relational aesthetics and community art. She holds art degrees from The Glasgow School of Art & California College of the Arts.

Sheila Mednick is an architect and designer currently living in Houston, Texas. She has studied at Columbia and Rice Universities, and has worked at offices in Paris, France, Houston, New York, and San Francisco.

Falon Mihalic is a landscape architect, artist, and writer based in Houston. She owns and directs Falon Land Studio LLC, a landscape architecture and public art firm.

John Pluecker is a writer, translator, interpreter, artist, and co-founder of the collaboratives Antena and Antena Houston.

Marie Rodriguez is an architectural designer and historian living in Houston, TX. She holds an M.Arch from Rice University and an MS from McGill University with a specialization in domestic environments.

Todd Romero is an Associate Professor of history at the University of Houston where he studies and teaches early American, public, and food history.

Nicola Springer Nicola Springer is Vice President at Kirksey Architecture.

Margy Waller is an advisor to national initiatives on creative placemaking. She is Senior Fellow at Topos Partnership and was Senior Advisor in the Clinton White House.

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Type Design
Be Here Bloc, designed by Michael McCaughley, OCD, for *Cite: 101*.
Outsiders, by A2-TYPE

Rice Design Alliance Gala 2018: PUBLIC

Nearly 1,000 people packed the Hilton's Ballroom of the Americas to honor Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, recipient of Rice Design Alliance's Award for Design Excellence at the 2018 Gala. The festive crowd at the Gala mirrored Rice Design Alliance's mix of professionals from the architecture, engineering, and construction industries, as well as design enthusiasts and those who are interested in positively shaping Houston and the region through design.

Rice Design Alliance President Juliè Gauthier and Gala Chairs Charlotte and Larry Whaley welcomed the guests to the Gala, and thanked the Gala Co-Chairs. The Gala hit a new underwriting record for Rice Design Alliance, thanks to Fundraising Chair Richard Morris and his committee, and supporters like Gala Premier Underwriters Walker Engineering and Crawford. The Silent Auction, chaired by Maggie Bryan and Meredith Stuart, featured exciting objects like Herman Miller Eames chairs in the Rice Design Alliance gala's signature colors, trips to Mexico, quail hunting on a private ranch, and aerial photographs by Alex MacLean.

Rice Design Alliance unveiled its new identity at the gala, with a new logo, branding, and colors visible in the Gala environment. A new website design for the Rice Design Alliance was simultaneously unveiled at www.ricedesignalliance.org. The Gala environment and branding was created by OCD | The Original Champions of Design.

Rice Design Alliance Executive Director Maria Nicanor introduced the numerous public officials in attendance, including County Commissioner R. Jack Cagle, Houston City Councilmember David Robinson, and Mayor Sylvester Turner. Mayor Turner lauded Judge Emmett's work in the region and his many years of public service, and praised the work of the Rice Design Alliance. The Mayor also announced the upcoming Rice Design Alliance competition that will focus on the I-45 expansion project in Near Northside.

A video, featuring among others Rice University President David Leebron and Rice Architecture Dean Sarah Whiting, expanded on the work Judge Emmett has done in shaping public space in Houston and Harris County. Phoebe Tudor, Founder of the Astrodome Conservancy and Chairman of the Preservation and Historic Sites Committee of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, presented the Award for Design Excellence to her good friend Ed Emmett. Judge Emmett spoke about the need for Houston to become a model for other cities and the importance of organizations like Rice Design Alliance to advance that effort forward.

Dessert, dancing, and fierce bidding on auction items rounded out the evening. The guests partied on until midnight.

Rice Design Alliance sends a special thank you to our Gala Chairs, board members, Rice Architecture students, staff, Gala volunteers, and our underwriters for their support in making this year's Gala such a meaningful evening for Houston's design community.

1 **Parker and Brittny Jordan, Tera and Tuan Tran, and David and Michelle Wright.**

2 **Juliè A. Gauthier**

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6 **Angie Chen and Courtney Tardy**

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11 **Larry and Charlotte Whaley, Ed and Gwen Emmett**

12 **Linda and Dick Sylvan**

13 **Sylvester Turner**

14 **Ed and Gwen Emmett**

15 **Richard and Beth Morris**

16 **Marley Lott**

17 **Maria Nicanor welcomes Sylvester Turner**

18 **Susan and Raymond Brochstein**

19 **Maria Nicanor**

20 **Ed Emmett and Phoebe Tudor**

21 **Maggie Bryan, Juliè A. Gauthier, and Meredith Stuart**

22 **Ernesto Alfaro and Marie Rodriguez**

23 **Maria Nicanor, Sarah Whiting, and Phoebe and Bobby Tudor**


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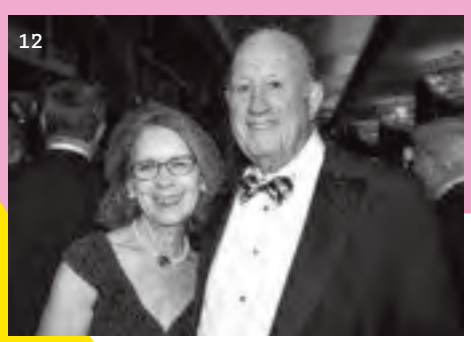

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Photos by Claudia Casbarian, Raj Mankad and Shawna Forney

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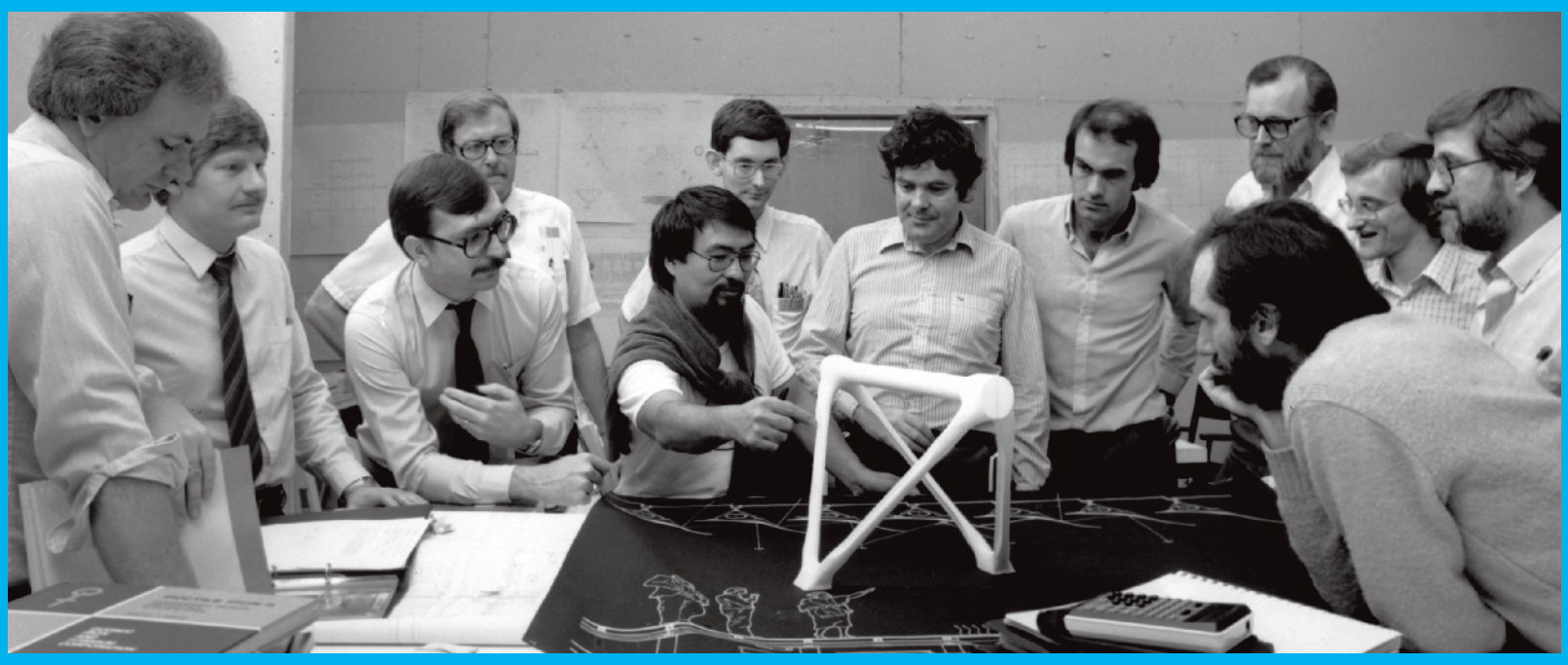
Rice Design Alliance, formed within Rice Architecture in 1972, facilitates an actionable understanding of how design influences the built and natural environment.

Rice Design Alliance empowers academia, architecture/engineering/construction practitioners, and the broader Houston community to transform our city into a better place to live and a model for twenty-first-century design.

MEMBER PROFILE: LARRY WHALEY

by Dan Singer



Menil design team inspecting model, from left: Ed Huckaby, Larry Whaley, Leland Turner, unknown, Shunji Ishada, unknown, Peter Rice, Neil Noble, Renzo Piano, Paul Kelly, Alistair Guthrie, and Tom Barker. Photo by David Crossley, courtesy of Menil Archives, The Menil Collection, circa 1981.

Before Larry Whaley had begun looking for his second job in Houston, he got a dinner invitation from Aubrey Gentry and Gene Haynes, friends and former fellow colleagues of his at Ellisor Engineers. Haynes and Gentry had left the firm a few months before while Larry was in his fifth year there. It was his first employer since graduating from Rice's Master of Science in Civil Engineering program. Accompanied by his wife of six months, Charlotte, Whaley arrived at Gentry's house where he suspected a job offer was on the menu —one, he says, "I was pretty sure I was going to decline." Although he was only 30, Ellisor Engineers had Whaley working as a principal engineer on several highrise office buildings in Houston. He didn't want to scale down to the smaller projects Gentry & Haynes, Inc. were designing. But, Gentry and Haynes surprised him. They were not offering him a job, he recalls, they were offering him a partnership. The two senior colleagues had already secured a loan that would allow Whaley to buy a third of their business. It was too good a deal for him to pass up.

Together they established Gentry, Haynes and Whaley, Structural Engineers. They were ambitious from the start though it didn't pay off immediately. "We were bold and confident enough to call on firms developing large projects" says Whaley. "They were courteous, but it was 'get a portfolio and come back.' They were not going to give us a high-rise building without a portfolio." So, the three partners developed a new strategy. "We focused on calling on and establishing relationships with new firms in Houston led by young leaders – The Woodlands, Trammell Crow, Transwestern, and the Hines subsidiary, Sugarland Properties. Much like their own firm, these clients were just getting started in Houston in the early 1980s. When Aubrey left the firm some years later, the firm became Haynes Whaley Associates, Inc. (HWA).

Then a career changing opportunity struck. Renzo Piano came to Houston looking for a structural engineering partner to work with Ove Arup of England on a museum in the Montrose area of town for Madame Dominique de Menil to exhibit, store and preserve the Menil art collection. When Renzo selected Richard Fitzgerald & Partners to be the architect of record for the project that opened the door for HWA to be interviewed for the structural engineer of record. "They invited us to chat, and they picked us!" recalls Whaley.

Whaley went by the Menil recently to take a look at that milestone project. It brought back memories of enormous professional challenges and solutions produced by the team of engineers at HWA working in conjunction with Peter Rice at Arup. Looking at the crop of "leaves" on the building's roof, he traced the path of the three-dimensional truss components that support the glass roof. The ferro-cement leaves, that diffuse light into the museum, work in tension as a bottom cord with the three-dimensional cast ductile iron webs and top cords to transfer the roof loads to a network of steel columns. No building codes recognized such a structure, and the only way the design team could get approval by the City of Houston was to conduct load testing of the fully assembled structural truss assemblies. The tests proved the system would perform as designed and the structural system was approved. The ferro-cement leaves were fabricated in Leeds England and the ductile iron elements were fabricated at foundries in the United States. All elements were shipped to the site, assembled, and lifted into place.

"It was a milestone project for HWA," said Whaley, "because it opened our eyes to a whole new concept of how you collaborate to make great buildings happen." The client is the driver of great design. Madame de Menil wanted something very special, a museum that would allow the art to be viewed during the day under natural light without the art being damaged by the ultraviolet light. Renzo's architecture coupled with the Arup and Haynes Whaley structural creativity and bold ingenuity made it happen. That ingenuity came naturally to the international crew of Piano, Arup, and fellow structural partner Peter Rice. After two weeks in England and Italy discussing the design process and experiencing many enjoyable evenings, Whaley says "we all bought into the process." Serving as the structural engineer of record for The Menil Collection emboldened Haynes Whaley to quickly reach for a higher tier of projects.

As more and more of HWA's clients sought projects featuring something unique, Whaley said they felt confident that the firm could deliver without running out the budget or the clock. This confident attitude served the firm well and the firm grew dramatically. A recent example of a commission that was won through HWA's emphasis on their collaborative nature is the new Exxon Mobil Campus in Springwood Village in North Harris County, Texas.

ExxonMobil's stated goal for the welcome building was to give a first impression of, "How did they do that?" and that a thoughtful person would be able to say, "Oh, that is how they did it." The firm worked with Pickard Chilton and Gensler, the architect of record, to incorporate fifty-foot deep mega-trusses as part of the architecture to efficiently carry the full weight of two cantilevers from each side of the building with an oculus that floats across the middle, while managing construction cambers and service load deflections.

Over the years, HWA's creative ingenuity and willingness to explore new methods and materials has been applied to many other projects including The Hobby Center, The Children's Museum, 609 Main, Washington D.C.'s Market Square and The Museum of Fine Arts new Glassell School of Art and The Nancy and Rich Kinder Building. Haynes Whaley Associates was acquired in October 2013 by Cardno, an international multi-discipline engineering firm that began in 1945 as a structural engineering firm in Brisbane, Australia. Whaley says "the merger with Cardno, who has locations throughout the United States, teamed with Haynes Whaley as their sole structural engineering practice in the United States, will be the foundation to establish a greater national structural engineering presence going forward."

Larry retired from Cardno at the end of June 2017. He remains active in the community by serving on several boards and supporting numerous philanthropic organizations.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN THE UNITED STATES: TWO CASE STUDIES

by Raj Mankad

CASE STUDY 1: RE-LOCATE KIVALINA

"It uplifts the community ... a simple renovation, to transform it into art, it is an incredible feeling. We are used to houses that ruined our community."

Kivalina, Alaska is a village on a barrier island, about 500 Inupiat people live there, the average highs are below freezing six months out of the year, and the average number of cars per family is zero. The differences with Houston are vast, but the similarities hit you like thunderbolts.

First, a design story. In 2015, with a grant from the ArtPlace America's Creative Placemaking program, the Kivalina Community Center was refurbished with a new skylight, an accessible porch with perforated metal screens, structural insulated panels to keep the heat in, a new kitchen, a new office for relocation planning, and space for archives — small upgrades on a shoestring budget, all of $250,000, that were designed by Klaus Mayer and Michael Gerace. The non-profit organizations, Re-Locate Kivalina and Architecture Without Borders Austria, provided key support as well.

"When public funds are used to build anything like the community center, the people who bid for those jobs have to go as low as possible, as required by regulation, and we get a plain old box building," says Colleen Swan, an Inupiaq who lives in Kivalina and who spoke with *Cite* by phone. "When architects transform a box building, it is an incredible experience, we've never had that experience before. It uplifts the community ... a simple renovation, to transform it into art, it is an incredible feeling. We are used to houses that ruined our community."

Now some history. The Inupiat moved seasonally, following caribou and fishing during the summer, and whales in the winter, until 1905 when the United States government

required families to send their children to school in Kivalina or face stiff penalties including prison.

"We are not here by choice, we were forced to be here," says Swan.

Government-built single-family housing replaced the traditional multi-family sod house.

"My happiest memories are living in a sod house," says Swan. "I spent the first seven years of my life in a sod house with grandparents and parents. A one room building, half built into the ground, with three families at one time ... I recognized a long time ago that if you want to write about a culture like ours, the places where we live, the environment, hunting, camping on the ice, it can only be done by the Inupiat — if you translate the stories from Inupiaq to English word for word, it is flat. You had to have lived this life to write about it for the story to have substance."

With rising temperatures, the sea ice that protected the barrier island is not forming to the thickness that it once did and, every fall and spring, intense storms are hammering Kivalina. In addition, with the threat of sea level rise, the submergence of the barrier island itself looms. Government agencies and banks are unwilling to invest in the village, which lacks running water and sewage.

Contested visions. A major study by the Army Corps of Engineers produced a plan to move Kivalina inland at a projected cost in the hundreds of millions.

As an alternative, some elders have identified a site by the water on the mainland that, although it lies with mapped floodplains, has not flooded. An adjacent lagoon provides both access and protection from the water. In addition, Mayer is working collaboratively with Kivalina community members on a "low-tech/high-tech" update of the sod house.

The Inupiat in Kivalina still live in multigenerational arrangements but are crammed into single-family houses that are not energy efficient. Construction costs for relocating Kivalina are enormous, in part, because both materials and skilled labor must be flown in.

The updated sod house keeps families together by providing private spaces arranged around a communal kitchen. Costs are lowered by building with mycelium building blocks made by crushing locally available material such as shipping waste and tundra, and binding it together with fungus. Google it — the material is still being tested but could be deployed soon.

Super-insulated windows are oriented to the south to maximize exposure to the sun. The first floor is partially sunken in the ground to minimize heat loss. A heat exchange moves air below the foundation to reduce heating costs in the winter and keep the tundra holding it all up from melting in the summer. The low-sloped room allows the houses to be clustered without shading neighbors from daylight.

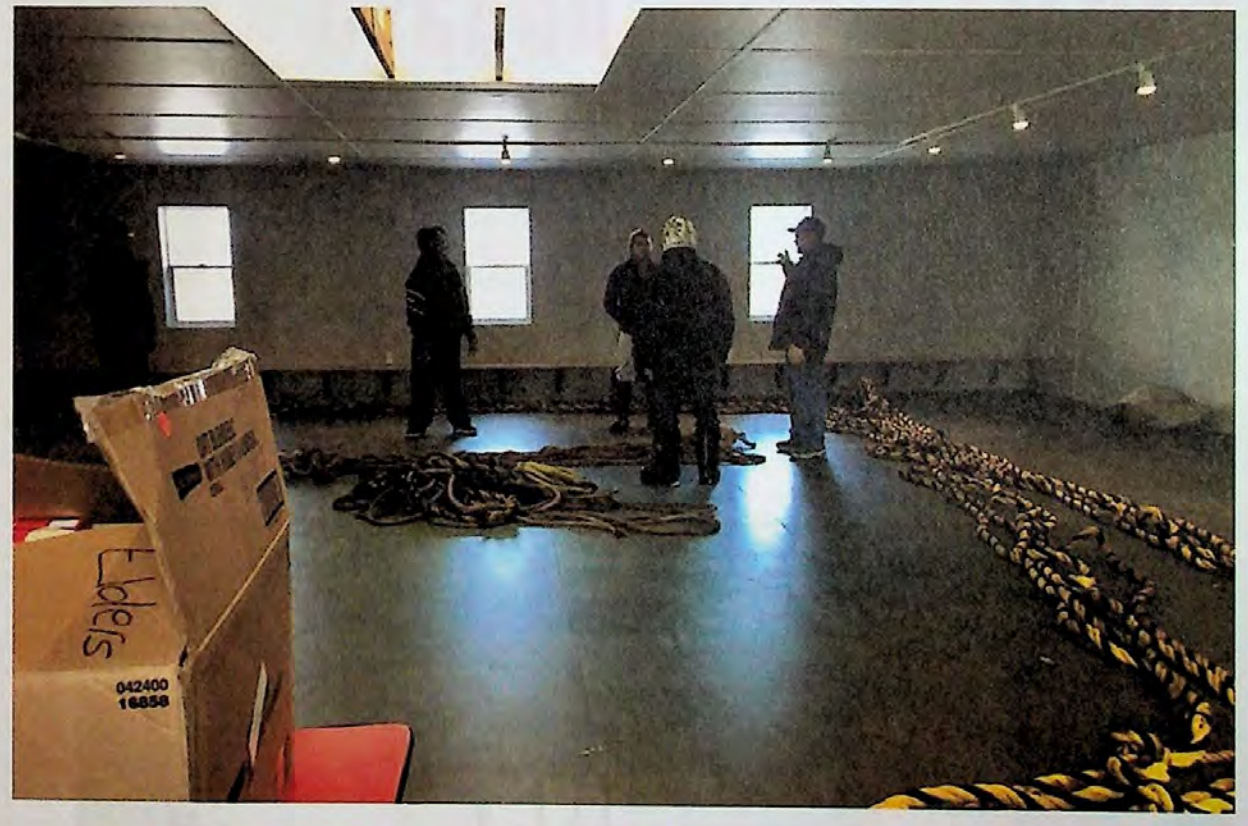
"I'm proposing a net zero energy house," says Mayer. "We are reengineering the sod to get more insulation value out of it.

The local materials and simplicity of the construction would dramatically lower costs, and enable residents to maintain the buildings. If only the shell is constructed and residents carry out the finishes, costs could go down further and bring about the type of results celebrated in similar projects such as architect Alejandro Aravena's "half-finished" houses in Chile.

"You are what you eat," says Swan. "This is what I tell a lot of people when they ask too many personal questions. The reason we survived in the Arctic is because we eat food from the Arctic. If the animals can survive so can we. We can build from our own environment [too] ... The Army Corps of Engineers think we don't know enough ... We have knowledge of the environment. We see the effects of the changing climate. We use our knowledge of the environment. When you move people, you are changing lives. There is more to moving communities than just moving structures. There are not just changes to the community you live in because of the changing climate, but changes also to the site you are moving to. When people talk about moving, they may want to consider those things. The whole world is impacted."

When asked for images of his work in Kivalina, Mayer mentions a snapshot posted on Facebook. "You wouldn't necessarily put the photograph in an architecture magazine, but it is satisfying to see the community center building used for so many aspects of community life, not just dancing but practical aspects like making preparations for whale camp."

The Inupiat have survived so much already. Houstonians could learn from how they are planning for the next storms.



Clockwise from top left: Location Kivalina, Alaska; Kivalina Biochar Reactor converts solid human waste into a carbon-rich, pathogen-free byproduct; Celebration at Kivalina Community Center; Whaling ropes in the center; Exterior of renovated center; a Hunting camp. Images courtesy Re-Locate Kivalina.

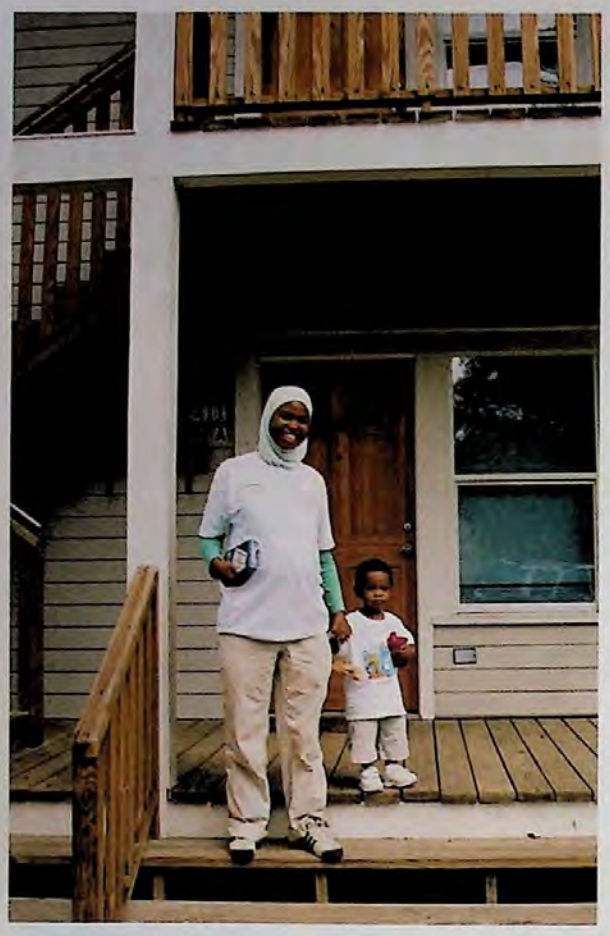
Clockwise from top left: Location of Houston, Texas; Residents at Francis Street Row House CDC property; Cleveland Turner aka "the Flower Man" with friend; and shared backyards. Photos courtesy Project Row Houses.

CASE STUDY 2: PROJECT ROW HOUSES

In Third Ward, a historic neighborhood in Houston built by African Americans after Emancipation, an arts organization has convened stakeholders; articulated a shared vision for redevelopment on the terms of the longstanding community; raised substantial funds from foundations; hired experts in finance, real estate, and architecture; and produced transformative results. In short, artists are not just at the table. They made and set the table.

First, the origin story: In 1993, seven visionary African American artists — James Bettison (1958-1997), Bert Long, Jr. (1940-2013), Jesse Lott, Rick Lowe, Floyd Newsum, Bert Samples, and George Smith — recognized real potential in a block and a half of derelict shotgun houses at the corner of Holman and Live Oak in the historic African American neighborhood of Third Ward, Houston. They didn't know it yet, but their efforts would influence and inspire generations of artists and arts organizations to work within urban communities throughout the world. Two blocks of 22 cottages, built in the 1930s as rental housing for African American families, were renovated by volunteers with support from a number of local and national funders. At the time, land values were so low that Lowe has said in half-jest that owners would beg to give Project Row Houses (PRH) property.

Architect Sheryl Vazquez at the University of Houston played a key role early on with the adaptive reuse of the buildings and site. PRH turned the houses into spaces for art installations that are open to the public at no charge and used others as homes for young mothers. The repetition of the gabled house fronts echoes a series of paintings by John Biggers. In addition to this iconic image, the deliberate joining of interior and exterior, and the creation of shared outdoor areas (front/back porches and joint backyard spaces) promotes community cohesion. This shared space, perhaps, is more important



"Over time, Row House CDC has become independent from PRH, setting a precedent for artists injecting areas beyond their training with fresh approaches that eventually spin off into independent projects."

to preserving the character of the built environment in Third Ward than the specific (historical) form of row houses.

Expanding housing options: PRH and Rice Building Workshop (now called Rice Construct) collaborated to create a series of row house-inspired duplexes to provide affordable housing for people in the community. In 2003, Row House Community Development Corporation (CDC) was created to act as a sister organization of PRH to manage the affordable housing program. The two-story duplexes on Francis Street are iterations of a design developed by Rice Architecture students under the direction of Danny Samuels and Nonya Grenader, and take inspiration from the row house with generous porches and shared backyards. Over time, Row House CDC has become more independent from PRH, setting a precedent for a pattern of artists injecting areas beyond their training and expertise with fresh approaches that eventually spin off into independent projects.

Incubating artists, small businesses, and nonprofits: From 1939 to 1970, many music legends including Ray Charles, Bill Doggett, Guitar Slim, Etta James, Jimmy Reed, Big Joe Turner, and T-Bone Walker played in the El Dorado Ballroom, a streamlined, modernistic nightclub designed by Lenard Gabert. In 1999, the building was acquired by Project Row Houses and has been renovated over time. The first floor of the building, Delia's Lounge, and the row houses have sheltered a number of enterprises at their early stages including Row House CDC, Workshop Houston, Sankofa Research Institute, Antenna, Otabenga Jones & Associates, NuWaters Co-op, and Crumbville, Texas. Rick Lowe no longer has a leadership role at Project Row Houses. His work in other parts of the world, including Greece, and his professorship at the University of Houston represents yet another successful incubation, of a theory and practice that, one hopes, can be adapted to other communities.

Remaking the process of gentrification. In recent years, land prices have shot up in Third Ward. The neighborhood's proximity to Downtown attracts developers who build three-story, luxury townhouses. The intentions behind efforts to improve neighborhood amenities have been turned on their head. Emancipation Park is at the heart of the neighborhood's history, and now is the pivot point for its contested future.

A community of formerly enslaved people purchased the 10 acres of Emancipation Park in 1872 as a place to celebrate Juneteenth, the anniversary of the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas. In 1916, the land was donated to the City of Houston and became the first public park open to African Americans. A 1939 plan by Hare & Hare organized a swimming pool, community center, and other amenities around a central spine. A major remaking of the park, designed by Philip Freelon of Perkins+Will, was completed in 2017 after decades of community organizing with a mix of foundation, state, and local funding. Even before the new iteration of the park opened, many within the Third Ward feared that the remade park would accelerate displacement of the very people whose emancipation it celebrates.

Artist as urban planner. Beginning with an MIT studio taught by Rick Lowe, PRH helped spur the Emancipation Economic Development Council (EEDC), a coalition countering displacement through a robust community-led effort focused on affordable housing, economic development, cultural preservation, health, and social mobility that has been supported by funders such as the Surdna Foundation, Houston Endowment, and the Kinder Foundation.

Dr. Assata Richards, a longtime resident of Third Ward and chair of the EEDC, says, "The EEDC is not just trying to make suggestions regarding the gentrification set to overwhelm the Northern Third Ward, we are remaking the process of gentrification itself."

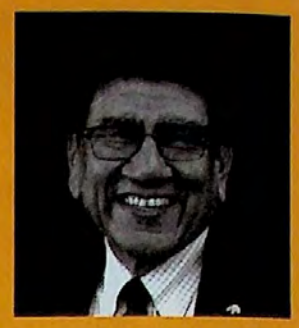
The first success came before the opening of Emancipation Park when the EEDC played a role in having Dowling Street itself renamed. Originally called Broadway, then renamed after Confederate Lt. Richard Dowling in 1892, it was renamed Emancipation Avenue in 2017. Other successes include gaining status as a Texas Main Street Program; establishing the first civic club composed primarily of renters; taking steps towards the launch of a financial opportunity center; securing commitments for employment from Texas Southern University, University of Houston, Hermann Memorial Hospital, and Houston First; holding the monthly Free Market Square on every third Saturday near Emancipation Park; and playing a role in the revival of Riverside General Hospital, which Harris County is reopening through a grant from the Houston Endowment.

Back to Housing. Remaking gentrification (which means curbing displacement), however, comes back to the preservation and construction of affordable housing. A large part of the historic African-American parts of Third Ward is owned by churches, the Midtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, Project Row Houses, Row Houses CDC, and other institutions. A comprehensive planning effort that looks at all this land together is led by Curtis Davis, whose background includes architecture degrees at Rice, MIT, and Harvard and a long list of senior leadership positions including Project Executive for the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Like all development projects, the details are held close to the chest, but EEDC is putting together what rarely happens in any U.S. city, especially Houston—a sophisticated, comprehensive, and funded plan for affordable housing.

IS THIS A HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT?

A Creative Placemaking Conversation
Conducted by Jamie Bennett
Transcribed and adapted by Margy Waller

Jamie Bennett
I am Executive Director of ArtPlace America, a ten-year collaboration among a number of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions. We began our work as an organization in 2011, and will finish in 2020. Our mission is to position arts and culture as a core sector of community planning and development.



Roberto Bedoya
My business card says Cultural Affairs Manager, City of Oakland. I manage the Cultural Arts Division for the city. A lot of what I do is ask questions. It's all about the support structure for individual artists and how artists work in communities and the power of locale. And the poetic will of a city. It can be reduced to empowering talent and empowering communities.

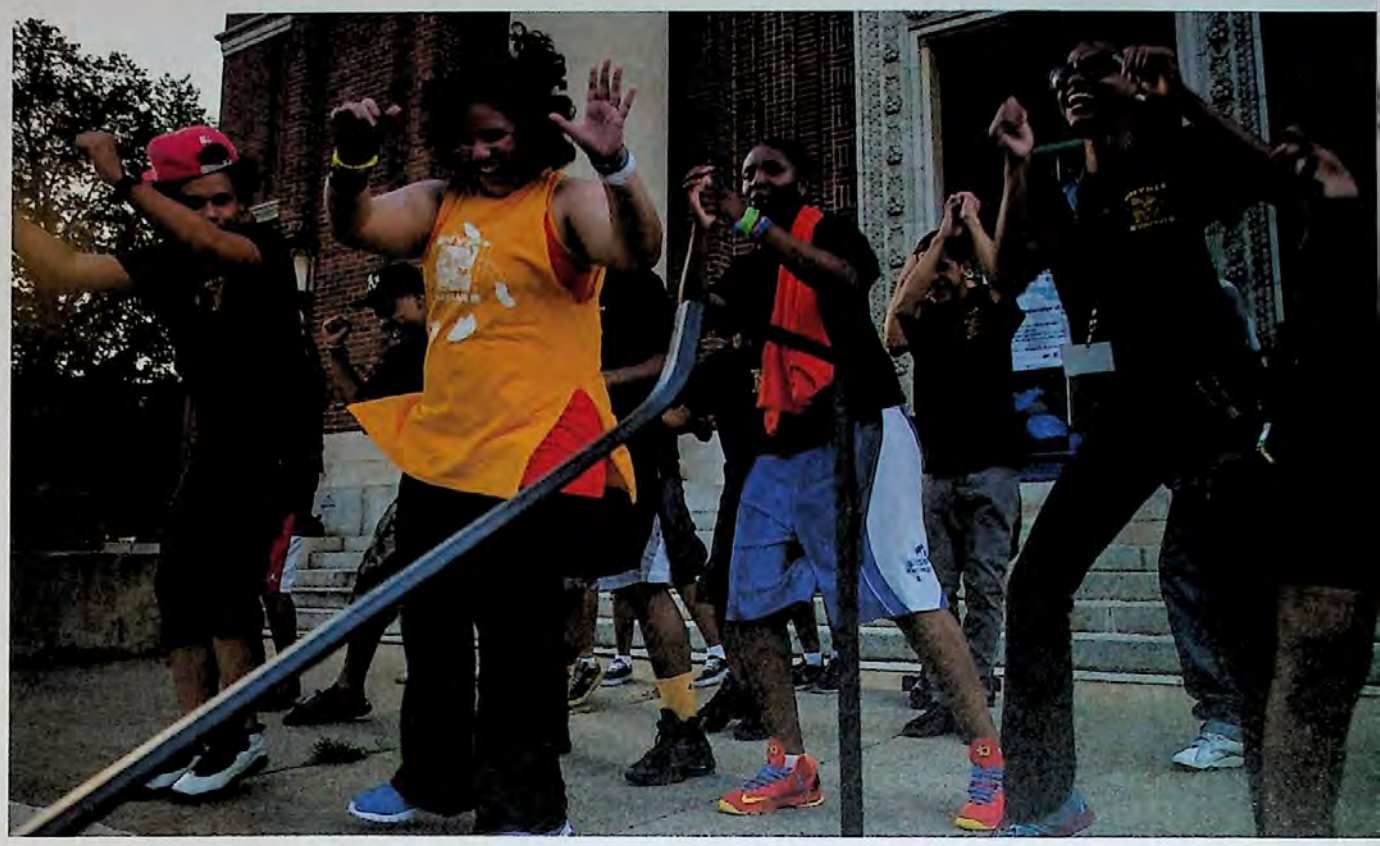
Sixto Wagan
I am Director for the Center of Art and Social Engagement at the Catherine G. McGovern College for the Arts at the University of Houston. I come to this work as a former artist, as a curator, and nonprofit leader. I look at how a local community like Houston fits into a regional and national conversation.

Juanita Hardy
My business card says that I am Senior Visiting Fellow for Creative Placemaking for Urban Land Institute (ULI), a global nonprofit concerned with responsible landuse. It's a membership organization that provides research and programs to its members. I am part of a project funded by the Kresge Foundation that's exploring the use of art and culture on real estate development projects and the state of ULI today.

Judilee Reed
I was Program Director of the Thriving Cultures program at the Surdna Foundation. Our work focused on increasing the real and perceived value that artists create in their communities. We worked nationally. We applied a social justice lens to everything we did and within the arts program. And we had a very wide definition of artists that can include design shops, designers, and other kinds of cultural producers.

Maria Rosario Jackson
One business card is Arizona State University. My work is helping ensure that the next generation of urban planners, social workers, designers, and artists all understand the power of arts and culture and design in the building of healthy communities. The second business card I carry is with the Kresge Foundation as Senior Advisor, and I work primarily with the arts and culture team in strategy development.

As Executive Director of ArtPlace America, Jamie Bennett travels the length and breadth of the country, talking to a wide audience about the integration of arts culture in community and economic development. He organized and moderated a discussion with leaders in the field including Roberto Bedoya (Cultural Affairs Director for the City of Oakland), Maria Rosario Jackson (Kresge Foundation, and a professor at Arizona State University), Juanita Hardy (Urban Land Institute), Sixto Wagan (CASE, University of Houston), and Judilee Reed (Surdna Foundation). This conversation surveys the current state(s) of the practice(s) in arts-driven community development: who are some of the people doing this work, what are the words used to describe it and what do those connote, how do the values of equity and social justice intersect with the pressures of real estate and economic development?



As part of Artes Pa'lante, Aimee Tejada leads community zumba classes on the steps of Blessed Sacrament Church in Boston's Latin Quarter. Photo by Mark Saperstein, courtesy ArtPlace America.

Jamie: We're coming together as a group to talk about the intersection of arts and community, to talk about the intersection of the people and the built environment, to talk about the intersection of culture and the natural environment, and I think language and precedents are both important. When you think about this work, what is the language you use to describe it? How do you invite others into the work and what invitation do you use?

Maria: What is common with everyone is that the first step in getting people to understand this work is to make sure that they're taking an expansive notion of arts and culture. So I find myself, regardless of who I'm talking to, having to say something about who artists are, the broad range of folks that I think exist and work in really important ways under this umbrella, and bringing all those under the same tent, to get people to recognize that it's a bigger universe than they may have started thinking about—who artists are and what art, culture, and design actually comprises.

Then it's a question of figuring out what's the lowest hanging branch in order to establish a connection. If I'm speaking to people in the community development field, I'm meeting them where they are by recognizing that they likely have some interest in the idea of comprehensiveness. Being able to point out that comprehensiveness also includes consideration of the role of arts, culture, and design in healthy places is an opening for speaking with people in community development and planning fields.

With artists, there are many ways that artists pursue their careers and some artists are really interested in this kind of intersectional work and other artists aren't, and that's okay. But also, for many artists, who might not have done it before, the leap into contributing to communities is not a big one because it's part of what fuels their motivation in some cases.

Roberto: Oh, language keeps me up at night. Maria and many of you know that I just trip out on what we talk about a great deal, and I've generated some common narratives just to keep the frame open for actions, and actions may be policy, artwork. Whether it's placemaking or placekeeping, or whether it's belonging and disbelonging, in the context of this work, I've pushed those terms out.

I want to circle back to one of the challenges in my current position. I went to a meeting yesterday with my boss and they started teasing me about, "Oh, you're the policy, you're the language dude. Tell me what policy placekeeping means?" I just love problemitizing it. I don't have to come up with the answers necessarily ... here in this circle, I'd say that I love the fact that we're all puzzling this out.

I remember my conversations with Maria, about when I sit with the Department of Transportation, in city government, and the notion of placemaking comes up, it's very attached to paving the intersections. Some very materialistic action. While I would say, "You know what? An artist would think about routes, how people move through the city, routes of avoidance, how kids cut through this parking lot to get over there, 'cause they didn't want to deal with the dog, or they didn't want to wind up dealing with the crazy old man, or they don't want to deal with the homeless. An artist thinks about routes, which is different than what a city manager and a planner may think about.

Jamie: Juanita, you're working with real estate development. You're thinking about folks who, I don't think of as using words like counter-narrative, who don't necessarily know what's invoked by placekeeping. When you're talking about these intersections with folks who focus about how projects pencil out, what do you call this work? How do you sell it?

Juanita: In the ULI world, placemaking is something that is well known to the real estate development community. They've been doing placemaking dating back to the early, I want to say 1930s, when its value was demonstrated by one of ULI's founders, who created this mall, inspired by the great cities in Spain, and people flocked there for the experience and they still do today.

The way we discuss it is as an innovation in placemaking. It's about establishing a sense of place and doing it in a way that attracts people to the place, that generates interest, excitement that uplifts the place and the surrounding community.

We present the value proposition of doing this for the community, for the developer, and other stakeholders. We are engaged in a conversation around best practices and how we do this in a way that the developers benefit, the community benefits, you bring in new, exciting energy and money for the community that uplifts the community, but you do it responsibly so that you don't displace the people that are there.

Jamie: Sixto, when you think about this practice and how it plays out in arts communities and for artists, what is the language conversation, what is the work called, how do you invite people to this conversation?

Sixto: We do continue to use the language of creative placemaking, because this is actually the way it is, this is the dominant paradigm. We think about the ways you are actually going to be part of it. Or what ways are you going to be rolled over by it?

I think it is great to think about best practices and think about responsibilities in this work, but I think that too many times, particularly in Houston, it's presented as a very quick fix. There

are the quick projects that seemed really great, and then months later someone asks about results. We have a lot of history about not only the good ideas, but also unfortunately, some bad models have happened. That history gets in the way when we use the language of creative placemaking.

Jamie: Judilee, as you think about these language issues playing out, these words playing out in philanthropy, does the language matter, does it change how you as a foundation professional engage?

Judilee: When we do our work, we start with the language that comes from the community. We ask them to tell us what they're up to, what they're trying to do, what problems they're trying to solve, and how they're trying to solve it. Then we work back from there. If we're successful, the value proposition actually creates dividends across a number of dimensions.

That is somewhat different than, for example, the reasons why we would participate in an initiative like ArtPlace which is very much driven by creating a specific set of activities that are described under an umbrella of creative placemaking. These approaches are central to this objective of trying to unlock the imagination of non-arts operators at a community level in thinking about the dynamics or the intersections of artists and cultural production in relationship to their goals.

So it operates both in terms of how you can inspire the imagination of folks who may not already be working with artists and cultural producers as well as looking at how the cultural producers and artists themselves describe their practices.

Is This a Property Rights Movement or a Human Rights Movement?

Judilee: When Roberto talks about trying to problematize, I always feel like in the back of his mind, he's both trying to bring forth the voice of the critic while also trying to make way for those who don't see themselves within those frames and inviting the opportunity for them to describe what it is they do. I feel like if we're doing our job as a philanthropy, we also invite the same discussion.

Jamie: Roberto, before I move on to the next question, is Judilee, right? Is that what you're trying to do?

Roberto: On a good day. You gave me an opportunity to problematize, so I'm going to do it right now. What I have discovered here in my community—and Maria Jackson and I have talked about this a lot—is whether creative placemaking is a property rights movement or a human rights movement.

When I talk to developers, they're not articulating creative placemaking as a human rights movement, and maybe public housing advocates are, and that's a different sort of narrative.

In this particular moment in time, when development is happening—the community, whether it's the artist community, neighborhood, or refugee community, they see placemaking as displacement.

Who Has an Equity Approach to Arts and Community Work?

Jamie: I want to make sure that we spend a little time on gentrification. Talk about displacement. Questions about who decides, who pays, who benefits.

Before we go to there, I'd love for us to think about real world places where folks are getting this right, where projects begin with human beings, where they begin with the residents of a community, where there really is an equitable value proposition and equitable decision-making.

Juanita: One project that comes to mind is called Monroe Street Market. It is in Washington D.C. in the Brookland community. This 250-million-dollar mixed-use, transit-oriented development project has 27 artist studios on the ground floor of two of the buildings. There's an art walk. There's a community art center. There is a stage. There are athletic facilities. There is a lot of public space, walking paths, and bike paths, that surround this community.

Two developers, Bozzuto Group, a large local developer, and Abdo, a smaller developer that had the idea for this project, decided, instead of putting retail on these ground floors-of two of the buildings, they would put these 27 artist studios. The studios are affordable and the developer has stated this will be in perpetuity, meaning they will always be affordable. They will never get pushed out. They are in this community to stay.

Maria: A project that I really admire, and there are many, but one that comes to mind right this moment, is the Chinatown Community Development Center in San Francisco. I think for me it's such a poignant example because it's an example of both placemaking and placekeeping. Chinatown has immense pressures in San Francisco, given the real estate market there. There's a deep commitment for Chinatown not to be erased. At the same time there's recognition that this is a living community and that healthy places evolve.

Their strategy is rooted in understanding the importance of control over narrative of place, recognition that a way of keeping narrative is also manifest in built environment. So, how a place looks, reads, feels is part of your narrative, your cultural narrative.

In San Francisco, one of the things I was really impressed with as part of the Kresge support to this organization, is the learning and evaluation work. We were asking practitioners from many organizations about how they go about learning. I was struck by one of the Chinatown staff representatives who talked about how the executive director leads and encourages walking through the neighborhood. There's something about having that kind of a skin in the game and that kind of daily awareness of this place, not just this physical place, but this historic place and this evolving place, that seemed really rich and important to me.

The other thing that has really impressed me is the tactics that they use to enliven community engagement and how in some ways there's a seamlessness between artistic and creative practice and civic practice. To participate and engage in arts culture, the creation of how a community looks and feels, is part of your civic responsibility.

Jamie: Judilee, you also get to look nationally, but you don't just look at cities. So, when you were thinking about places in this country that don't necessarily look like Washington, DC or San Fran-

"This 250-million-dollar mixed-use, transit-oriented development project has 27 artist studios on the ground floor of two of the buildings. There's an art walk. There's a community art center. There is a stage. There are athletic facilities. There is a lot of public space, walking paths, and bike paths, that surround this community." Courtesy Ted Eytan.

cisco, are you seeing anything that you would love to hold up and say, "This is the kind of thing we want to see more of?"

Judilee: Yeah, definitely. Thanks for inviting the question around the non-urban approach to this work, because I think it's there where the lack of density can become central to how you address opportunities in these places. And when you asked the question, Jamie, the first project that came to my mind was one that the First People's Fund has just completed called Rolling Rez Arts, which is very much a response to both the geographic constraints of living and working on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, as well as the real needs for cultural producers to have access to resources in spite of that geographic challenge.

So, what the First People's Fund has done, in partnership with a number of folks including the Lakota Federal Credit Union and ArtSpace, is customize a van that could go to artists wherever they are across the Indian reservation and deliver art, business training, banking services, and a number of other network and information developing strategies.

First People's Fund found through their research that over 50 percent of the households on Pine Ridge have home-based businesses and of that 51 percent, almost 80 percent are creating art. So they have an artistic practice and they describe that practice as a business—it's a very high number. The challenge is that over half of them have incomes of less than $10,000.

What draws me to this example is that the problem solving is coming from the folks who understand it firsthand, the people who have been working in this community, or are of this community. They are perhaps best situated for figuring out, not only what the most meaningful artistic practice would be to bring through this bus portal, as well as how to work with local banks and figure out how to create banking services on a van. I mean, it's very compelling.

Jamie: Sixto, you're the home team. Tell us, are we getting it right in Houston? Is there something happening in Houston that we should hold up as a national example?

Sixto: Well, we've held Project Row Houses as an international example for many years. It has been a pioneer in this work, and also such an advocate, not only for the community, but also for artists who are able to do this work. Regarding the university's partnership with Row Houses, we want to know how to look at the process that they created, this collaborative and community-based process, and ask whether it is replicable. Or is it very much a Houston-based situation that's depends on Rick Lowe and that community of artist founders? It is a significant example of placekeeping that has been parlayed into civic outcomes.

I'm very interested in their current work in terms of the Emancipation Economic Development Council, and that Project Row Houses as a non-profit arts organization is key to bringing the religious communities and the businesses together in this artist-led equitable neighborhood community development endeavor to preserve community without gentrification.

Human Rights and the Dramaturgy of Public Policy

Jamie: Let's dive in there for a minute. There's a guy that I think many of us know named Andy Shallal who ran for mayor of Washington DC and he's a poet who's also a small business owner; he owns and runs the restaurant and bookstore Busboys and Poets. One of the things he talked about having learned in running for mayor is that White folks live in neighborhoods and Black folks live in communities. This makes me think about the difference between the people-first approach and a built-environment-first approach. Roberto, this seems like what you're getting at in terms of your human rights and property rights formulation. But talk about the difference. Who do you see starting with the people-first approach? Who are the kinds of people that you see originating projects and thinking in that way?

Roberto: I think that my preoccupation or reflections about placemaking as a human rights movement is also linked to the storytelling I was talking about: creating the platform for civic engagement work.

Oakland does not lack in civic self-esteem. I got a community that's always walking around with a clenched fist and they're just up in my face, God bless them all. And I love them. At the same time, we recognize the skillset needed to move zoning laws after Ghost Ship, that tragedy just generated so much civic chaos around zoning and spatial relationships. That is still a hot button issue. So for me, thinking about artist communities and thinking about east Oakland, how they are organizing themselves, it's really about trying to create agency and developing that skillset so that they feel empowered.

Now that I'm in government, I like to think about the dramaturgy of public policy and how artists come to understand how law is made or policy constructed and what's in their toolbox. If you think about dramaturgy in terms of space, stage, script, policy, actors, that's tools that they often

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Oakland Avenue Farm in Detroit, Michigan. Photo by Michelle and Chris Gerard.

have. So when my community organizing group just gets really frustrated and wants to change how things are moving, I often have to say, "Let's step back and look what's in your toolbox. You're a performing artist, you know about stages."

Jamie: Juanita, I'm particularly interested in real estate developers, because they're maybe one of the few businesses that can't pick up its assets and go somewhere else. If you own buildings, if you own land, you can't offshore that. You can't move all your buildings to another town that gives you a better tax break or something else. So real estate developers, the ULI community, are deeply invested in their places, or deeply invested in their communities, and yet also have this very specific profit mandate. So how do you see folks balancing the profit imperative and the commitment to place?

Juanita: It's a good question. What I have seen in the short one year that I've been at ULI is a great deal of interest on the part of developers, ULI members, to understand how to do this and do this well, and do this profitably.

The one thing that comes to mind right now is Walter Reed, which is a hospital complex in the northwest part of DC with a team of developers, Urban Atlantic Hines, and Triden, creating a mixed-use development project in the historic property. They decided that they were going to have art and culture be a major feature of this project. They decided to honor the history of this place as a federal medical facility and also bring things to the community that will help uplift the community.

They tapped two non-profits to help them in that. At the southern tip of this development will be an art complex that will include art studios and an incubator space for artists. There'll be artistic way-finding that connects this piece to the other parts of the complex. So they recognized that one important way to honor the history of a place, as well as to support their goals around placemaking and placekeeping, is to engage art and culture, to use art and culture to do that.

What About Gentrification? Where Do Artists Fit?

Jamie: That gets at it exactly. Let's spend some time now on the issues around gentrification, around displacement, around self-determination, around collective efficacy. And Sixto, I might start with you, because one of the things that's fascinating to me as I travel around the country and talk to people about these issues, is that artists are talked about as both gentrifiers and gentrified. Tell us how you've seen this play out.

Sixto: Part of the question is in how the artists are actually thinking of themselves as part of a larger narrative, and if they're only thinking of themselves very specifically in terms of arts production and that creation, versus actually being part of a community.

It is a question of where they are deployed in this process. In what ways have the developers or the community organizers actually established the purpose before artists were at the table? Have they taken their own civic responsibility to be part of those conversations earlier on? Or, in what ways, can they actually disrupt any of these processes so that it becomes a more equitable conversation and so that it's not just about making it all pretty, but actually about these larger questions of equity and a livable community.

Roberto: The disaster of Ghost Ship was a real interesting pivot in the civic life of this city. All of a sudden I found myself going to City Council meetings, zoning meetings, Planning Department meetings. The artist community's there with homeless activists and the refugee community and basically in a unified manner saying, "There's an underground housing market here that you're not dealing with. People are living in garages. People are living in warehouse spaces. People are living in tents. So this collective problem needs to be solved collectively."

Jamie: Judilee, at Surdna, you guys have identified sustainable environments, strong local economies and thriving cultures. You haven't talked about government. You haven't talked about policy.

Judilee: One of the things we're really challenged by in this moment is trying to make peace with whether we're trying to effect incremental change or if we're calling for a revolution.

If you look at a community level where systems are just simply not working, nor have they ever worked for certain populations, is our best chance of success one where we try to implement incremental changes where we're actually bending existing systems so that they work better in support of people?

Or should we be emboldening people to call for that revolution? To call for that kind of tectonic change that's going to reconceive this whole system so that the issue is not just about displacement, it's about the whole thing.

I do know that if I look at our funding portfolio across all three of our programs areas, you see a little bit of both.

So really specifically to some of the things Roberto was talking about, we are supporting an organization that is trying to leverage investment dollars to create a trust model in support of arts and cultural organizations in San Francisco and Oakland. How you can hold property as an asset in perpetuity in support of arts organizations? That's not a revolution. That's really just incremental change that we hope is going to begin to demonstrate or provide the runway to demonstrate all of the other ripple effects of having arts organizations in your community and the benefits that they provide.

Roberto: I did want to talk briefly about the impact of the Community Art Stabilization Trust (CAST) in the Bay Area. This is foundations, real estate developers, community and cultural community, cultural development trying to deal with stabilizing our non-profit sector. They've started off in San Francisco. Now they're working in Oakland. It's small, relatively small money. But they're having a great deal of impact keeping arts and artists in place. And it goes to say Judilee's point about trying to bend ever so slightly that kind of outcome for arts.

Juanita: Creative placemaking, as great as it is, and the many benefits it has provided to communities, that it has had the unintended outcome of gentrification on occasion in my view is not bad. It's not a bad thing. Bringing in new culture, new ideas, new energy that's what we want, right? When we're talking about revitalizing the community we want to bring in all this new good stuff. But we also want to honor and protect what's there, right? And promote what's there.

We don't want to see displacement. How do we avoid displacement? We think about putting plans in place, putting policies in place, collaborating with different partners to ensure that the people that, for example, the people that are there continue to be there. That we're diligent around placekeeping. That we don't drastically change the culture of a place. But we enrich that culture, we think about ways to uplift and enrich and enliven the culture that is there.

Jamie: Maria—Professor Jackson, if you're thinking about these issues of arts, culture and equitable development, gentrification and displacement and you're thinking about what your ASU students need to know about these things, what are the core concepts?

Maria: A first thing is a good grasp of what the issue is with a historical perspective.

The arts and culture stuff is just a piece of it. It tends to be, sometimes, a distraction, I think. Because it can make for an all-consuming story that is quotable and

interesting, but it's a lot more complicated than I think is often made visible. Figuring out how to calibrate those public conversations about the role of arts, culture and design in neighborhood change, period, is something we're still not that good at it.

Is Gentrification the Right Word, or is it Displacement?

Jaime: The words "gentrification" and "displacement" are used interchangeably by some, and for others it is possible to have gentrification without displacement.

Roberto: I hate the term gentrification. It has currency and the press will always run with it.

Years ago when I was in Baltimore, I had a talk about gentrification and this was like a really tired conversation. I said to the audience, 'How many have heard the word rasquachification?' Nobody, nobody had heard it. I'm really concerned more about how vernacular forms of speech happen in neighborhoods and how we validate them. Rasquache is a slang term that talks about how you paint your house bright pink and how you turn your front yard into a little place where you're selling brooms. These are all vernacular forms of speech and these are all vernacular points of neighborhoods and somehow we do nothing to validate these forms of how arts, culture, and design animate city life. There may not be the big box or the remodelized train station. There are these other things. I guess what I'm sort of saying that part of my work is to constantly think about how do we validate what's already got juice.

One last thing. The placekeeping term. Even though I love it, it becomes a form of sentimentality. I go to a black arts cultural district and everybody's basically, saying, 'It's placekeeping.' But it's like they want the old days. They've got all this sentimentality and they've got Black Panther rhetoric behind it as well. Oakland's black population has decreased by 40 percent over the last decade. That's the trauma I'm dealing with in a city that's no longer a black city. So placekeeping becomes a tool, rhetoric to say, 'Hey I'm still alive.' You've got to applaud that but at the same time you all, come on. How do we pivot this to the action world of maintaining city identity?

Juanita: I agree that displacement is a huge issue. Something that we've been talking a lot about the last several months at ULI, and while we may not have a solution for it yet, and there may not be tools that exist yet as to how to address it that we can arm with community leaders and developers and the like, I think the fact that we're having this conversation is a very important one.

Roberto, you have a lot of passion, I hear that. I don't know how you feel about my comment that gentrification—don't think it's a bad word. I think when you talk about revitalizing a community, I think gentrification is exactly what you want, you want to bring in new energy, new people, new whatever to the community. You want to mix it up; you want to make it rich. You don't want to make it an all Chinese community, an all black community. We are a melting pot. You want to bring all of us together in a respectful way. That's why thinking about how to avoid displacement is, I think, where we need to focus our energy.

Roberto: I don't oppose the outcome of wanting a more robust civic life. I do hate the term gentrification. There's no way... If you don't cop to racism and displacement legacy that's built into the meaning of that world, then you're complicit. I want new words and I'm always about new words. Because if gentrification means othering, then it's not a good term.

I dig what you're saying, that at the best part of gentrification you have infrastructure. You have economic vitality. You have social curation. Those are all good things. But I cannot honestly say that I'm going to be a cheerleader for gentrification. I'd be killed in my town.

Maria: When we talk about mitigating "gentrification" or more precisely, loss of affordability and involuntary displacement of long term residents and businesses, I think we need to rethink our aspiration. Too often, the focus is only on preserving affordability. The aspiration can't just be limited to, "you will not be displaced." We can't be satisfied with that. In many communities that are vulnerable, the conditions are the result of historical exclusion from the mainstream socio-economic opportunity structure. We can't be satisfied with just protecting the results of a flawed system and the status quo. We need to aim for, not only protecting affordability, but also for creating opportunity for long standing residents and business owners to build wealth and advance beyond current circumstances. We have to set the bar higher. We are part of the problem if we don't.

Judilee: Yes, I really agree with what Maria is saying, but before she took me to a higher place, I was wrestling with the conversation that Juanita and Roberto were having. One of the key words that Juanita offered was respect. I would say that we have to think about proactive respect, not just a sort of passive, "I respect you. You also exist in this space." I think about the communities where there is change already happening, where there's change that was well programmed by city governments to create diversity of residents and what that means for folks who have been in those communities for generations. They have sent their kids to the community school, they have ... Really, this has been their neighborhood.

While I think that change should be welcomed, I also recognize the enormous challenges of that when we don't recognize the right of everyone to have a sense of belonging and a sense of place. It doesn't always have to be the same definition, right? It doesn't always have to be the same thing and when we forget that, it becomes really this tension of, kind of ... the dominant culture, if you will, over that which is perceived as being weaker.

Sixto: What is the value of homogeneity in a community? Or in a neighborhood? Part of the thing that we're struggling with or that I've been looking at is Houston's segregation and continued segregation in the historic wards and really what does that mean? In what ways have the traditional homogeneity in the wards been a benefit and a method of placekeeping? Because we can see the African-American and Latino communities still have a hard-fought presence in those historic neighborhoods. Whereas the Asian communities no longer have a significant presence inside the Loop, and they've been pushed to outlying suburbs.

Jamie: Projecting into the future, what's next for this conversation, for this community of us, and as part of that thinking, is there a new language? Is there a new way to talk about this work? Is there a new way to frame the conversation that open the door for more thinking?

So thinking forward a year, three years, 10 years, what is it that we need most that's in this conversation? What needs to change most?

Roberto: Maria, first of all, I love this phrase "opportunity structures." Is that a Professor Jackson original?

Maria: No. That's old school planning talk. That's old school planning, sociology, economics.

Roberto: Well, I love it, because in some ways in this current role, I think about creating for the future more robust opportunity structures, to be blunt. I'm doing a cultural plan. So I think about this road map that I've been given and the charge to create for my city.

"I go to a black arts cultural district and everybody's basically, saying, 'It's placekeeping.' But it's like they want the old days. They've got all this sentimentality and they've got Black Panther rhetoric behind it as well. Oakland's black population has decreased by 40 percent over the last decade. That's the trauma I'm dealing with in a city that's no longer a black city. So placekeeping becomes a tool, rhetoric to say, 'Hey I'm still alive.'"

As we speak I got an email from my mayor who basically's all like, "Oh, do you know about Bloomberg Philanthropies and their public art thing? And this project in Indiana. And this project in Albany." And I'm thinking like that's what I have to deal with. It's like I know that there's also this political pressure to kind of ... I hate to be so crass ... but produce bankable culture on the behalf of the city who wants that kind of feel good, community building, economic benefit, social cohesion that, God bless my mayor, she thinks that I can do all that. So do I.

She gets excited. But I think obviously I'm really struggling with language, because I think language is very important and I think as an artist-type, I think, how do we prompt the future? What does the artist do that sort of prompts our best selves to create the best social environment that we want. And I do think about equity, profoundly. And the charge to have a full, realized equal and just society.

So that's the work. My colleague here in city government, she's all about the built environment. She's the planner. I like to say, "She's space, I'm place." So I'm really about investing in the voice of a city, the aesthetic voice of the city. I believe profoundly that these artists have a poetic will that can change the world. They

Garage Cultural in Southwest Detroit and Oakland Avenue Urban Farm founders, Billy and Jerry Hebron. Photos courtesy ArtPlace.

do. They do it all the time. And so in some way the change that is occurring is also reimagining and animating civic life differently. And confronting those obstacles and those barriers. And it's messy, it's profoundly messy. It's the messiest thing I've ever done and I love it.

Juanita: I think the important point is, as Roberto said, and I think Maria alluded to also, is thinking high aspirations and beginning to change the conversation in a way that we can all buy into it and feel comfortable and all head singularly in a direction that moves all of us forward.

Maria: Related to that, I think that the paradigm about what we aspire to has to be tinkered with. It has to change. And the metrics and other systems that indicate whether we're making progress or not have to adapt to that elevated aspiration.

Judilee: Let me speak as a representative of a foundation for a moment. The task ahead for us specifically is occupying the space between metrics and metaphor. I hope that as we move forward with this work we begin to really task ourselves and the folks who we're working with to really look at where the benefits accrue as a result of the work that we're doing.

Hopefully it will be across a number of beneficiaries, not across a single goal. Oftentimes what we do is measured by a single goal. It's a metric-driven kind of system. I think that's to our detriment.

I was at a book reading a couple weeks ago by Arundhati Roy, the wonderful novelist and social-political activist. She has this background in architecture and was riffing a little bit about urban planning and what that means in her city of Delhi.

She talked about how we had to start considering cities as everything that is in the air, not just the buildings and the arrangements of streets. It was compelling to me in the simplicity of the expression, but also in how profound it is to really ask ourselves to arrange our work in such a way that we look at the intersections of all of these things, and we think about what success looks like across a number of dimensions, not just one.

Sixto: Well, I guess it's evident why all of these esteemed thinkers before me have actually influenced everything that I've done, so thank you for all of those really smart words. These are a lot of things that I've been thinking about, particularly ideas about metrics and who are they for. Will they be used in a positive way? What ways will they be used against artists and or communities? Who's able to be at the table around the development of those metrics?

I continue to think about Houston and where we are, and what Houston of five years is going to be. We will continue to be an energy capital, but really what does that look like when we continue to be growing and will be the third largest city? What are the implications of that? Who's actually moving into the city?

At this University, we will use this as a center and as a platform, actually encouraging other artists and other communities and other organizations order to engage in this discourse. Actually making sure that it is an ongoing conversation and that it is no longer just swept under the rug. As artists and arts organizations we will think about the next crisis. We want to think about the next citizens that we're building this city and these communities for.

Jamie: I have been looking at the words that kept popping up. They're these wonderful pairings of twin concept, of metrics and metaphor, voice and agency, of authenticity and nostalgia, of belonging and displacement, and of people and place.

What is a word, what is a phrase that you're walking away with? What is something that's echoing in your ear from this conversation?

Judilee: Roberto oftentimes provokes a lot in me. One of the things that I want to sit with a bit more coming out of this conversation is this idea of creative placemaking as a human right. I want to think about that across everything we do because in this particular moment in time, we really need to think critically about what human rights looks like in this country.

It's creative placemaking as a human right, but I'm also going to fill in other practices, other themes, as hyphenated human rights. Ask ourselves whether or not we are addressing it in that manner. Thank you, Roberto.

Maria: I'm thinking a lot about aligning aspiration with all of the things that we're doing. Whether it's metrics, whether it's training, whether it's public dialogue. There's something about this particularly in the conversation about gentrification.

In crisis, you can take a couple of different roads. You either shrink and retrench and hold on, or you open up and something else emerges. I think that we have to be inclined to let something else emerge. We've got to reckon with letting go of some of the things that we're comfortable with or have thought were the right things to do, and let something else emerge.

Jamie: Thank you, guys, for taking a couple hours. Thank you for thinking out loud. Thank you for engaging.

THE DOMESTIC GALLERY:

THREE VIGNETTES

by Falon Mihalic

From left: Russell Prince, Martiny Ivy, and Lilly Lerner exhibitions. Courtesy Front Gallery

Historically, Houston artists create using the very fabric of the city itself. From transforming cars into works of art, to making artist-run collective spaces in unlikely buildings, to guerilla-style public art interventions, Houston is fertile ground for artists to experiment. And yet, even with a lack of zoning and a laissez-faire attitude towards development, the city deploys a variety of methods of control around artistic production such as event permits, liquor laws, and insurance requirements at the artist's expense. Additionally, the cost of attaining and maintaining an arts-related space like a studio, gallery, workshop, or event venue can be a major hindrance for open-ended emerging work. These constraints have made artists look to the home and the domestic realm as the stage for unfettered creative production and exhibition. What happens inside private living rooms is not typically within the purview of art, but Houston artists have changed that by taking advantage of their own residences as sites for cultural exchange.

Producing art shows and events within the home for public display performs two important functions that benefit both artists and the places where they occur. First, it embeds artistic practice into neighborhoods in a way that is highly localized and approachable for residents (as opposed to exhibits and performances that take place in museums, commercial galleries, and larger event venues). Second, it provides opportunities for emerging and underrepresented artists to experiment and show work with minimal overhead expense and risk. The experience of attending events inside people's homes is more intimate than a typical gallery opening because attendees can engage directly with the artists and other art-goers in conversation. These conversations help build arts patrons for emerging artists, which ultimately helps artists build their credibility and artistic practice. In this way, each home's space serves as an incubator where new ideas are developed and artists engage in an intimate presentation of their work. The living room as art space is a critical but lesser-known aspect of how creative placemaking happens in our neighborhoods. The results are open-ended, thought-provoking, at times awkward or strange, but always fun and approachable. Approachability matters when the goal is to bring out a diverse community.

Front Gallery

I park my bike in the front yard, just behind the white picket fence of the house at 1412 Bonnie Brae Street. It's hot but the neighbors and their kids are on the porch anyway. Inside the front door is a living room converted into a gallery space. There is a shelf that wraps around most of the room and holds a series of ceramic sculptures modeled after women's worn purses. The work is by local sculptor Lilly Lerner and each piece is based on the purse of a woman from her past. Each ceramic purse tells a story in the way that it sags with stretched seams and scratched metal buckles. They are rendered in such life-like detail that they appear to be real purses. One standout piece is of a tan leather satchel situated on top of the living room's fireplace. It is slumped in an imperfect stance, imbuing it with realistic texture and weight. Each bag tells a story that manifests itself well in the intimate space of the living room, as if the purse is waiting to be picked up and thrown over one's shoulder.

Front Gallery is run by artist Sharon Engelstein, who converts her living room into an art gallery every few months and invites her friends and neighbors to look at the work. All of the work is for sale, too. The events are promoted through social media and a mailing list, but the ambiance feels cozy and inviting, not elitist. I spend time looking at every sculpture and thinking about the life of the person who owned it. After about half an hour I am feeling crowded out as new people are coming into the space. The gallery is a standard Montrose bungalow living room in size and character with a window looking out onto the porch. The living room can fill quickly, making it its own self-regulating space. I step out onto the porch and fall into a laid back conversation with someone who lives down the street. Sharon jokes about how they installed the shelf just in time for the show. We listen and nod, happy to be a part of this gathering of people looking at sculpture together.

FLATS

It's Saturday night and the food truck out front signals that a party is happening in an apartment complex in the East End. Upstairs, the one-bedroom apartment of artist and photographer Ronald Llewelyn Jones has been converted into a temporary art gallery for three local photographers. The show is part of the pop-up photography exhibition series FLATS presented by curator Jessi Bowman. FLATS transforms living rooms and apartments into one-night exhibition spaces and invites the public to view the work. This show is titled "Perceptions: Women" and includes the work of three Houston artists exploring the theme of women photographing women. Some of the works are portraiture style, others have staged and stylized settings with women ironing, gardening, or hanging laundry to dry. Each artist's work is grouped into a section of the apartment. Roller derby women are profiled in black and white in a series in the kitchen and the living room contains photographs and sculptural installations of women's clothing.

To light the show, there are metal clamp lamps hung in strategic corners of the apartment and directed at the work on the walls. The furniture has all been moved into a back room that's locked during the show. The apartment dweller, Ronald, is glad to provide the physical space to emerging artists by giving over his apartment to the show.

One photograph jumps out at me: a woman bent over an ironing board and ironing her dress while she is wearing it. The colors are subdued tans and greys but the dress and the pile of clothes in the laundry basket on the floor are a pale sickly pink. It is by Elise Weber, a photographer pursuing an MFA degree at the University of Houston. Participating in the FLATS series has taken her work outside of the university setting and inserted it into a local community context.

Ronald and I sit outside in folding chairs and talk over the noise of the food truck generator. He is pleased with the turnout and the event overall. We talk about the screen printing workshop he will host soon, also in his apartment. His private residence becomes a site of cultural exchange, a kind of palimpsest where the program of the living room dissolves into a classroom-gallery hybrid, and a site that also expresses pride as a reflection of the neighborhood.

Alex Marinick installation.
Courtesy FLATS.


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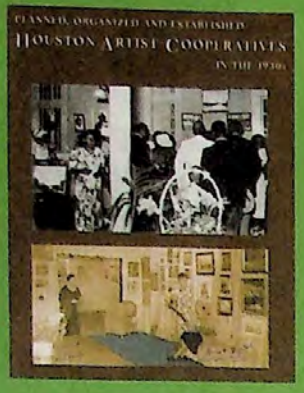

Planned, Organized and Established: Houston Artist Cooperatives

The use of residences as arts spaces has a long history in Houston. The Orange Show, the Artery, the Living Room Art series of Voices Breaking Boundaries, Inversion, and, of course, Project Row Houses are among the many, many "living rooms as art" that shaped the cultural landscape here. An exhibition in fall 2017 at the Houston Public Library, curated by Danielle Burns Wilson, takes the history back to the 1930s with the establishment of the Houston Artists Gallery in the Beaconsfield Apartment Building basement. The segregation of Houston extended to the art world and Blacks established the Negro Art Guild in a parallel effort holding their exhibitions at the Colored Carnegie Library. The exhibition at the Julia Ideson Building brought works from the two collectives together in the same place for the first time including "My Guitar" by Samuel Countee, who attended Houston's Booker T. Washington High School and went on to gain national recognition.

Alabama Song

I walk up the curved concrete walkway leading to a brick 1930s house in the Third Ward. The front door is heavy and made of wood with an ornate metal handle. I cross the threshold into a living room of ordinary size where there are two dozen people sitting in chairs with others on the floor. There are several musical acts performing at this experimental show called "Lean, Bleak." Each group is set up in a different area: the sun room, living room, and dining room based on the acoustic needs of each musical act. The audience rearranges chairs and sprawls in new positions on the floor in each new room to listen Some people have their eyes closed and there is sound coming from the adjacent sun room with its French doors flung open.

The sound is reverberating off the mosaic tile floor and into the living room. It is minimal and ethereal then picks up tempo and complexity and I find myself listening intently for where the music will go next. I settle into my chair so I can revel in this rare opportunity to simply listen with intense focus. The music feels unscripted, raw, and somewhat surreal as the performers create sounds in response to each other. The space feels inviting and approachable in spite of the work being sometimes emotional and intense. The walls of the living room are intentionally left grey and textured, a contrast from the smooth pure white walls of a typical contemporary gallery space. These walls seem to say, "It's ok, you and your work are welcome here."

That welcoming attitude is important to Regina Agu and Gabriel Martinez, co-directors of Alabama Song. They focus on new, emerging, and experimental practices across multiple arts disciplines. They want artists to feel comfortable creating new work in the space. At "Lean,Bleak," most of the audience is immersed in every strange sound, sitting with eyes closed on the edge of their seats. These emotional performances are punctuated by complimentary remarks from the hosts which brought the space back to feeling like we were all just hanging out in someone's living room. The apex of emotional intensity happens when one of the vocalists sits in a chair with his back to the audience and produces beautiful primal sounds, ranging from guttural coughs to long high-pitched free-falls of sound.

These events are organized, hosted, and produced by artists within the control and safety of their private residences. One major benefit of the home approach is that financial expenses are minimized while community connections and artist ideas are elevated. Home-based artist spaces are a grassroots form of cultural capital where artists are lifting up the work of their peers. These spaces are the fertile ground for seeds of artistic ideas to germinate. They are the incubation chambers for helping emerging artists grow into themselves and their work. In these ways, the home-based art venue fits into the larger ecosystem of artistic production in the city as a springboard. New ideas are risky and the domestic gallery provides a platform for a test launch to present the work in a low key setting before sharing it with a larger audience. The term "emerging" can apply to artists of many types; they may be still in art school, new to practicing art in a specific medium, or even new to art-making all together. It is notable that each of these spaces featured are run entirely by artists. The host artists are elevating the work being produced and helping to catapult it into the community.

These art events work well inside the home as an outstretch of our culture of being a welcoming city—perhaps it is a kind of relic of southern hospitality. The living room art spaces build on a history of innovative art spaces such as the Orange Show, Voice Breaking Boundaries Living Room Art, the Artery, and Project Row Houses that have been a strong part of Houston's identity. They have transpired as the result of the same forces: collaged land use, affordability, lax zoning, and a deep need for emerging artists and new ideas to germinate in a place-specific context. Domestic art spaces are a small-scale testing ground for what may evolve into longer term or larger-scale artistic institutions or events. In these home-based art spaces, an important type of storytelling occurs that's intimate and personal where the goal is a kind of focused exchange of ideas, expressions, and actions. The smaller audience size puts greater responsibility on the viewer to engage with the work; to become an active participant. The act of telling stories, whether through sculpture, photography, or experimental music creates a shared identity that reflects the character of the place where it is made. Using the home as site for cultural exchange normalizes artistic practice and makes it an accessible part of everyday neighborhood life.

Photo courtesy Alabama Song.

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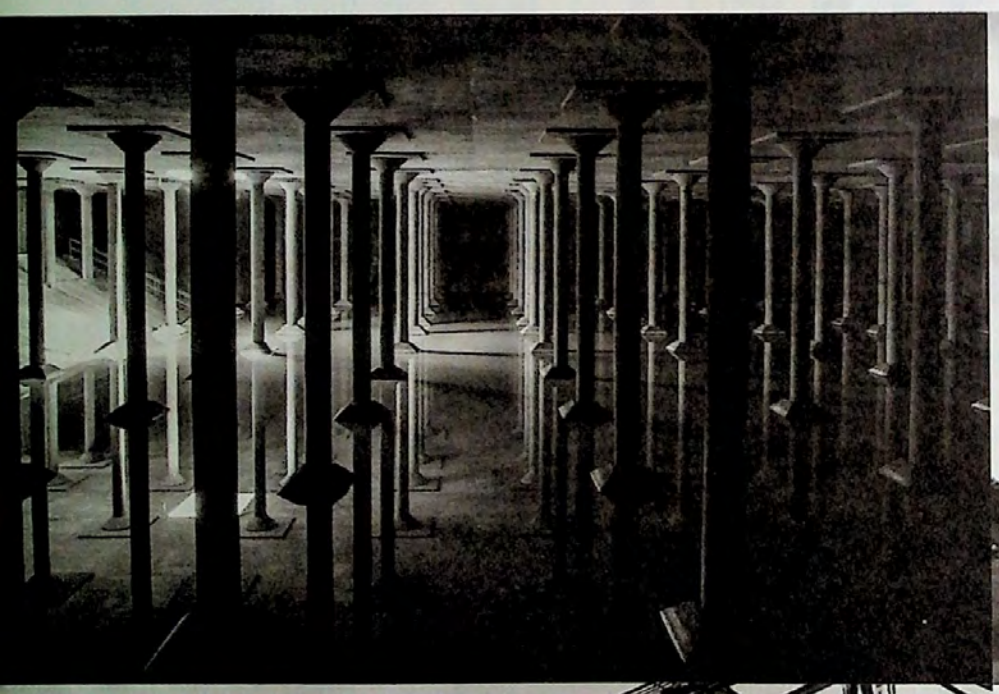

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IDENTITY & DISPLACEMENT IN HOUSTON'S SECOND WARD

by Ernesto Alfaro

The Second Ward in Houston is located at the northernmost tip of what most Houstonians would consider Houston's East End. One of the original four wards of the city, created in 1840, it originally constituted the northeast quadrant. Today, it effectively fronts Downtown and is the first neighborhood that the casual visitor will encounter on their journey eastward. Because of the highways, stadia, and the hulking behemoth that is the George R. Brown Convention Center, there are roughly five main entries into the East End. One of these is Leeland street, where a colorful mural of an indigenous figure greets the visitor at St. Emanuel Street. Murals and street art of all flavors are visible here, providing the visitor with a transition writ large and hip: you are entering something Other.

Under the term "Creative Placemaking," these works of art can be considered with other efforts to use art and culture programming to invigorate a neighborhood. The term has attracted a great deal of criticism because it can be associated with gentrification. Rather than lumping together a big range of work and assigning a single pass/fail grade, we need to learn from failures and what has worked best.

The mural at Leeland & St. Emanuel was created by Houston artist Angel Quesada (@artkungfu), who described the piece as a guardian, a protector of the Second Ward and the East End, a means to signal to visitors that this place exists within a specific cultural context. But what do we mean when we say, "the East End?" Expansive and difficult to navigate for most, it is made up of a vast number of neighborhoods, including the Second Ward, within which, there are several other neighborhoods—a nested condition, like Russian dolls, that creates a multiplicity of identities as explored by John Pluecker's essay in this publication.

Both industrial and residential, with little commercial development in comparison to other areas of the city, the Second Ward has been home to a number of ethnic groups, from Czech, to German, to African American; its current incarnation is decidedly Latin: "El Segundo Barrio," as it has come to be known since the 1910s. But even in this, there is a mixture of Latin identities from all over the Americas. On Milby and Garrow, the old German dancehall now known as El Regional Ballroom has been home to Casa Chilena de Houston. The Second Ward is a palimpsest that only continues to accrue identities as time races on.

However, this richness of identities is now threatened. The area is particularly appetizing to developers for four main reasons: its proximity to downtown; the number of now vacant industrial spaces; the high number of rental units; and the presence of an aging housing stock. According to former president of the Greater East End Management District, Diane Schenke, up to 80 percent of residential units in the overall East End are rental units. It is reasonable to say, even, that the Second

All photos Ernesto Alfaro except where noted

Left: "The Guardian of Second Ward" mural by Angel Quesada, at the corner of St. Emmanuel and Leeland Streets; Below: Angel Quesada presents his latest mural at the Morales Radio Hall, "Muertos Mural."

Ward is susceptible to predatory development tactics. Development of Houston-style "townhouses"—think suburban isolation but vertical and packed three to six per lot—has been a regular occurrence for the past 10 years in the Second Ward. This is what most people would refer to as "gentrification"—the removal of existing but dilapidated structures in favor of residences that could appeal to new middle-class homebuyers. The promise of development is that it improves a neighborhood by bringing in a new population and new life to the area. While it is true that a new demographic can certainly fill in the void created by the dismantling of the existing urban fabric, there is no guarantee that a cohesive, revived community will, in fact, emerge.

The problem of gentrification unfolds in three major ways:

First, through the demolition of existing structures, gentrification erases the material history of the place from the urban fabric. In this sense, there is a displacement of history, where a new architectural form of townhouses replaces the existing, vernacular language of shotgun or dogtrot houses or turn-of-the-century industrial buildings. The material presence of these townhouses, cladded in mute tones and generic textures, replaces the older, vernacular buildings with its own interpretation of the city, one that lacks a specific relationship with the particular history of the neighborhood.

This leads us to the second way gentrification threatens an area: through the replacement of the existing fabric with what sociologist George Lipsitz refers to in *How Racism Takes Place*, as a "white spatial imaginary," a White middle-class vision of what America should be: properly gendered and prosperous—the "privileged moral geography of the nation." In order to manifest this vision, it becomes necessary to remove history and to use an architectural language that is not specific to the place. An abstract, ahistorical condition replaces the making and meaning of a vernacular language. In the context of the Second Ward, the contemporary language of the townhouse has no historical traces in it—it is a plastic assemblage of forms, colors, and textures that exist without a specific geographic precedent, other than itself.

Lastly, and this is the greatest problem of all, gentrification often results in the physical displacement of people. In the Second Ward, these are the large body of renters, who have little to no political or economic voice with which to oppose development, largely due to their status as immigrants or lack of financial resources to appeal to political figures who would represent their interests. When new construction arrives, and property values inevitably increase, many of the low-income families who live here will relocate to other areas of the city. Or else, land owners find their property value and taxes have risen to such a point that it would be foolish not to sell the land they've held onto for so long. The net result is the same: the people who imbue the place with its character and life will leave and the spirit of the place will leave with them. While "gentrification" is used to describe some or all of these related issues, in my view, the problem of redevelopment in the Second Ward, and in all other similar neighborhoods, is best described as displacement of urban fabric, of identity, and of human bodies.

At stake in this game of shifting meaning and bodies is the identity of the Second Ward itself. But to pretend as if a neighborhood can be frozen in perpetuity is naive. Cities and neighborhoods need change and growth—it is a fundamental characteristic of life. So the question becomes, how do we allow for development to happen but maintain and even enhance the identity of the place, all the while protecting the more vulnerable members of our community? This is no easy task, but the good news is that there are many people working towards this goal. Leading the charge is the Greater East End Management District, whose most notable recent effort is the transformation of Navigation Boulevard into a cultural destination. By now, many have seen the Sunday Farmers Market and festivals that have taken place over the course of the past several years on the Navigation Esplanade. But what I would like to point out in the context of identity, is the language of expression that the management district and its various partners have used in the physical transformation of the urban fabric: art. Evident in the papel-picado, or "cut paper," metalwork on the arbors of the Esplanade, in the construction of bus shelters and benches, in the murals that adorn many of the entryways into the Second Ward, art is the language that communicates the multiplicity of identities, the collective condition. The deliberate decision to use color and forms that come from Latin American heritage, from street art, from the spirit of the neighborhood, is a bold move that says: what has happened here is important, relevant, and should be celebrated.

Roberto Bedoya, the noted cultural activist, arts advocate, and poet, has often talked about the way that regular people manifest their identity and culture onto their houses or neighborhoods through an aesthetic practice that he calls the Rasquache:

"The Rasquache spatial imaginary is the culture of lowriders who embrace the street in a tempo parade of coolness; it's the roaming dog that marks its territory; it's the defiance signified by a bright, bright, bright house; it's the fountain of the peeing boy in the front yard; it's the DIY car mechanic, leather upholsterer or wedding-dress maker working out of his or her garage with the door open to the street; it's the porch where the elders watch; and it's the respected neighborhood watch program. Rasquachification challenges America's deep racial divide through acts of ultravisibility undertaken by those rendered invisible by the dominant ideology of whiteness."

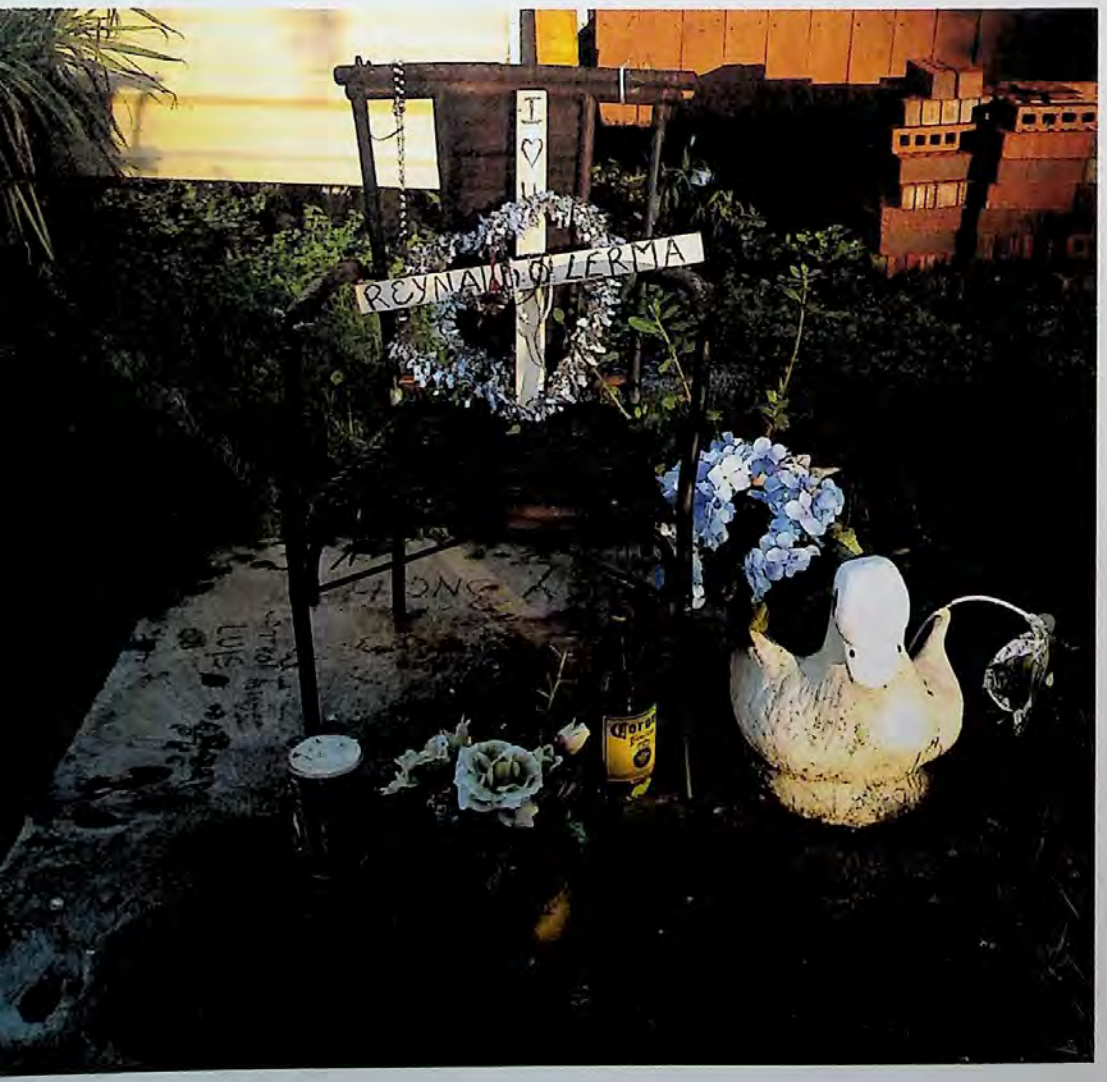
Originally of Nahuatl origin, Rasquache had endured a negative connotation "in Mexico as being an attitude that was lower class, impoverished, and having bad taste." But with the growth of Chicano and Mexican-American art movements since the 1970's, the Rasquache has become, as Tomás Ybarra-Frausto would have it, "a form of resistance incorporating

strategies of appropriation, reversal, and inversion." The Rasquache is everywhere in the Second Ward. It's so pervasive that it becomes the dominant aesthetic, utterly normal. You can see casual shrines in front yards, hand-lettered signs on Canal Street—it creates the Second Ward.

The vast number of murals that you see in this area make sense in the context of the Rasquache. An early example is Leo Tanguma's 1973 "The Rebirth of Our Nationality" restored over the last year by Mario Figueroa, Jr., aka "Gonzo247," under the direction of Tanguma. Vibrancy and life is evident in the 2013 Harrisburg Underpass Gateway mural by the Houston artist Daniel Anguilu. Commissioned to inaugurate the launch of the East End Metro line, the mural tells the visitor about the Second Ward's aesthetic reality, about its love of murals, about its casual coolness. Further along the line, the management district's offices pop out in a Tuscan yellow, its logo contrasting in a dark blue. Still further, the Harrisburg Art Museum (HAM) rises unapologetically, disheveled, and brash. Its sharp hues, bold lines, and questionable content is anything but static. Curated by the ubiquitous Anguilu, the murals provide a constant visual presence to the community, a backdrop to the changing art markets, car meetups, etc., that populate the sprawling pavement in front. With its rotating ensemble of artists, intimate understanding and reading of the community, the HAM embodies the Rasquache, filters it through its street patois, spits it out fresh on a regular basis. As an entity that is fluid and street-smart, steeped in art, this ability comes naturally. For institutional outsiders, such as design firms, the challenge is greater.

Can a management district successfully deploy the Rasquache? A mural here or there is one matter but can any governmental or quasi-governmental entity institutionalize a "roaming dog" aesthetic?

In the design of the Navigation Esplanade, Rasquachification is clearly evident. Metalab, the firm commissioned to implement part of the concept of the programmed median, decided to implement a papel picado technique on the shade canopies of the Esplanade, in great part because it was a natural extension of the visual culture already present on Navigation Boulevard, in places like the taquerias Doña Maria, or Villa Arcos. Metalab returned to the motif for their winning competition entry for the redesign of San Antonio's Riverboats, a sign of the broad appeal of the technique. In the Esplanade, the fencing also received this treatment, along with word ornamentation. Less successful, however, were the word benches and bus shelters that were part of a streetscape improvement in the area immediately adjacent to the Esplanade. While the concept was reviewed by community members, its physical manifestation does not achieve that sense of challenge that the Rasquache requires. With its outdated font choice and Spanglish phrases out of context, the benches fall flat and can seem confusing at best. Some of the phrases are simply grammatically nonsensical (Be Mucho Bueno) and could therefore be potentially insulting. Clearly, that was not the intention, but there is risk for misuse when institutions adopt Rasquache aesthetic forms.

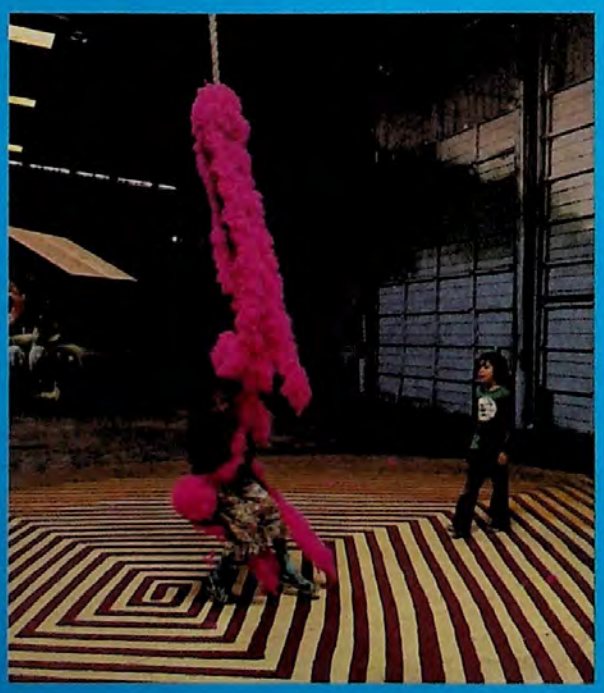


Another example of a design entity implementing Rasquachification, although admittedly not in a deliberate manner, is SWA's "Houston Gateway Art Bridges." Nominally, this was a beautification competition project by Houston First Corporation, intended to improve the appearance of overpasses crossing from downtown into the East End. The project involved photographer/artists Geoff Winningham and Janice Freeman working with Houston school children. Pixelated mosaics were derived from the children's images, photos, interpretations of the city. The result was printed onto hundreds of plastic ribbons that were then woven into the existing 6-foot-tall chain link fence railing. The bright, jarring colors may have their origins as an image of the city, but its abstraction puts it closer to traditional Mexican woven textiles. Suspended over the freeway, the signal is clear: here, there is color, life, vibrancy, diversity.

In all these examples, it is the use of color and form that creates a memorable experience tied to a specific location. The murals, decorated arbors of Navigation Esplanade, and colorful structures of the Second Ward all create a mental connection to the place. Through repeated interactions, these connections take on an emotional dimension; it is through this emotional dimension that a generic space transforms into a meaningful place. It is only through people that places have significance. It is the traces of their lives that resonate in the material culture of a place. In short, spaces may be built physically, but places are constructed socially. By using manifestations of culture in the design of both our residential and commercial structures, we contribute to the creation of a place. This requires a sensitive understanding of that culture, which is not easy if the culture is not your own. But we humans are highly adaptable; understanding another culture can be easy if we are open to it. It takes time and effort to learn about that culture, live it for a little bit, perhaps. You have to be careful not to misuse it or misunderstand it, or, worse, impose your own reading onto it when it suits your needs. When the artist or designer takes too many cultural shortcuts, the work will fail to connect with its audience. The work described thus far has been a mixture of hits and misses, precisely because of these conditions. But to stop trying because of failure would be a mistake. We continue exactly because some of the design moves have been a success and we learn from those design moves that did not work. However, it is only through institutional support that any meaningful, major improvements will take place in the Second Ward. The long-time East End activist Jessica Castillo-Hulsey takes up this line of argument when I met with her in late June of 2017, a month or so before Harvey. We met at Doña Maria's, where over some tacos, we chatted about what it means to live in the Second Ward. A long-serving force and voice of the community, Castillo-Hulsey minces no words in describing the problem: "We need housing—affordable housing."

She is right, of course, both in the unspoken perception and the potential solution. The people-displacement aspect of redevelopment is not subtle for Castillo-Hulsey: "they're trying to move us out!" With a stable residential base, tailor-made for the Second Ward, the displacement of people is not inevitable. But this is where the real work needs to happen. In part, by investing

"The murals, decorated arbors of Navigation Esplanade, and colorful structures of the Second Ward all create a mental connection to the place. Through repeated interactions, these connections take on an emotional dimension; it is through this emotional dimension that a generic space transforms into a meaningful place."



Left: Shrine in memory of a family member exemplifies the Rasquache aesthetic but remains authentically functional; Above: Navigation Esplanade with design metalwork by Metalab; Below: Interior installations at the Harrisburg Art Museum.

in good design, New Hope Housing has gained community acceptance for housing people at risk of homelessness in Single Room Occupancy buildings. This non-profit developer puts design front and center, which has been a key to avoiding potential rejection of affordable housing. The Canal Street Apartments, designed by the Houston architect Val Glitsch, is a project that has enjoyed great success since 2009. New Hope Housing's recently completed development at 3315 Harrisburg Ave, designed by GSM Architects, is also a step in a positive direction for a population that sorely needs housing, and its approach to color is laudable, even if their palette misses the spirit of the Rasquache. But these programs miss one of the most vulnerable populations in the Second Ward:

families. It's not that the residential precedents don't exist (see Marie Rodriguez's article in this issue), or that emergent templates haven't been studied—it's that the city is unable to take on the cost required to produce the complete solution. The people of the city government, fractured into their various departments, fighting one another over jurisdiction or scope of work, face a crisis of creativity in answering this problem.

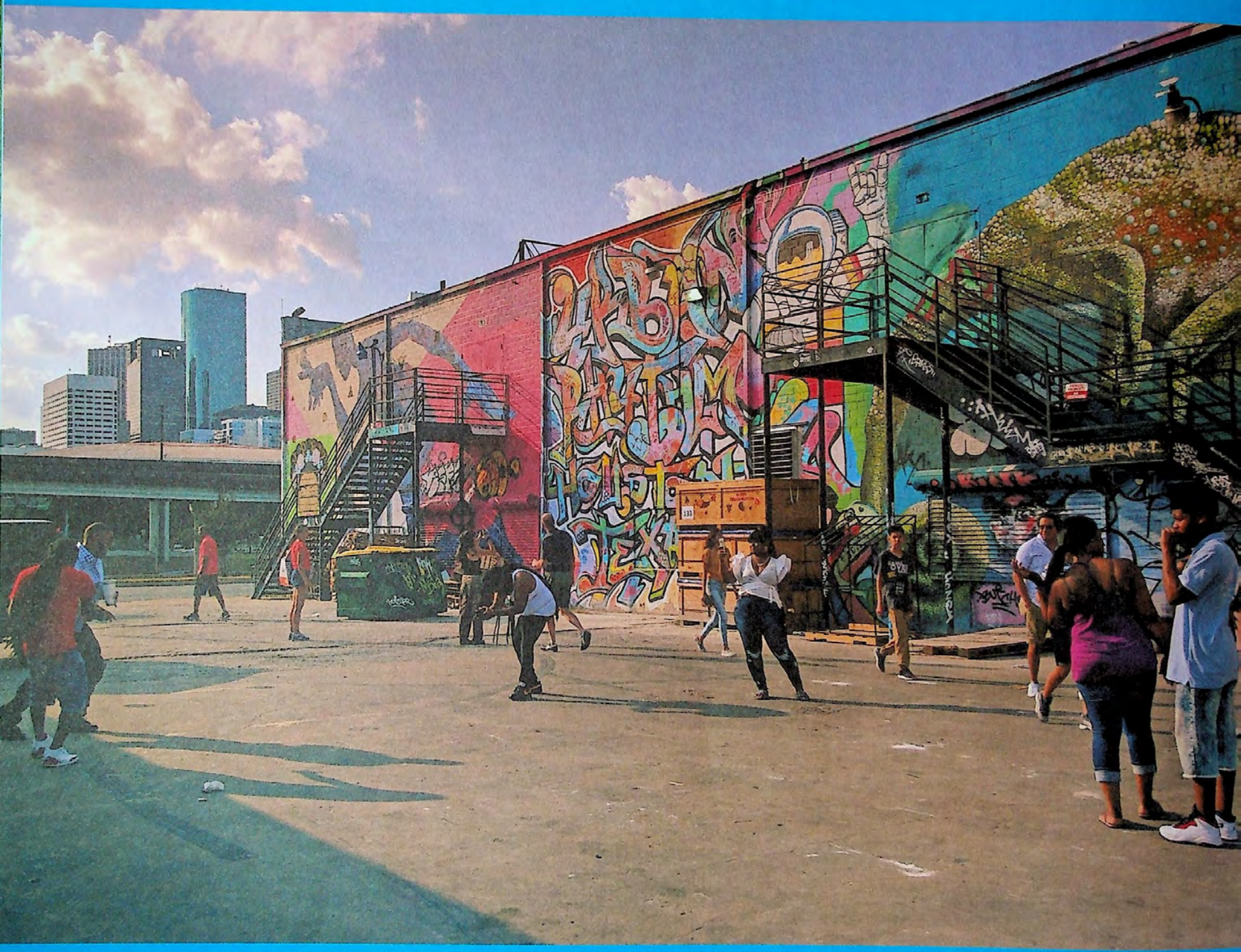
Our city has an abundance of resources from which a solution could be teased, including at least one billion dollars in post-Harvey aid. The Second Ward is one of Mayor Turner's designated "Complete Communities" and the Director of Housing and Community Development, Tom McCasland, was a Second Ward resident. The mayor and his team would do well to be as ambitious as possible about integrating market-rate, workforce, and affordable housing plans with the burgeoning transit, landscape, art, and design.

In whichever way this complex problem evolves, one thing that is certain is that the Second Ward is among the most creative and arts-oriented areas in the city. The use of art to mark a place, make a connection, only works when there are people there to respond to it. This is the work of Creative Placemaking, that poorly monikered term that functions as a catch-all for art in action, in-situ.

Unfortunately, the Second Ward has seen its fair share of Creative Placemaking failure—most notably, in Houston Art Alliance's ill-fated "Transported + Renewed" Festival of 2014. Sitting in the expansive rear yard of The New Potato bar, with its uninterrupted view of downtown, at dusk, Angel Quesada and I talk about this arts event gone wrong. The bottom line is that although the goals of the organizers were laudable, mistakes were made including a lack of face-to-face bilingual outreach early on to East End communities and a reliance on mainstream digital marketing. The selection and number of Latinx artists, and artists based in the East End, was contested by the artist arts community itself. The timing of the festival coincided with major land acquisitions and demolitions by developers. While many of the specific events and works were excellent, the festival as a whole left a bad taste in artists' mouths because all the problems together that made some artists feel like they were "the shock troops of gentrification." What should have been a celebration of the unfettered vibrancy of the East End ended with bruised egos. A methodical, if harsh, letter entitled "Artists of Transported + Renewed Weigh In" published on Glasstire.com placed egg squarely on the face of the Houston Arts Alliance. In the past year, the HAA has gone through a leadership change and reorganization with a greater focus on funds going to artists and arts groups embedded in the Mayor's Complete Communities program.

What should be clear to all is that the various uses of art in the East End are not a structural or systemic failure of Creative Placemaking, in and of itself. Yes, the term is not great, and can, at times, do a disservice to existing cultural conditions, but art being deployed as a means to create meaning and memory is not a disservice to artists or the community. Yes, the work of Creative Placemaking can lead to displacement, especially when those consequences are not considered in the first place. Art has the capacity to do so much work, when cast in the right manner. While art alone cannot address structural social and economic problems, it can help the lives of real people by giving them a connection to a place, a sense of pride in their neighborhood, a sense of home, belonging, and meaning.

Hip-hop video being filmed at Graffiti Park at St. Emmanuel and Leeland Streets



Left: Studio Sassafras in the Near Northend; Above: Pinata festival on Navigation Esplanade featuring "Cray Cray Crawfish" by Jesse Lott, Kristina Kolosova, and John Branch.

The obvious criticism in considering Rasquache operations as design practice, is that it is necessarily limiting. The vocabulary of this aesthetic is culturally very specific, which means there is a larger group of people for whom its meaning is elusive, at best. But what the Rasquache does offer is a mode of operation - an approach to the construction of our urban reality that does not fall into the complacency of the white spatial imaginary. It is a mode of resistance that is positive, but it is only one of many that are available to us. There are some ready-made examples that we can turn to in Houston, already.

At Discovery Green, Margo Sawyer's "Synchronicity of Color" expands the idea of what parking infrastructure can do. This artwork is simply the cladding on the stairwells that lead down into the parking garage below the park. But it also becomes several things at the same time: a wayfinding/ orientation element, a photo opportunity, a piece of sculpture. Sawyer's use of color is a method of engagement.

The same could be said about Ashley Rose's Sugar + Cloth Color Wall, which used to exist in the Second Ward on Canal Street near North Sampson Street. A simple series of oversized color blocks painted on a brick wall and adjacent concrete paving, the artwork drew a constant supply of visitors looking to satisfy their selfie needs. The color itself was the attraction. Demolished in 2017, the Color Wall has found a new home in Downtown, at Green Street. At this outdoor mall, the challenge has always been trying to get foot traffic, to engage the visitors in a rewarding, meaningful way. By locating the Color Wall here, the benefits are multiple: visitors can discover a new aesthetic experience, and the vendors see increased numbers of customers. This project is a great example of how some of the best design moves can be simple.

The examples above are all art-based and the obvious question becomes: how does this manifest itself in the case of buildings? It is a bit more challenging here because architecture is often reactionary, despite what architects may think. It responds to market demands. Occasionally it can lead the way, but these are not the norm. In Houston, one understated example of a project that looks at its urban context carefully and responds to it in a sensitive manner, is the office and recording studio of the musician and composer John Edward Ross, Studio Sassafras. Working collaboratively with Michael Morrow of kinneymorrow architecture, the building speaks to the industrial setting of the Near Northside, of which it is a part. Its corrugated metal sheathing makes a material linkage to the area, but the massing of the building transforms the project into something else. Hints of color peek out, as if from under the metal itself, adding a hint of something new. These deft, subtle moves speak to the neighborhood, devoid of its former urban fabric as it is, and help it recall its history.

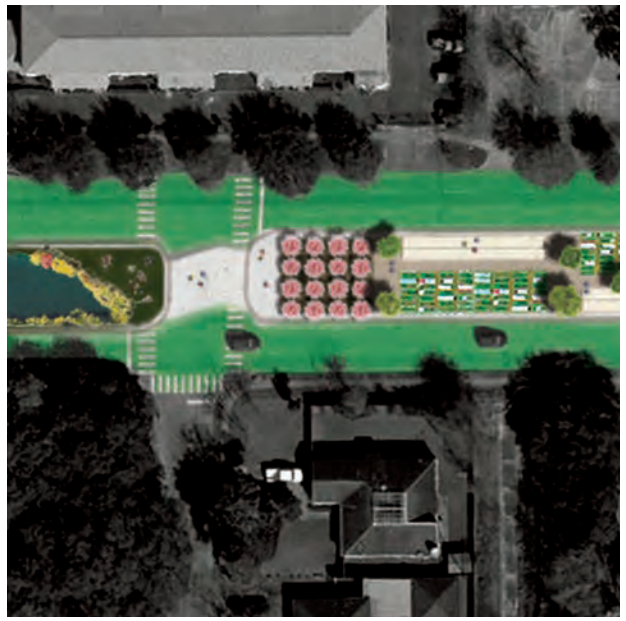
Another positive example is LEGORRETA's San Antonio Central Library, where we see the use of color writ large and bold. With its earth-red hue and vibrant, colorful interiors, the library becomes a visually delightful experience that seduces the visitors to linger. With its bold form and changing floor plan, the design offers sufficient visual interest to the library user, whose understanding of the space becomes intimately connected to the color and form of the library - whose understanding of the library as place happens precisely because of the idiosyncrasies of the design. This library works hard to make that connection, that personal engagement, but it does so in a language of contemporary architecture. Color is notoriously difficult to work with (this explains architects' love of white), because it can become dated very quickly, and can be very polarizing, as well. But things like color and smell and touch have an amazing capacity to impress themselves in our minds, in our memories. It is in this way that the idea of place happens at all: our minds are where art, design, and culture operate to color the way we see the world, where we see a space transform into place.

Playscape image courtesy Falon Land Studio.

SHARPSTOWN STRIP

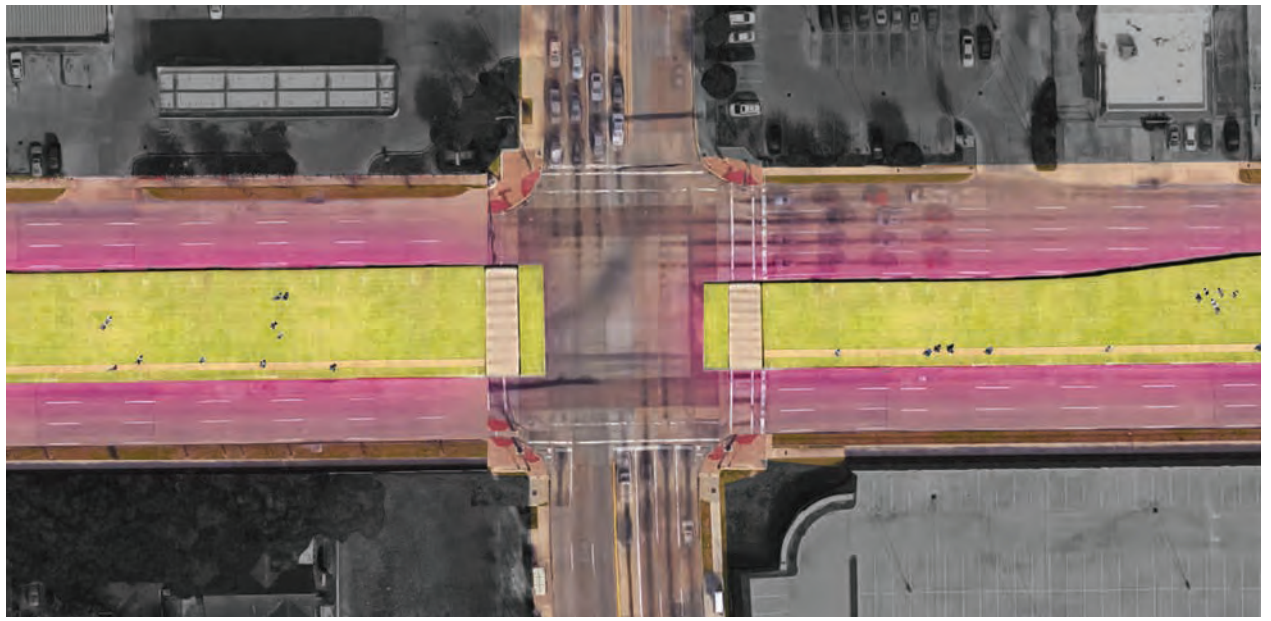
by Sheila Mednick

Community gardens at residential blocks

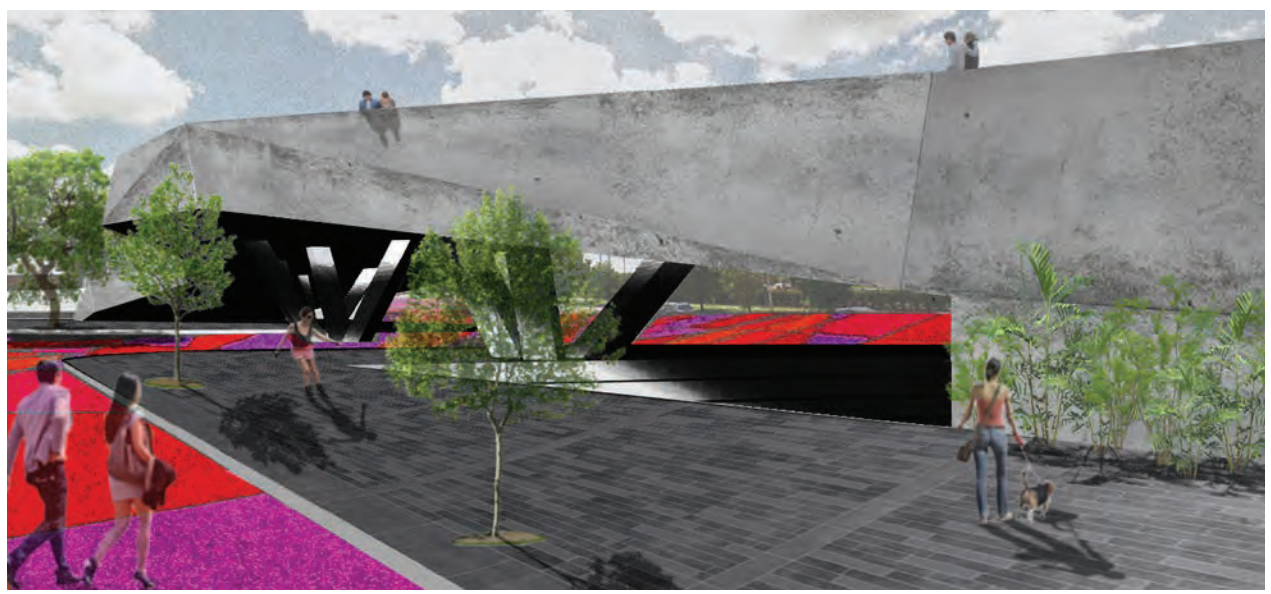


Outdoor markets at commercial blocks

Reappropriating the median for pedestrian use



Pedestrian bridge spanning intersection at Bellaire and S Gessner.



Brightly colored roadway cautions drivers to slow

The work presented here was originally submitted by the author as a final project to the Introduction to Landscape Architecture course at Rice Architecture in the Fall of 2017. The original assignment challenged the students to provide a landscape concept for the Plaza of the Americas mall, as a kind of landscape intervention that would re-frame the site to better suit the real needs of the people living in the Sharpstown area. Sheila Mednick opted to disregard the confines of the site and focus, instead, along the length of Bellaire Boulevard as it passes through the Sharpstown area. Her design intervention was distributed in a linear fashion, extending the landscape program in a more equitable, de-centralized fashion. Her text below is the program brief that she developed for the project.

Bellaire Boulevard has two distant anchors without a public sphere in between. On one end is Chinatown, a hub for goods and services that has few, if any, parallels in any other part of Houston, and on the other is PlazAmericas, a shopping center with more historic than current relevancy, facing a level of desertion that leaves it ripe for redevelopment. What remains between the two is, to most people, little more than a blur through the car window as they whiz past residential homes and neighborhood parks. This is a shame because down the side streets are some of the most vibrant communities in the area. Isolated from each other by large swaths of automobile-bearing pavement, neighborhoods, along with their unique characteristics disappear into the blanket of gray asphalt and yellow-brown grass medians. The public sphere has become engulfed by the need for cars, relegating spaces for humans into protective bubbles, varying in size, disjointed from each other by some type of roadway that typically isn't pedestrian-friendly.

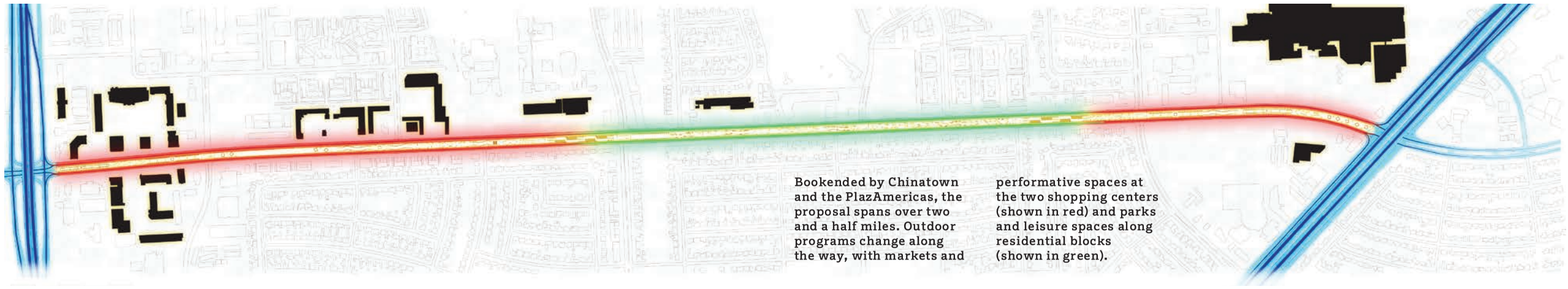
This project does not dismiss car-culture in its entirety. Automobiles provide a sense of freedom and a practical independence that little else can, and for a long time, the automobile has been an integral component of American culture. As the product of American suburbia, I can recall countless nights as a teenager spent with friends, driving around aimlessly looking for something to do until the drive itself became the main social event. Even though the debate around the need for cars continues to escalate amidst ride-sharing phone apps and the rise of self-driving cars, privately-owned automobiles will not disappear in totality, especially in a city as car-centric as Houston.

Cars are a mainstay. But we can still question their centrality and lament the lost opportunity of public spaces for humans rather than automobiles. Cars, through their speed and volume of movements, undeniably create rifts in the population. This happens not only between those in a car and those not in a car, but even among the population of drivers themselves as layers of tinted glass and margins of space render other humans invisible behind the car window. After all, thousands of pounds of metal traveling at least ten times the speed of pedestrians is an effective armor between the haves and the have-nots. These considerations, especially at this site, begs the question: how can both drivers and pedestrians share in the experience of a public amenity? How can roads be reappropriated, as we move away from our utmost dependence on privately owned vehicles? And how can the streets that once dissected communities and neighborhoods now pull them together?

This proposal addresses these questions with a linear pedestrian park measuring 2.6 miles in length that runs from one anchor of Sharpstown to the other. Excess lanes of Bellaire Boulevard are transformed into a super-sized median of open space, housing a variety of programs and events such as outdoor markets, chess and domino game tables, public art, and community gardens, just to name a few. Vibrant graphics painted onto the surface of Bellaire Boulevard provide a colorful spectacle in an otherwise dreary-gray landscape, merging together the flanking city blocks and encouraging car drivers to slow down. Monolithic pedestrian bridges made of concrete arch over intersections to create continuity along the entire length of the parkway as it responds to surrounding city blocks through changing program and color.

This linear park is a place for pedestrians, but vehicles are not excluded. Many features are visible from the car window, so that experience is different, but present. The design intent is to bring together different users, traveling at different speeds. The public experience should be shared by all people, whether they are commuting to work in their cars, taking the bus to school, wanting to get some sun outdoors, or simply going for a drive without much else to do.

Proposed section through Bellaire Boulevard



Bookended by Chinatown and the PlazAmericas, the proposal spans over two and a half miles. Outdoor programs change along the way, with markets and performative spaces at the two shopping centers (shown in red) and parks and leisure spaces along residential blocks (shown in green).

THIRD WARD QUILT

by Nicola Springer & Jamar Simien
with Ernesto Alfaro

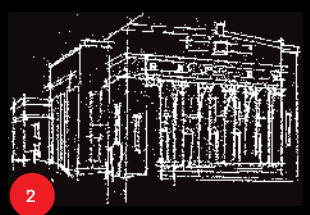
The Third Ward Quilt project began with bicycle tours of the Third Ward led by Nicola Springer, an architect and graduate of Princeton and Rice universities, and Vice President at Kirksey Architecture. Over the past five years, and with the invaluable assistance of Third Ward resident and historian Carroll Parrott Blue, Ms. Springer has systematically documented the architectural history of Third Ward through archival research, photographs, oral history, and observation.

This project attempts to recover an intricate tapestry of buildings, people and events, here and gone in Houston's Third Ward. Springer and visual artist Jamar Simien created physical maps of the Third Ward on 36-inch-by-48-inch acrylic sheets, reproduced here. One panel shows the current building lexicon outlined in black. In a second layer, based on a 1943 aerial photograph, the buildings that no longer remain are shown in white, a kind of "ghost" layer. A third layer shows how the construction of the 288 highway cut through the neighborhood, displacing a large portion of the Third Ward and fragmenting

Legend

- Building
- People
- Still here
- No longer here
- Public Park

1
San Jacinto Memorial Building
1914, 1928, 1936; Layton & Smith, Hedrick & Gottlieb, Joseph Finger; City Beautiful Movement



2
Temple Beth Israel
1925; Joseph Finger; Late Art Deco

3
Richardson House
1903; J. Perkins Richardson; Colonial Revival

4
Elizabeth Baldwin Park
Dedicated 1910

5
St John Baptist Church
1946; James M Thomas; African American Designer and Builder; Gothic Revival

6
Wesley Chapel AME Church
1926; William Sidney Pittman

6
W. Sidney Pittman
First African American Architect in Texas; 1875–1958

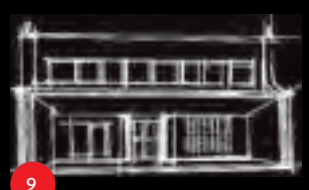
6a
Dr Ben Covington Home

6a
Booker T Washington
Stayed with the Covingtons

6b
Richard Randolph Grovey
Barber and Civic Leader, 1934 sued for the right to vote in primary ballot

7
Douglass Elementary / Now Yellowstone Academy
1927

8
YWCA Blue Triangle
1951; Birdsall Briscoe; First African American YWCA charter in Texas



9
Grand Court of Calanthe Building
1948; Art Deco

9
Mary McLeod Bethune
Founder of Bethune Cookman University speaks at Grand Court of Calanthe Building

10
Wolf's Pawn Shop / Originally Wellworths Dry Goods
1950; Art Deco / Moderne

11
St John's Missionary Baptist Church
1948; Neo Classical; 2701 Emancipation Ave

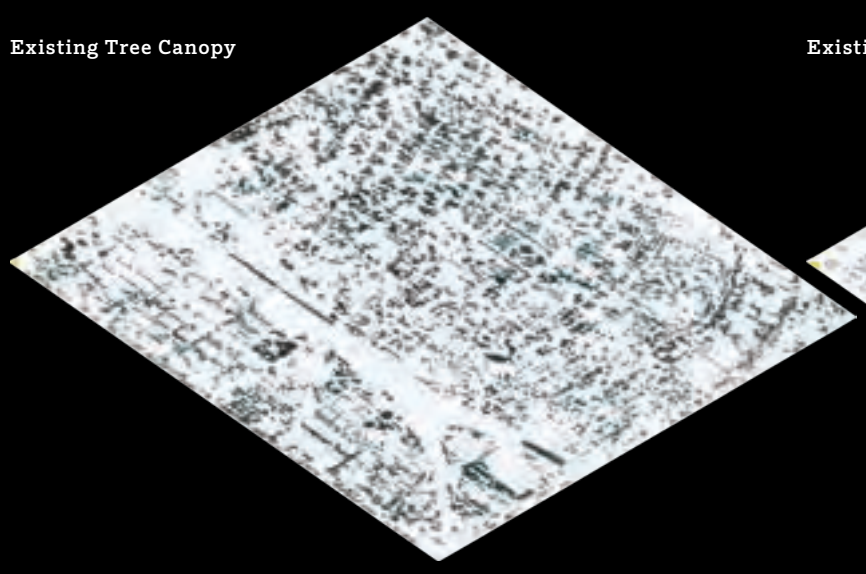
11a
Carl Hampton
Black Panther killed 1970

11a
Black Panther Headquarters
2800 Block Dowling / Now Emancipation Blvd

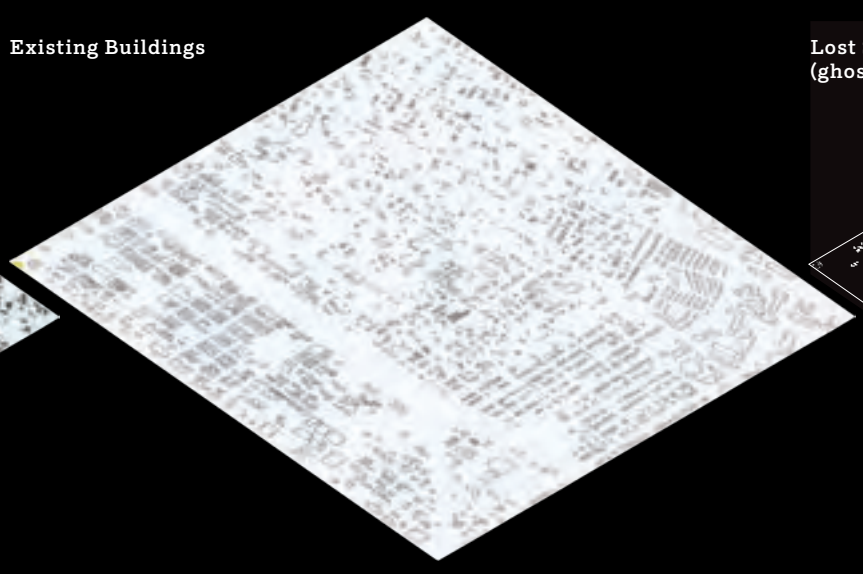
12
Emancipation Park
Founded 1872; 3018 Emancipation Blvd.

12
New Recreation Building
2017; Philip Freelon

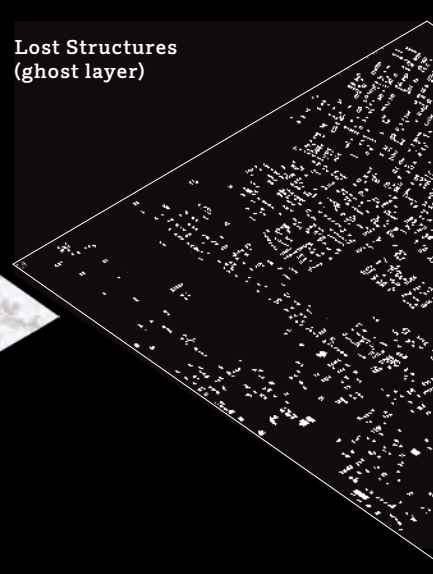
Existing Tree Canopy



Existing Buildings



Lost Structures (ghost layer)



the community. The base layer is a color negative of the city grid and a fifth the current canopy of trees. The final panel shows as icons the architecture and influencers of the neighborhood.

The goal of the project is to reveal the palimpsest of history that is the Third Ward, the conflicted and collective cultural construct of the neighborhood, shaped by forces of capital, institutional racism, the sheer will of a community to thrive, and the lives of the many figures who have dwelled here. The ultimate intention of this project is to educate community residents and visitors alike, young and old, people of all backgrounds. Springer and Simien want to connect the community to the rich tapestry of hidden history that lies latently in the Third Ward. In this sense, we can refer to the map as a quilt, because of the special meaning that these fiber objects hold in the context of black America.

During the 19th century, when enslaved people escaped from their bondage, they used quilts as maps. Designed and hand sewn by the enslaved, each piece creatively referenced a different step along the way to freedom. The quilt, for the African-American community, is a symbol of collective dignity and cultural identity. The intent of this project is to show an entire quilt of the space with imperfections and irregularities, resonant pieces that through time were relegated to useless history or, at best, a history out of step. The quilt is a means by which visitors and residents alike can recover this history and make it come alive for a new generation. With funding from a Rice Design Alliance Initiatives for Houston grant, the next iteration of the Quilt will be a physical installation that will be deployed in a nomadic manner across the various community entities of the Third Ward, accessible to all members of the community.

12
Jack Yates
One of the civic fathers of Houston's black community; 1872; Founder Emancipation Park

12
Community Center Building
1939; Architect; William Ward Watkin; WPA Moderne

12
Theola Petteway and Judge Zinetta Burney
Co-Founders of Emancipation Park Conservancy 2011

13
El Dorado Ball Room
1939; Lenard Gabert; Art Moderne

14
Sixth Church of Christ Scientist
1941; One of only three congregations in the US; Art Deco

13a
Flowerman House
2305 Francis Street

13b
Lightnin' Hopkins
Blues Guitarist
bus stop @ Dowling Street / Now Emancipation

13b
Lightnin' Sam Hopkins
Blues Guitarist

13a
Cleveland Turner
"Flowerman" Folk artist
1935–2013

15
Project Row Houses
Community Artist Collective 1994
Row houses built 1939

15
Rick Lowe
Co-Founder of Project Row Houses, 1994

16
Yates High School / Baylor College of Medicine Ryan Middle School
1928; William Ward Watkin

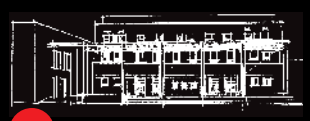
17
Houston Negro Hospital / Now Riverside General
1926; 3204 Ennis Street; Maurice J Sullivan

17
Dr. Rupert Roett and Dr. Ben Covington
Founders of Houston Negro Hospital

18
Nursing School at Houston Negro Hospital / Now Riverside General
1926

19
Cuney Homes
1940, 1942, 1993; John F. Staub, MacKie and Kamrath, Landscape Hare and Hare; 3201 Cleburne Ave

20
Thurgood Marshall College of Law
Texas Southern University; 1976, John S. Chase



21
Mack Hannah Hall and Granville Sawyer Auditorium: TSU Campus
1947; Lamar Qato

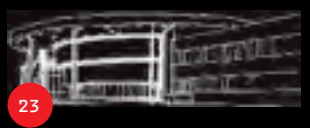
21
Heman Sweat
His lawsuit against the state challenged the segregation of the University of Texas

21
John Biggers
Artist and Muralist; Founder TSU Art Department

21
John S Chase
Architect; 1925–2012; First African American enrolled in UT architecture

21
Barbara Jordan
Graduate of TSU and First Black woman to represent Texas in the US House of Representatives

22
Ernest S Sterling Student Center
1976; TSU Campus; John S. Chase. Architect



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Martin Luther King Humanities Center
1969; TSU Campus; John S. Chase Architect

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Johnston's Middle School / Now YWCP
1925

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Peggy Park
4101 Almeda Road

26
Weingarten's Supermarket
Location of Houston's first Sit-in

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TSU Students
March 4, 1960; Sit-in at Weingarten's Supermarket Lunch Counter

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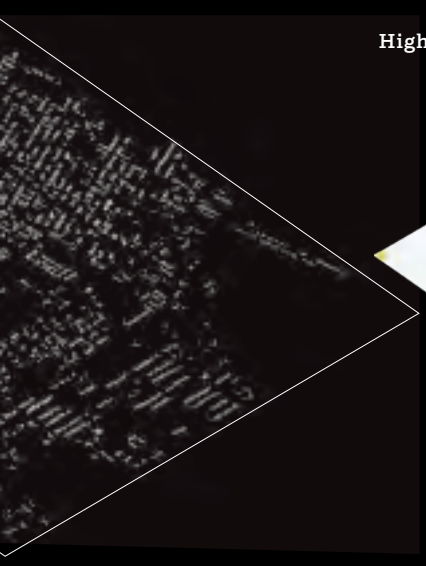
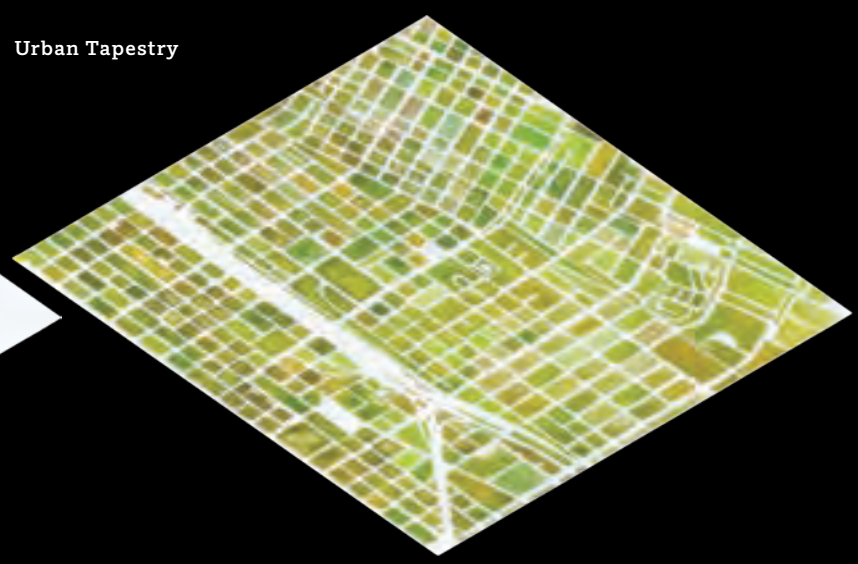
Houston Light Guard Armory / Now Buffalo Soldier Museum
1925; Architect Alfred C Finn



Highway 288 Incision

Urban Tapestry

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HOUSING

& THE GILDED MUZZLE

by Marie Rodriguez

Houston is an alien landscape. A city with streets that slump and crumble due to its tenuous subsurface. The continual creation of potholes makes for a daily commute that is, at best, choppy. It relentlessly hinders the car's wheels and makes for erratic progress. During an idle moment waiting at a traffic signal on Chartres and Commerce, I witnessed a heart-wrenching scene: the reality of homelessness writ large. Police crews were walking through the infamous homeless encampment that has found a home there for the past several years, evicting its residents. Safely behind my car window, the callousness of this city struck me hard. Houston has one of the lowest numbers of homeless residents within a major city and annual counts that show a constant decline in homelessness. Yet Houston is unable to provide shelter for all the homeless people it does have.

The dismantling of the homeless encampment sets off a broad set of questions about housing in Houston. Hiding behind these published averages that cover a vast area are many different housing crises, each difficult to name, in part, because our collective vocabulary, standards, and knowledge of history are not up to the challenge. The fact that affordable housing is addressed as a social problem couches its purpose as a societal burden. The root of the crisis is within the process of how we provide shelter with a disregard to the individual's specific needs. A government agency may often whitewash an extant community in order to satisfy an image of "housing" that is in fact societally predetermined. The problem is that this enhanced image may not and often does not nurture that existing community. This essay, then, is more about how to talk about housing, rather than about offering solutions.

Aerial photo by Alex MacLean

Four microhousing plans, Nagakin, 150 Flat, New Hope Housing, and Lawn Road Flats. Redrawn by Marie Rodriguez.

The dips and bumps in Houston's roads, and our bursts of acceleration between them, has a parallel in Houston's population growth and development patterns. It is a characteristic of a business-driven metropolis, manifesting a "rush-business-wide-openness" appearance noted by John Milsap as early as 1910. It is a city that bursts with vim and vigor. But there is a latent question: how can such a wealthy city not shelter it's less fortunate in a dignified way? The mayor believes that Houston can overcome its status as one of the most inequitable cities in the US and has initiated different strategies to tackle this socio-economic gap with signature efforts focused on five target "Complete Communities"—but the vision remains vague.

In Houston, we need innovation not only to provide shelter for homeless people, but also innovation across every housing type—and especially more variety in types. The neglect of creativity in housing structures has been fueled by building the same models, on repeat. Housing developments in Houston act as a gilded muzzle that restrains design evolution and feigns progress with a thin coat of luxury and ornamentation. Their siting isolates residents from neighbors. Even as Houston becomes more dense in terms of built structures, the new housing projects do not coalesce into a larger whole. Their spatial program, building mass, and landscape fail to communicate a language that can engage the potential social body. We need a revolution not only in housing strategies for the homeless and people of all incomes but a revolution that fosters social relationships and communities.

At present the latest housing idea for the homeless is temporary "low-level shelters" — an important acknowledgment of the difficult truth that not every homeless person will accept conventional types of housing. When first proposed in early 2017, the siting for these staffed shelters was to be under designated highway overpasses. In December 2017, the METRO board approved a plan for a shelter inside a relatively isolated METRO bus facility at McKee Street just north of Buffalo Bayou. While these ideas are rapid responses to a crisis, they disregard the potential to forge more poetic and humane solutions. How can the design community work with city officials and its departments to probe deeper and achieve a truly creative proposition? Where is the "can-do" spirit of Houston that local politicians proclaim? How can we rethink housing so everyone has a home and we don't just shuffle bodies around?

Domestic Examples

Early Small-Scale Housing

Houston has a dual personality of entrepreneurship and chicanery. At the dawn of Houston's development, the idea of shelter was constructed and designed with raw utility. A large swath of domestic houses following the founding of Houston would service the multiple trades that worked along bayous and railroads. These houses served as inns, hotels, lodging, and boarding houses. They provided shelter to a bustling cast of lodgers such as longshoremen, speculators, immigrants, migrants, etc. The spatial program in these boarding houses were elastic, ductile structures that easily converted rooms or salons from one to two and even three rental spaces, propelled by the volatile surge in demand for shelter. This response to the highs and lows of lodging needs had a democratizing effect on the development of housing in Houston. The city's unsustainable speed of growth, along with unexpected disasters, would strip away the need for comfort and community building within domestic house designs for the working class. During World War II, various multi-family residences were constructed to meet wartime demands when blue-collar workers were filling positions at nearby industrial plants, channel docks, railyards and construction sites.

In the few intact sections of Houston's historic wards—especially the Sixth Ward—you can still find examples of modest but dignified housing such as row houses, bungalows, and cottages that were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "discrete duplexes" that Margaret Culbertson documented for *Cite* 95 and their close cousin, the fourplex, have provided affordable housing that is often seamlessly integrated into the surrounding context, providing the opportunity for a mixture of classes within neighborhoods like Montrose, Eastwood, Houston Heights, and even Southampton. As documented by the Kinder Institute, this important housing type is no longer being built in large numbers and the existing stock is quickly yielding to demolition or conversion to expensive single-family houses. The loss of these nimble housing types is dramatically changing the dynamic pattern of these historic neighborhoods.

Rice Building Workshop (recently renamed Rice Construct) developed successful iterations of row houses in partnership with Project Row Houses. The architect Brett Zamore followed a similar line in his design logic that took a local house form and distilled it into an affordable product. He carefully reworked vernaculars of our region into an efficient, affordable, and charming house type that he packaged as the ZFab housing unit. These important efforts, even as they are being scaled up, represent a very small fraction of the innovation in new housing types.

Multi-family Housing

Houston has a few publicly-owned housing projects, such as Allen Parkway Village and Irvington Village, but far less than major cities that came of age in the early twentieth century. Houston relies on federal housing vouchers and poorly aging 1970s-era garden apartments, which serve as privately-owned de facto public housing. The Houston Housing Authority (HHA) is collaborating with non-profit groups and doing good work with the best resources available but in the face of natural disasters and federal down funding the limits of housing vouchers and few funding options comes into sharp focus. The destruction brought about by Hurricane Harvey served to intensify a looming crisis where many of the worst hit structures were the very same affordable multi-family apartments. Large numbers of old and outdated structures are in desperate need of repair and upgrades. Such repairs are likely the most cost-efficient way to preserve affordability that will help maintain established communities.

In the past five years, the "Texas Donut" has been repeated across the region so much, that it is easy to lose your sense of place. Am I in Midtown or the Heights or EaDo or the Energy Corridor? These buildings fill entire blocks and wrap around hidden parking garages. Courtyards and pools provide some fresh air to units but on the whole these apartment buildings have little indoor-outdoor relationship. You enter by car, navigate sterile halls, and settle into units with relatively few windows. Sadly, the overall effect of this type of density stifles community development. Once wide open and bucolic, the now well-worn landscape of Houston has layer upon layer of built structures that jostle and huddle at different scales, styles, and material. This pastiche environment of deficient housing demands an inoculation of local ingenuity towards policy, construction, design and planning.

After surviving an epic storm such as Harvey, Houston should develop a fuller repertoire of housing strategies, invest in new buildings and celebrate its communities but more importantly, explore new building types.

View from Tout Suite.
Photo by Tom Flaherty.

The Big Picture

Houston is currently experiencing a housing crisis where market rates for rental units that used to meet standards of affordability have ended. When the combined cost of housing and transportation are considered along with HUD Secretary Ben Carson's rental proposal, the big picture is more troubling. The options for those living below the poverty line are scarce especially with the potential spike of tripling their current rental rates if HUD's proposal is approved. In fact, only 18 out of 100 families that apply are offered subsidized affordable housing. We need a heuristic approach to housing that can recapture an organic Gemeinschaft (informal community interactions) among its residents despite its constructed environments. New housing projects should revisit Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) design concepts that encourage a relationship and access to outdoor landscapes, a mix of incomes and housing types to create communal societies. For this concept to succeed there must be an effort to understand the process of how to house an individual. This involves searching for the root cause of their hardship, what can or would provide happiness and basic comfort. The mission for affordable housing agencies should be to uncover the personal context of the prospective resident. Agencies should come to understand the personal context of the individual in need by learning about their inner environment- a complete world which consists of their state of mind, gender, values, beliefs, cultural history—in other words that which comprises their Gemeinschaft. But in order to effectively place people in a successful housing environment also requires an awareness of what psychologists call the relational context of a person. This is where their personal context thrives in situ. The relational context emerges from the characteristics, qualities and supportive elements of the individual's sense of place. The model housing environment that agencies should explore is in the dynamic interactions found within the relational context of a family or tenant. Examples of contextual elements would include friendships, a neighborhood park, community center, church, etc. There is a new wave of thinking among some private institutions like Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) and its "Doubling Down" plan. They actively adopt an approach that offers a supportive housing model that facilitates tenant access to health care and social resources. This alignment of public/private initiatives with a commitment to the conservation of a family or individual's relational context can reveal and reverse the root causes of homelessness and poverty. CSH research studies indicate that 80% of chronically homeless tenants are still living in supportive housing after a year.

Can there be a reform in Houston's housing codes and markets that can incentivize developers to rehabilitate existing small-scale housing types of courtyard apartments, garage apartments (also known as ADU), duplex, triplex, and fourplexes with courtyard green spaces that effectively encourage a relational community? How do we change the ground rules so that developers do not continue to invest in a saturated upmarket and instead redirect their efforts to foster social communities in an indelible way? How do we promote more partnerships between corporate entities and federal groups? The efforts of the HHA and Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV) to assess existing social interactions and reactions between homeless residents in encampments is a process that attempts to find the best housing solution for each individual. Mark Thiele, vice president of HHA's HCV program affirms that their successful collaboration with local service agencies have worked for the past six years, since 2012, to really drive down homeless numbers in Houston. The best collaboration in Houston at the moment is between SEARCH and New Hope Housing. It's successful program connects an individual or family with the best housing type and supportive services. A sense of place and comfort is provided in the NHH facilities with counseling, accountability, job placement and community support to enable a successful transition for families or individuals into permanent housing. To recapture a critical element of the individual's relational context is key in this transition. The relational context is the psychological space that you inform and will, in turn, inform you as you engage with it and your personal context. This is where differing personal contexts mix, diverse people coalesce and try to find an equilibrium—a sense of place—a relational context. Here is the creation of the Gesellschaft (relational society) awareness, a mutual community that has its communal society as a model of conscious support.

Our city needs to look at its distinct characteristics of cultural diversity in order to identify, express, and promulgate its heritage. Houston architects need to create social sculptures and create affordable housing that nurtures without dismantling the extant community. Design solutions that engage the relational art of a neighborhood and builds a social architecture that benefits its residents coterie. There is no need for another building dressed with a culture-appropriated kitsch detail or another cost-effective design that fails to enhance but rather acts as a crafted cage that isolates. How do we appeal to the highest ideals of Houstonians and overcome the NIMBYism that has stopped new affordable developments in so-called high-opportunity areas?

Signs of Hope

There is positive progress that can be found in the city with groups such as GO Neighborhoods, Avenue CDC, and LISC. They mobilize communities by listening to them and encouraging their highest aspirations. Through "Quality of Life Agreements," communities develop support for cohesive approaches to housing development including financial literacy, preservation/repair of existing housing stock, and recommendations for multi-family housing sites where it makes the most sense. In well-organized communities like these, the City of Houston leveraged disaster recovery money after Hurricane Ike with private investment to build transit-oriented developments with mixes of affordable and market-rate housing. Hurricane Harvey disaster recovery funding after Harvey could extend and magnify those efforts. The Way Home program has met with success as well. A partnership between the city, non-profit foundations, and institutions that serve the homeless has sought to reduce homelessness through coordinated action. Single-Resident Occupancy (SRO) housing built by New Hope Housing have been integral to this reduction, with their high design standards. Former Mayor Parker and Mayor Turner have made credible claims that homelessness among veterans has been nearly eliminated.

The struggle to find a home, safety, and rest is a mutual concern for citizens of all income levels. Yet the success of each individual's search for shelter is hindered or assisted by their relational context, that of a bank, family support, ethnicity, cultural status, addiction, or mental health. It is the relationship between the individual and their context that situates affordable housing as the potential bulwark. This last issue is one of the major causes of homelessness, and the most ignored. Is the person with a mental illness not only sheltered but at home? Can they too have a sense of place infused with art and design? Mental illness is often not diagnosed or treated within impoverished communities. As their mental health escalates, they are criminalized and as jails become their semi-permanent shelter, their situation cascades into long-term homelessness.

One sign of hope is the regular acknowledgement that the Harris County Jail is our largest mental health hospital. The Harris County Sheriff's Office is showing more empathy towards the homeless community after several failed attempts at strict enforcement. A turn in policy has now created an opportunity for a real engagement with the crux of homelessness. The Homeless Outreach team is aware of the prevalence of mental illness within these communities and has included transportation to and from the proper health facilities and resources that can offer them the help they need to improve their living conditions.

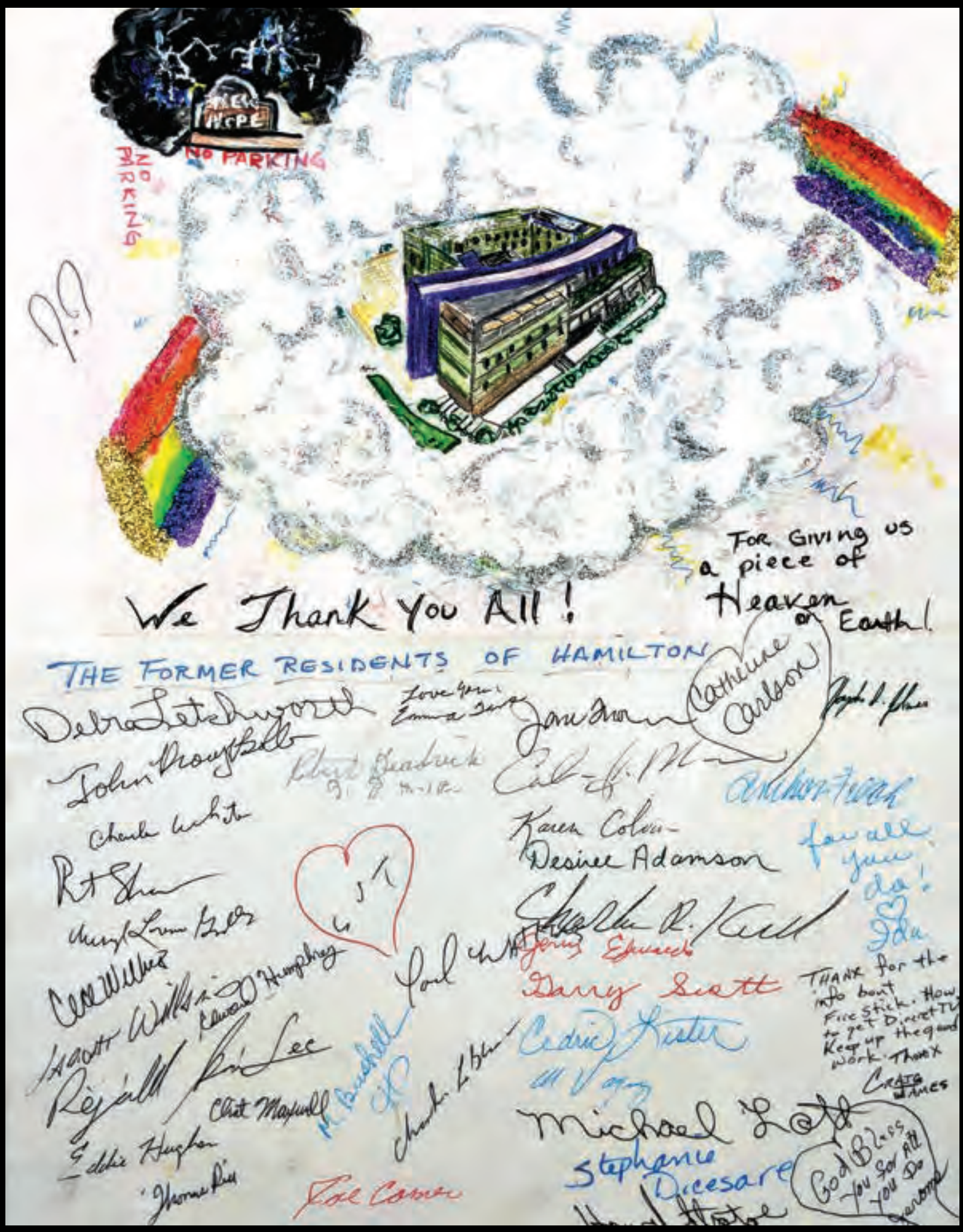
The International Examples

Early Models of Social Housing

Even with these signs of hope, we lack the vocabulary in Houston, and elsewhere in the United States, to articulate what Complete Communities could look like. Early models of social housing that span from 1900-1953 such as Boundary Estates, Betondorp, Waldsiedlung Onkel Toms Hütte, Splanemann-Siedlung, Isokon Building and Unité d'habitation showcase a variety of creative residential designs and innovative space planning prototypes with certain design aspects now regarded as standards in successful and efficient housing developments. The archetypal forms of social housing are those that successfully sustain and enhance the original intent to house low-income citizens. To measure how successful a housing design works, the key factors have to address how effectively it offers comfort, safety, and a community.

Among the first housing example to provide these qualities is the Fuggerei settlement of Germany, known as the earliest continuously-operating example of social housing. It is a housing design that developed from dual interests within disparate philosophies. At the time that this housing settlement was conceived, in 1516, Martin Luther's recent critique of the Catholic church and its sale of indulgences would foment a social change in the relationship between the wealthy and the church. The impoverished citizens of Germany raised an uproar over the concentrated monetary wealth of successful merchants. The affluent were perceived to be too powerful and not fulfilling God's will, whereas the poor were relegated to damnation due to class condition alone. Luther's powerful act sparked a quick and effective re-examination and crafty solution from one of Germany's prosperous merchants.

Jakob Fugger, a wealthy merchant with



Resident's drawing of New Hope Housing Harrisburg. "Heaven on Earth." Courtesy Stephanie Dicesare.

close ties to the Roman Catholic Church, quickly engineered a clever solution that satisfied his personal interests twofold. First, the maintenance and upkeep of his ever-expanding estate required more employees which brought about the need for more housing. Second, he needed another form of absolution from the church, instead of paying off his indulgences directly to the church he provided housing under conditions that the residents say three prayers for the Fugger family. This community of social housing for the citizens of Augsburg rises a modest two stories and is arranged in clean, long rows. The intimate scale of the houses and streets creates an outdoor space that is welcoming and useful for impromptu encounters with other residents. Over time, the Fuggerei settlement has adapted its buildings and built new ones in response to the demands of its community. Mr. Fugger's adept enactment of a social housing settlement initially housed his employees, but it also endured and constructed a satisfying appearance of benevolence for the Fugger family and was successful, despite its veiled intention.

European cities at the dawn of the industrial revolution had a labor movement with a housing shortage. During this time, there was a rigid class structure that directly informed the deplorable housing conditions of the working class. This point of crisis was remedied in small part through the housing design experiments of collective living models. Early forms of Einküchenhaus (central kitchen houses) explored in Europe and in Chicago at Hull House would have communal spaces with a shared kitchen, bathrooms, dining, laundry facilities and community spaces. This was the beginnings of a fount of creative housing solutions within dense urban city centers that can still be seen today in various evolutionary forms.

Micro Units, Macro Community

A continuous retooling of space to bring an economy of use is a specialty of nano flat and micro unit designs such as bedsits, geki-sema, Nakagin Capsule Tower, Carmel Place, and The Collective Old Oak. These experiments in economy of space are better suited for cities with extreme density. These Lilliputian units are fitted to address a targeted audience and are often built to respond to the immediate pace and method of construction found in its context.

Houston is just starting to explore the micro or nano concept with its first example to be built East of downtown. The concept borrows from the typical mixed-use apartment tower model and further partitions its inner volume to create units that are at best an afterthought of Taylorism ideology. After the savage floods of Harvey such pursuits of efficiency are necessary to provide affordable housing quickly. Yet, it is at this time of urgent need when we should recall past housing approaches such as the Existenzminimum philosophy that fueled the Neues Bauen designs for Germany's affordable housing. Houston has yet to formulate its own micro housing prototype or philosophy. A rethinking of the housing built form that can jockey attributes of a method or materiality that echoes its context in the same way that the OPods dwelling units by James Law Cybertecture do in Hong Kong. They creatively reuse a construction product that is refashioned as an affordable housing prototype that can be installed within a densely populated environment.

Conclusion

To understand why the city resists a conscious design we must understand the process to find the barriers. In a critical step, the architect audits and collaborates with the community, developer, and city leadership in an attempt to create a stimulating design that uncovers the vitality of the neighborhood. The architect pursues creative solutions that craft, protect, and encourage identity, health, and comfort. This is the ideal, but the ground conditions typically favor whatever is most expedient and profitable in the short-term. We have yet to see if the Complete Communities initiatives will prove effective or become another braided tether to muffle complaints. With relatively little advocacy and innovation coming from the design community itself, and an erosion of the tenuous and Byzantine financing of affordable housing at the federal level, it is hard to keep expectations high.

We will continue to see homeless encampments under highways and along sidewalks throughout the city center. A scene of scattered and aimless bodies persist as they huddle against the base of several downtown Houston skyscrapers. This jarring image further exhibits their resistance to housing assistance. What can Houston do beyond moving our homeless neighbors into a public holding pen that will offer security, basic hygiene facilities and social services? One form of housing Houston should pay attention to can be seen at Dignity Village in Oregon. This tent encampment that conceived its own rules, funding, and model of operation, was influenced by the ideals and needs of its homeless residents. It emerged from a grassroots effort to carve an existence with a democratic system of design and governance. This settlement pattern was met with resistance, at the beginning, by the city and neighboring residents of Portland. In the end, a mutually-agreed public location and lease arrangements were established to become an exemplary alternate dwelling to city shelters. Houston is equipped to host a tent city with its ample vacant lots, a willing mayor who's exploring the idea of "low-level shelters," and a burgeoning tent community. Here is the opportunity, the reckoning of transforming the quality of life, for a group that needs it the most. This is where a potential creative place-solution can develop with innovation and empathy. Academic institutions and the construction industry can form placemaking workshop partnerships that collaborate with the homeless to provide effective quick-build structures. Several facile models worth adapting already exist which include Jean Prouve's early demountable shacks to today's tiny houses. Artistic production allows for acts of self-expression that can address a panoply of social and psychological issues within the homeless population. Space-specific art practice can synthesize identity, find the character and meaning in a place: I am homeless, but I can live here with dignity, with others who are like me, in this place that is our own. When place enters the language of expression, a relational context established, a meaningful connection takes place and the initial step out of homelessness can be achieved. This is what we have to address and what carefully deployed design solutions can make manifest: a sense of belonging, of contextual community, of home. The way forward is for us to remove the gilded muzzle that stops us in our tracks, that prevents innovation. The language of art and culture-making allows us to begin experimenting and discovering new forms and emergent building types. But if we experiment and fail, we should not give up. We should embrace and learn from our failures, rise up and continue to try - the way Houston has done since its founding.

"One form of housing Houston should pay attention to can be seen at Dignity Village in Oregon. This tent encampment that conceived its own rules, funding, and model of operation, was influenced by the ideals and needs of its homeless residents. It emerged from a grassroots effort to carve an existence with a democratic system of design and governance."

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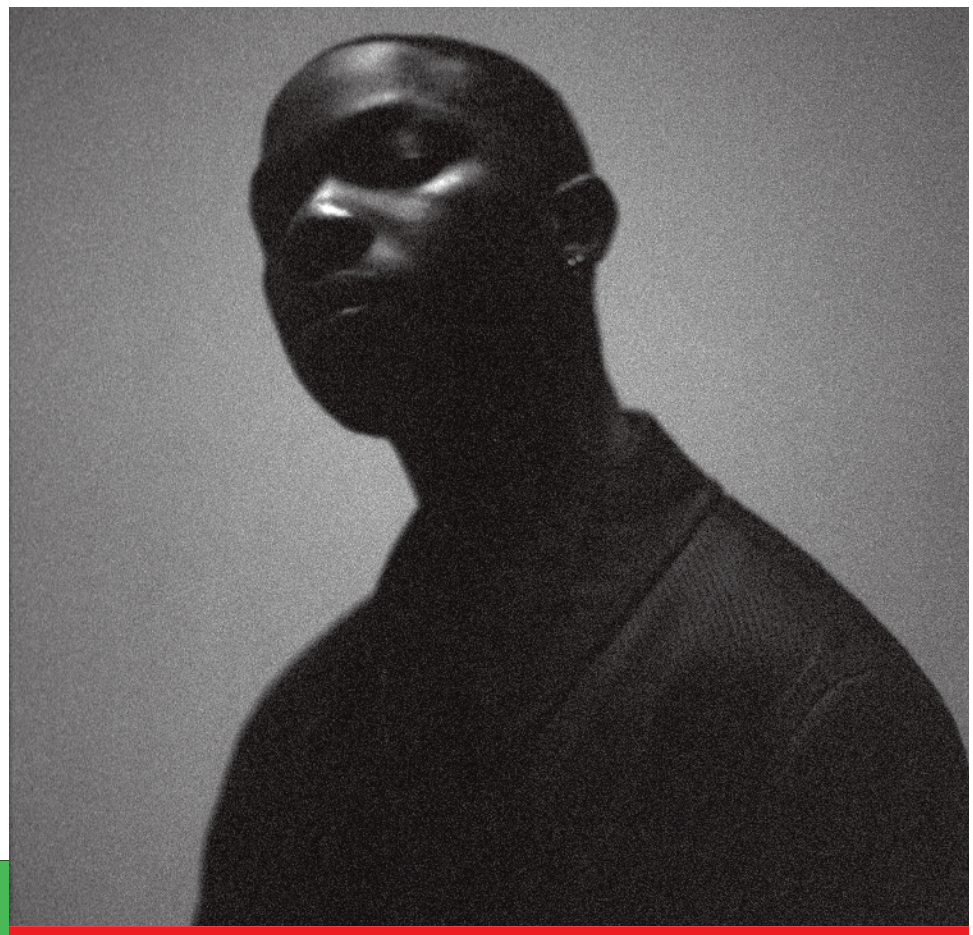

by M. Lawrence Dillon

Dozie Kanu has been making waves in the design community since he displayed a bench as part of an exhibition called "Midtown" at Lever House in New York City. The bench is arresting in its aggression and simplicity. The top is a solid slab of purple-dyed concrete fitted with industrial-grade Schedule 40 pipe atop two chrome-plated Swangas Cadillac rims. As a designed object, the bench provokes a re-evaluation of how we define and display success while still functioning as a bench. It is a powerful expression of this young artist's voice. In mid-February I sat down with Dozie at the Rothko Chapel to discuss upbringing, hip hop, rebellion, and art. An edited and abridged account of the interview follows.

Where did you grow up?
I grew up on the southwest side of Houston, and around 3rd or 4th grade we moved to Missouri City. So the demographic of my schooling sort of changed. It went from being predominantly black and hispanic to going to a white elementary school—primarily white students.

Looking back that had a pretty impactful effect on me. When you're coming home to a different culture it's sort of difficult to find where you fit at school.

What kind of kids did you hang around?
People who were extremely ambitious, who saw—you know—life outside of Houston. Who saw, real possibilities and capabilities of what they were able to accomplish.

One of my best friends, I used to go to his house after school and he'd produce music, and he'd always say crazy emphatic statements like, "I'm gonna meet Kanye West one day. We're gonna be best friends! I'm gonna be in the studio with Jay Z!"

At the time you'd say, "Uhhhh, alright, how are you gonna do that?"

Day by day, year by year, things progressed and I remember being in New York and him saying, "Hey, come to the studio, I'm here with Kanye." And being like... Whoa. You really did it. You know?

Were you a good kid?
I was rebellious, but it was a rebellious nature that was grounded in the fact that I would always make sure that I was doing no wrong.

For example, I had a friend that I had met online who lived in New York. They had a really large network in the fashion scene in New York. They were styling people like Diddy.

They invited me to fashion week. I was a sophomore in high school. So, I get this person to write my principal a letter saying that "We are inviting him..." you know, make it sound professional, like I needed to leave.

I told my parents about it and they were like, "Absolutely not! You're not missing school just to go hang out in New York." The guy had already booked the flights for me.

The night before my flight I put all of my luggage in the garage before they went to bed so that they wouldn't hear me bringing down my luggage and stuff. And I called a taxi out of the phone book, and went to the airport while they were sleeping. I turned my phone off.

When I landed in New York I had all these missed messages from my mom and my dad. I'm not answering, I'm not texting them back. They're really worried, they don't know where I am.

Finally I decided to text my mom ... " I'm so sorry mom. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I went to New York, I'm gonna be back on this date, my flight lands at this time. Don't worry about me, I'm safe." They were furious!

That ended up being a very pivotal moment in my life where I was just ... alright, I gotta get out of Texas. I met a lot of people that I ended up linking up with when I finally

"Bench on 84's" (2017).
Courtesy Dozie Kanu

moved out there after high school. Yeah. That was just one of the examples of me being rebellious and saying, "No. I'm not following your rules."

You studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. What was that like?

I was probably one of the only ones that had production design as their focus. So I was always busy.

When I was doing production design stuff a lot of the students didn't have big budgets. So I wasn't really doing the typical task of the real production designer. It was pretty much having an iPhone and searching junk yards and garage sales and things like that.

That was mainly what I was doing and after a while I was like ... Nah, I can't keep doing stuff like this. So in a weird way doing production design at that level taught me how to maximize having nothing. How to maximize having zero resources.

Can you describe the work you're doing right now?

I'm working with readymade objects and configuring them in a way that holds some symbolic value and at the same time still performs the functional aspect that it needs to perform which aesthetically fits with this design language I'm trying to develop.

I think after a few years that will eventually evolve into fabricating from scratch.

What influence does the world of hip hop have on your work, if any?

Even the 84s is a reference to hip hop culture, because in Houston rap the vast majority of Houston rappers have referenced, you know, Swangas in their raps. Chopped and Screwed, DJ Screwed, they always always referenced Swangas, and to me they represent Houston in a weird way. Not Houston the city, but Houston in the rap sense. Codeine. Promethazine. Grills. Slabs. Customizing your car. All of this stuff plays into the stereotypical Houston rapper or Houston rap scene, which I tried to implement into that piece.

Hip hop is important. Rap is like a religion at this point.

What are some of the goals you have?

There is a space within the spectrum of design that straddles the line between art and design. You can make that line hazy to people by the way that you respect the designed object.

In the eighties people were willing to buy Basquiat's work, wealthy collectors, and hang his pieces on their walls. But that is a different experience than buying a design object from a Black artist.

Now I want to pose the question are they willing to engage with a Black artist who is making design objects? Will that be as easy for them?

Question design, and question art. Sort of carve a space for myself into the history of design art. I can't wait for things to progress more so that I can really flex my skill in putting together worlds.

What comes next from Young Dozie?

I made the bench last year in May for the big group show that I participated in, and shortly after that I had the idea of turning that into a collection of other pieces with that same concept.

Recently the gallery gave me the funding to do it, and I gotta say, the response has been far better than the bench, just because it feels a little bit more accessible.

Final question, why did why you choose the Rothko Chapel to meet today?

I believe in the power of art. In a weird way religion is a sort of a dying concept. More and more people are choosing not to believe in any religion. There are more atheists now than ever. I just think that it's important to put your faith in something.

I could go on and on about why I think this place is important, but, yeah. It's one of my favorite places in the city.

"Marble Cube Table" (2016) and "TeePee Home" (2016). Courtesy Dozie Kanu.

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Photos courtesy Finca Tres Robles and Luke Brawner

FINCA TRES ROBLES: URBAN EDUCATIONAL AGRICULTURE

by Daniel, Thomas, and Mark Garcia-Prats

With little Annete dropped off at preschool, Vicente Acuña, Janette Carballo, and their two year old make the quick half-mile drive down the block to Finca Tres Robles, our 1.5-acre urban farm in Houston's Second Ward. A breeze rustles through the three large oak trees, a mix of English and Spanish chatter can be heard as they join the other parents in our Community Farm Share Program. Through a collaboration with Ninfa Laurenzo Early Childhood Center, the local HISD preschool, and the Houston Food Bank, parents like Vicente and Janette receive weekly bags of our fresh produce sponsored by community members and one Friday each month they gather for a cooking class to share a laugh, a moment, and a meal together at their community farm. Vicente is typically the only father but he and Janette have prioritized attending together for their family, a choice that is deeply personal—Janette is eating for two.

Four years ago, when we began Finca Tres Robles, we were constantly asked why we would start a 1.5-acre farm in the city, instead of finding 100 acres at the rural periphery of Houston. For most, this idea had no rationale because the only value much of society sees in agriculture is the food it produces. What would be the point of a small farm when it could only produce a fraction of the food?

Our motivations for starting a farm are founded in a deep responsibility and care for the people and place where we live. Large parts of the Second Ward are food deserts where many residents lack access to fresh healthy food options within a reasonable distance from their homes. Our time, energy, and commitment have been focused on building impactful relationships between the farm and the community in which we serve; almost every school within two miles of the farm has been out for a field trip. We've worked with Austin High School students to build community gardens at three elementary schools. Through a Texas Department of Agriculture grant, Community Family Centers has been purchasing fresh produce from us for meals prepared in the cafeteria for preschoolers attending their Los Niños Early Childhood Montessori Program. We have had AARP sponsor free gardening and cooking classes for the community. Local small businesses including Chocolate Wasted Ice Cream, Sipping Sisters Fermentation, and Metal Rain Tanks have taught classes on the farm to share their trade and professional expertise. We have played host to dance performances, poetry readings, concerts, weddings, birthdays, pop-up dinners, and community potlucks. The farm has become a central hub.

During a 1995 presentation to a group of Houston public school teachers, Dr. James Comer, the noted child psychologist and education pioneer said, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship." For years, Dr. Comer promoted

the idea that a child's academic learning goes hand-in-hand with their emotional and social development. If educators want students to acquire math and reading skills, teachers must find a way to integrate students' emotional and social development along with those academic skills. For Dr. Comer, the epicenter of learning is the relationship between educator and student. When a student feels she knows and can trust her teacher, only then will a student allow him or herself to be challenged and changed.

While central to everything we do, food is just one aspect of our farm. In communities where individuals have grown increasingly disconnected from one another, the implications of Dr. Comer's statement are profound. In our communities, just like in our classrooms, first comes the relationship, then the learning. The power of a community lies in its capacity to learn about its own challenges and resources (whether material or skill or knowledge), and to effectively leverage those resources to address the challenges. But, all of this depends on how well we know and trust each other. Do I know my neighbor's name? Can I call them if I need an extra hand? Would I respond if he called? Do I trust them enough to share my telephone number? Do I know what her talents are? Is he an electrician?

Before a community can begin to address the complex problems of health, education, just wages, and affordable housing—just to name a few—it first needs its residents to know one another's names, to share a meal, and to laugh.

Farming, especially in the organic realm, is the practice of managing relationships—the bugs to the soil, the soil to the plants, the

microbes to the roots, the weather to the pests, trees to the animal life. These relationships are intrinsically dependent upon the place in which they are located. The topography, the climate, the soil content, the native plants, all together, create an intricate, interconnected ecosystem. Each farm becomes a unique design that develops in reciprocity to its place, ultimately defining the farm. However, the most important relationship in agriculture has been abandoned—the relationship to people.

For many, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of agriculture as primarily about plants. Agriculture is not about plants, but about people. Our relationship with food has changed significantly over the past century, as agriculture has been removed from our communities, pushed to the fringes of our urban society to accommodate larger production capacities and mechanization.

Those of us who live in urban areas sometimes mourn the loss of the "small town" feel. We long for the days when we could leave our doors unlocked and when everyone knew everyone. These sentiments reflect a loss or destruction of the sense of community, but ignore the responsibility we share in that destruction. At its core, the small town is fundamentally based on the connectivity of the community and the realization that interdependence is a way of life. There is one elementary school, one high school, one grocery store, one ice cream parlor. This interdependence is far from unique to small towns. In a city where the vast majority of people no longer work and live in the same community, large chains dominate our consumer options, and fewer students attend local schools, our experience of interdependence is subject to choice.

Different movements across the United States have sprung up in a response to this lack of connectivity: buying local, promoting walkable/bikeable streets, complete communities, etc. These are the manifestation of the growing recognition of the tremendous value of relationships, and our responsibility to invest more fully in these relationships. These movements seek to facilitate the growing demand for connectivity and provide choices that positively impact our communities. Quantifying these impacts has been the focus of researchers like Dr. Doug Schuler, Associate Professor of Business and Public Policy at Rice University, who has spent the past several years analyzing various food desert interventions. This past year, Dr. Schuler and his students worked with us to begin quantifying the impacts of Finca Tres Robles, especially of our Ninfa Laurenzo Community Farm Share Program. They estimate that four years of this joint food access and education initiative alone could save between $220,000 and $1,250,000 in obesity related healthcare costs.

These health savings just scratch the surface of the potential value community focused urban farms afford. Their benefits ripple out beyond the farm's edges, reaching into the neighborhood to provide employment and economic opportunities, address environmental and air quality concerns, reduce and divert organic waste from landfills, and contribute to ecosystem services like stormwater management just to name a few.

This is why we at Finca Tres Robles believe agriculture should take a leading role in Houston. What we love about agriculture is the diversity of connections and intersections. For our ancient ancestors, food production became the cornerstone upon which all aspects of culture were built—arts, economics, sport, science, technology. Food production can once again be the cornerstone upon which we build a new culture and identity for Houston.

What excites us most is that Houston can do something no other city its size can do—not New York, Chicago, or L.A.—and make agriculture a fundamental part of our city. This city can provide the opportunity to develop a new urban vision founded on connectivity, localized choice, and an understanding of the interdependence of community, centered around a meaningful cultural exchange found through agriculture. The farm is our investment in the health and future of Vicente, Janette, and their young, growing family. Working to make agriculture accessible to our community isn't just business, it's personal.

"Agriculture is not about plants, but about people. Humans began domesticating plants 10,000 years ago in order to provide a stable source of food for themselves and their families, leaving behind nomadic hunting and gathering which had defined human reality up to that point in our history."

CRITICAL PLACEMAKING:

When Ernesto Alfaro asked me to write about my five favorite places in Houston, I made a list and came up with an absolute minimum of fourteen. In subsequent conversation with Ernesto and Raj Mankad, the focus of the assignment shifted as the concept of place, the theme of this issue, was emphasized. As common a word as "place" is, defining it is tricky, especially without resorting to tautology (a "place" is a "place" is a "place"). Ernesto proposed the concept "creative placemaking," one that he pursues in the practice of landscape architecture. He noted, however, that this phrase has generated resistance, which led the three of us to debate the conceptual place of phenomenal place in the construction of place (back to tautology again).

Therefore I feel compelled to precede enumerating my list of favorite Houston places with an attempt to explain what makes them "places," as opposed to mere spaces, terrain, landscapes, or buildings. Online definitions of "place" agree that it is a specific, defined, and bounded entity. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language offers thirteen definitions of "place" as a noun, another twelve of the verb "to place," and two more as a term of sports. In confronting the question of what makes a space a place once before, I had defined place as a distinct ideological space.

Hanging something as awkward as "ideological" on space (sorry: in skirting tautology, I seem to be going overboard on quotation marks) derives from my intuition that space becomes a place when we (or they) agree that said space possesses special, distinctive, and defining qualities. These qualities can be bad or good, but they differentiate that space from what adjoins and surrounds it. It is this implicit agreement—this social consensus—on the existence of defining qualities that guarantees that a space comes to be accepted as a place, and it is because of this consensual operation that I use the term "ideological" to describe the social process by which space gets promoted to the status of place.

Adding "critical" to "place" emphasizes the roles played by choice, intention, and design in the formation of places. To criticize is to make reasoned judgments about the truth, beauty, virtue, and goodness claims of what is being evaluated. Linking "critical" and "place" acknowledges that the aura of specialness setting a place apart grows out of how and why personal and collective sensations of elation, amazement, awe, and reverence (or fear, disgust, revulsion, and outrage) get emotionally connected to a place. The proposition "critical place" encourages questioning of why we respond subjectively to places the way we do. It also implies that prettiness, happiness, and personal satisfaction are not the exclusive criteria for judging the coherence of a place. Enjoyment, while emotionally gratifying, can inhibit apprehension of the phenomenal dimensions of a place if enjoyment is the sole sensation by which the efficacy of a place is measured.

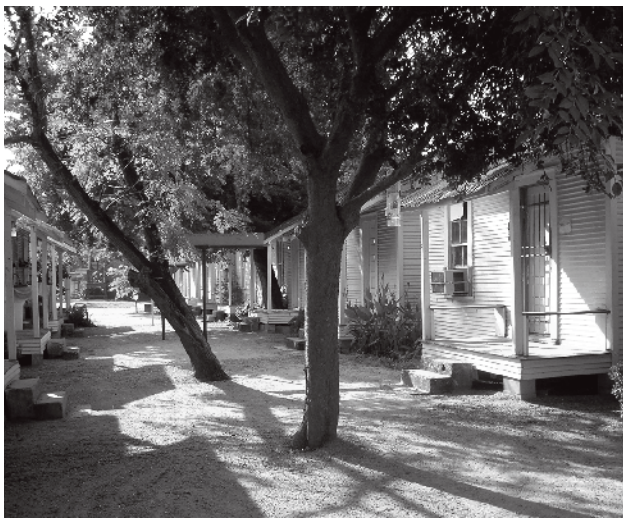
Having, I hope, made the case for critical placemaking, here are my choices.

1. Banks of Buffalo Bayou in Memorial Park
In August 2014 I had the opportunity to kayak on Buffalo Bayou from Briarbend Park downstream to Sabine Street. I was mesmerized by the bayou's frontage in Memorial Park. There one sees banks that take the form of high clay bluffs tightly framing the bayou's meanders. At irregular intervals the banks are cut through with ravines. These carry off storm water when it rains and are also conduits for natural springs. Vegetation is dense in the riparian forest buffer lining the bayou banks. The root systems of trees and shrubs anchor the banks, and the canopies of tall trees shade the streambed, creating a serene microclimate even in the middle of summer. When the water level is low, you can see outcroppings of chimney rock protruding from the sandy beaches at the base of the banks, sometimes extending into the channel. There are even little rapids near Memorial Park's west edge. The bayou's park frontage has experienced the least engineering intervention along the entire course of Buffalo Bayou. It is where you can still experience Houston as a pre-urban landscape in which the forces of animal life, plant life, and climate have not been subordinated by engineering. Sadly, a portion of this landscape has been targeted by the Harris County Flood Control District for "natural restoration" with bulldozing, clear-cutting of vegetation, and destruction of the historic high bluffs in order to reshape the banks and dredge a new channel. The non-profit Save Buffalo Bayou has marshaled public awareness of the threat to this essential Houston place, where it remains possible to discern the spiritual profundity of Houston.

2. Main concourse of the Houston Zoo
The main concourse of the Houston Zoo shows how beautiful, sophisticated, and subtle public outdoor space in Houston can be. Designed by the Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare as part of their comprehensive reconstruction of the zoo in 1949-50, the concourse demonstrates the effectiveness of symmetrical spatial organization as a method to compensate for Houston's flatness. Hare & Hare combined a central, rectangular reflection basin with architecturally integrated rows of benches, upper and lower terraces that "spatialize" the experience of flatness, and an enclosing avenue of majestic live oak trees. These elements construct a powerful sense of tranquility and well-being that cleverly condenses the larger spatial diagram structuring the plan of Hermann Park. Acknowledging the unpredictability of Houston's weather, Hare & Hare backed up the live oak trees with parallel lines of concrete canopies. Designing for the topographic and climatic conditions of Houston, Hare & Hare produced a strong form civic space that has matured with the passage of time. Hare & Hare rehearsed aspects of the zoo concourse design in their design of Hermann Square in front of City Hall. Houston's other avenues of live oak trees—Main Street, Rice University, North and South Boulevards—counter natural flatness with the construction of civic space and cooling shade. At the University of St. Thomas's two-story exterior walkway, Philip Johnson installed an upper deck to alleviate what Lars Lerup calls Houston's "flat planet" syndrome. And Isamu Noguchi's Cullen Sculpture Garden of the Museum of Fine Arts uses infrastructure, landforms, and planting to construct an architectural landscape that enables visitors to more intensely savor the phenomenal qualities of Houston. Like the Zoo Concourse, these sites persuasively shape space in Houston to construct distinct public places

STEPHEN FOX'S FAVOURITE PLACES IN HOUSTON

by Stephen Fox



3. Project Row Houses

When artist Rick Lowe and his collaborators Michael Peranteau and Deborah Grotfeldt started the non-profit Project Row Houses in 1994 to acquire a block-and-a-half of abandoned rental cottages in the historically African-American Third Ward neighborhood, any prediction that this might become one of twenty-first century Houston's foremost cultural landmarks would have seemed presumptuous. Yet inspiration, improvisation, and continuing hard work have enabled Lowe and his associates to take something very ordinary—tenant housing for working-class African-American families built in the segregated, lower-income, minority neighborhood of a Southern city—and radically transform perceptions of the cultural value of this site into something extraordinary, even prophetic. Lowe brought any artist's sensibility to re-visioning the collective significance of these houses and the communal spaces they shape, which today are perceived not as ordinary but as archetypal. Lowe transformed the value of this complex by presenting it as a representative Houston place. Twenty years earlier architect Howard Barnstone accomplished something similar when he persuaded Dominique de Menil to paint the bungalows Menil Properties had acquired near the Rothko Chapel gray with white trim, giving an otherwise ordinary Montrose neighborhood a subtle and extraordinary new identity. The Orange Show, another grassroots non-profit, has followed suit with the opening of Smither Park. Project Row Houses represents a mythic Houston promise: if you have a compelling idea, it will be embraced.

4. Astrodome

James Gast, historian of the Astrodome, concedes that despite its boldness and historic singularity, the enclosed and air-conditioned Harris County Domed Stadium was a bare-bones construction, primarily because of the lean budget with which it was built. What makes the Astrodome a quintessential Houston place is its magnitude and audacity. The amazing explosion of interior space that visitors experience is still as powerful today as when the stadium opened in 1965. Rising in the middle of what was originally a flat, empty, 260-acre surface parking lot, the Astrodome was always blunt, unmediated, and unapologetic. It still is. The Astrodome's acute sensation of spaciousness is a property of other mid-twentieth-century sites in Houston. The sanctuary of Temple Emanu El by the architects MacKie & Kamrath seems to expand spiritually because of its breadth and high-set illumination. The Rothko Chapel substitutes intimacy and intensity for the Astrodome's outburst of enormity. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Upper Brown Gallery in the Museum of Fine Art's Caroline Wiess Law Building, when it is not subdivided by partitions, contains a stunning expanse of transparent, air-conditioned interior space that is Houstonian in its generosity and grandeur.

5. Brochstein Pavilion and Garden

The Brochstein Pavilion at Rice University and its landscape, the work of New York City architects Thomas Phifer & Associates and Houston landscape architects the Office of James Burnett, embody the practice of critical placemaking. Sited at a location that was formerly the antithesis of place—unbounded, undefined, and without character—the Brochstein Pavilion and the Crownover Courtyard imaginatively and meticulously filled a void with fullness. The pavilion is a steel-framed, glass-walled volume bracketed by terraces and gardens. These expand outward into a broader terrain to knit together a place where none previously existed. Like some of the other places I've chosen, the Brochstein Pavilion's terraces and garden invite Houstonians to linger outdoors rather than simply look at it from inside the air-conditioning. In this respect, the pavilion resembles the promenade surrounding the Menil Collection as well as two more solemn sites, the Kagan-Rudy Chapel at Emanu El Memorial Park and the Proler Family Chapel at Beth Israel Cemetery, open-air structures in cemeteries, where mourners gather under cover but in the open-air to experience the passing of family and friends from life to death.

What I find compelling about these places is how they amplify and condense subjective experiences of Houston-ness. Such experiences can be of mythical Houstons—the Astrodome certainly qualifies in this regard—but, critically, they provide phenomenal experiences that ground one's sense of connection to Houston. In March 2016 the Cultural Landscape Foundation sponsored a symposium in Houston that examined new public place design, focusing on Buffalo Bayou Park, Discovery Green, Hermann Park, Emancipation Park, and projects still in the design stage. What landscape architect and historian Charles Birnbaum, executive director of the Cultural Landscape Foundation, discerned in his observations about Houston is the necessity of critical awareness in the construction of such places precisely because each one has the capacity to deepen and broaden public apprehension of what it means to live in Houston.

Buffalo Bayou by Jim Olive and others by Tom Flaherty.

THE PARKING LOT BECOMES A SPECTACLE

by Ernesto Alfaro

Houston Coffee & Cars. This monthly event changes the program of the parking lot at Memorial City Mall into a performance not just for cars, but people, too. It started 13 years ago with no more than 15 cars and quickly grew, now drawing 3,000 cars and 8,000 attendees month after month. Organizer Jorge Verdejo says, "We are able to feature some of the most sought after and exclusive machines in the world. We have some people that travel from all over the country monthly and we have some that arrive as early as 4 am just to get a great spot." While the vehicles are certainly the draw, the placemaking takeaway lesson here is that this event is about the people. The success of the event has been so steady, that Memorial City Mall organizers have changed the section of the parking lot in which it takes place, from the less visible south side, to the parking area fronting Gessner Road. The program transformation is impressive, and the visitors gets the sense that while people are there to see the vehicles, they are also drawn to the human spectacle, to see the toddlers in remote control toy cars, to pet the cute Corgis out for a stroll with their humans, to see each other. Photos by Tom Flaherty.


American Girl


SEARS


SUMMIT288

READING HOUSTON'S NAMES NEW & OLD

Text and Photos by John Pluecker

The ride begins at the house my father's parents built on Lawson Street in the East End. I bike over from my own house and take a little video of it: the green grass, the beige tones of brick, the overgrown ornamental pear tree in the front. I ride past the little apartment complex where I lived in 2001 when I first moved back to this neighborhood, and then by the little houses being manicured and flipped all around the neighborhood. Riding past the Magic Palace party complex at the corner of Dumble and Leeland, I notice new graffiti behind the Thai restaurant: "La Raza Unida" and "F*ck gentrification" and "La Raza para siempre." I continue down Leeland and cross the railroad tracks near Cullen, conscious that this is the dividing line the East Downtown Management District uses to define their jurisdiction. Behind a house on Leeland, a huge quantity of jeans, pants, and shorts in child and adult sizes are pinned on a clothesline, zigzagging across the backyard. On the other side of the street, gleaming white, four-story townhomes beckon. I bike on to cross the light rail tracks barreling down Scott Street.

By the Oak Farms Milk facility, a huge new HISD building is being raised on a site where formerly there was an array of narrow streets and humble shotgun homes. One of those houses was owned by the family of artist and friend Lisa E. Harris, who has made film, opera, and performance about the loss of her ancestral home and about that very neighborhood, which she and other residents call "the Lost Ward." A little chunk of the Third Ward that was lost first when it was cut off from the rest of the neighborhood by the building of the Gulf Freeway, and now it is being lost again to redevelopment. What is razed and what is raised?

Around the corner, there is a Perry Homes gated development called "Midtown Village," built in the mid 2000s. The anachronistic use of the term Midtown is due to the fact that the development predates the invention of the EaDo term; the developers knew they wanted a marketable name, but none existed so they used

Midtown, despite the geographical distance. In 2009, the East Downtown Management District held a competition to select a new name for this part of town (the losing options were Warehouse District and Saint E—after St. Emanuel Street); EaDo won.

I bike by the Tian Hau temple nearby on Delano Street with its cantilevered archway entrance, one of many reminders that this used to be a Chinatown, before business owners relocated to Bellaire Boulevard and Alief. The streets around it are lined by townhomes up and down every side. The only people outside are walking dogs, jogging, or exercise-walking, a range of colors in lycra and skin. On the streets, old trolley tracks crisscross the pavement in all directions—remnants of other ways of moving through the city. I read on a sign in front of a gated set of pasty white stucco townhomes: Modern EaDo. As I come closer to the newly-christened Emancipation Avenue, I pass a sign for the Assumption Cameroon Catholic Association at St. Nicholas Catholic Church. A group of people are assembled on the front steps of the church and are happy to chat, a lively mix of Cameroonians, Nigerians and African-American members. As one Cameroonian member tells me, their community was re-assigned to this church by the Archdiocese about 15 years previous in order to infuse the parish with new energy (and increased tithing). A Texas Historical Marker by the front door tells the story of this oldest Black Catholic church in Houston, which—coincidentally and unbeknownst to me—was designed by my German Texan great-uncle, Leo M. J. Dielmann, who designed hundreds of churches around Texas in the early twentieth century. I've sped down Polk Street thousands of times just one block over from the church, but I was unaware of this little sanctuary or my own familial ties to it.

It's getting dark by this time, and, tired, I bike home as quickly as I can pedal.

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Since the mid-twentieth century, highways have dominated thinking in Houston, not bike rides or trolleys. The highways sliced through the historic wards in the center of the city, devastating historical neighborhoods. The highways ignored and attempted to obliterate older forms of movement, other ways of organizing and seeing, though they were not entirely successful.

What I'd call highway thinking has run along well-established corridors, falling into old arguments and engrained positions. Houstonians swerve, cut, and accelerate forward as fast as possible into the future, dreaming that it will be more comfortable or more safe. The mind is formed and shaped by its surroundings, by the ways the body transports the mind. The city becomes the structure of our minds, allowing certain pathways and disallowing (or at least discouraging) others. But not everyone stays on the highways.

Artist Lisa E. Harris told me the story of her grandfather who would always take the backroads, the cut-throughs, the smallest thoroughfares connecting one historic neighborhood to another. She recalled being picked up from one family home and taken somewhere, and her grandfather would never take the highways. Her grandfather called these routes "The Old Indian Trail."

What other kinds of thinking become possible in Houston, when one exits the highway and leaves behind the Google Map fastest route from one place to another? What about navigating through the backstreets of neighborhoods? What other kinds of seeing and perceiving become possible? Highways here are both real and metaphorical, standing in for a larger structure of thinking, a lack of attention. What if thinking happened along backroads, narrow alleys, and farm roads with deep ditches tucked into the middle of the city? What if thinking happened not just in relation to the names of the exits on the highway or the erroneous neighborhood designations on smartphone apps, but rather through all of the other ways that

people have called and named these spaces?

This way to a memory. This way to remember something buried or entangled with weeds and vine. Old Galveston Road. Old Spanish Trail. Old Indian Trail. The wards.

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On Youtube, I watch a talk by Jim Parsons from Preservation Houston about the history of Houston's wards, from their creation in 1839 as political districts until the present day. By 1915, the ward system was officially abolished. And yet, despite that fact, as Parsons says, "110 years after the Wards should have disappeared, they haven't." These nineteenth century political districts became social and cultural formations largely defined by race and national origin. As African-Americans moved into Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, those of European descent moved out. As Mexican-Americans moved into First, Second, and Sixth Wards in the first decades of the twentieth century, those Germans, Italians and other Europeans—my ancestors who had newly acquired their twentieth century urban whiteness—largely left.

Those historic wards were subsequently sliced by freeways, diced by redlining and disinvestment. One history of Houston could be written by analyzing the gradual shrinkage of the size of historic wards. For the last thirty years or more, these same neighborhoods have faced steady encroachment and displacement of historic residents. With a slew of hungry real estate developers and agents, the wards would appear to shrink year after year, while other names and designations grow and grow. Midtown creeps north and east, west and south. Eado creeps across the bayou into the Fifth Ward to the north, deep into the Second Ward on the east.

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In 2016, I wrote an article about a development project designed by Francois de Menil in Acres Homes that aims to build $350-400K homes for artists. In that article I wrote a paragraph that was widely shared online:

"One note for anyone looking to move into a neighborhood in Houston that is not historically their own: no need to rename the neighborhood. Nationwide, this phenomenon has become a tired cliché. If historical residents call the neighborhood East End, let's not call it EaDo. If historical residents call the neighborhood Third Ward, let's not call it Midtown. If a neighborhood is called Acres Homes, let's not invent another name like NoLo. It's offensive and wrong. Naming is important, is political, is a way of self-identifying. When a developer re-names a neighborhood, it enacts a kind of violence, an erasure, of that community and its history."

Years later, the battle for control and power in a space is still a battle for the power to name. Names have an architecture, a sound structure. The shape of a name gives it a body, born out of years of history and struggle. These structures of sound and memory are often unknown to new arrivals, or given short shrift. Thus new arrivals often end up calling a place by a new name, one they can identify with more smoothly.

Perhaps it's helpful to differentiate naming and calling. For this purpose of this essay, I'd argue naming is institutional, hierarchical, and assigned from above. While calling tends to be more ephemeral, personal, and specific. Though it is entirely dependent on who is doing the calling and who has the power to name. And often the two intertwine and weave together.

If socially powerful people begin to call a place by a new name, their own social position and power can result in that calling becoming a name. For example, a new development by Jonathan Wasserberg of City Choice Homes in the heart of the Second Ward off of Canal and Everton Streets is being called "Eado Square." The East Downtown Management District defines the eastern boundary of the neighborhood as the railroad line that cuts diagonally across the East End. Yet this development is far out of those boundaries. Residents of the Second Ward have petitioned online and off to get the developer to rename the development to reference the actual, historic neighborhood: Second Ward. In this case, what has happened is that the developer has decided to call their development a name in conflict with the actual institutional name of the space. As a historical resident of the Second Ward told me, "EaDo is not a neighborhood, it's a creation of marketing." While this is true, this new name for a space is promoted and repeated in real estate and in the visual landscape, used by new residents, and eventually becomes an identity. This new name is expansive and, reaching its tentacles out into new areas, re-christening spaces as it goes.

Another example of this calling becoming naming is found in Lisa E. Harris's film about the Third Ward; in it, two young people looking for a home with a real estate agent refer to their disinterest in homes "in the Third Ward part of Midtown." The name Midtown here is so powerful as to overstep its bounds, growing larger and larger while literally devouring other historical names. Over the long term, these incursions into new territories erode historical names, as the privileged decide to call a space by a new term that often later becomes recognized as the new name. A friend at the Midtown Management District tells me they recently received a phone call from a new resident complaining about Midtown street names appearing on signs in both English and Vietnamese; "This isn't Little Saigon anymore," he insisted, "all of them have left already," he insisted. The Little Saigon name was won after years of work and years of calling; that legacy is rapidly being undone. There are myriad examples, and they are often ugly.

On the flipside, many places with official names are called by other names by people without societal position and privilege. These names remain under the radar, non-dominant. Like calling Second Ward "El Segundo" or "the Deuce." Or, for example, the neighborhood named Magnolia Park is often called "the Avenues," says María Jiménez in an online recording. In 2017, an artwork by Jamal Cyrus, Nathaniel Donnett and Chanelle Frazier near Project Row Houses along Holman Street included directional signage with an arrow pointed toward "The Bottoms," which is what many residents of the Northern Third Ward call the area. "The Tré" instead of Third Ward. "The Nickel" instead of Fifth Ward. These informal callings—these soundings—never reach the level of an institutional naming, because the people doing the calling do not have the economic backing and social power of those managing and promoting names like EaDo or Midtown.

Over time though, through persistent organizing and power-building by the less powerful, historical elites can lose the power to confer names. Witness the renaming last year of Houston Independent School District institutions named after Confederate heroes like Stonewall Jackson. Or the renaming of Dowling Street—which had been named after a Confederate hero in 1892 as a way of insulting the empowered Reconstruction-Era Black community in Third Ward. In the last few years, many community members in the Third Ward decided that this name needed to change and this insult needed to be undone; they successfully petitioned for the city to rename the street Emancipation Avenue. In Magnolia Park, 67th Street was re-christened César Chávez Blvd in 2000, after a long fight spearheaded by Bennie Martinez, a member of LULAC and the Tejano Heritage Society. Naming reflects power gained and power lost.

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On the east side of Downtown, the streets still tell stories about the Lost Ward, Third Ward, Old Chinatown, the East End, the oldest Black Catholic Church in Houston, and more. So many stories told by the streets, the buildings, and all the long-term and generational residents of the neighborhood.

Although there is change afoot in Houston, it is hardly new. Historically, change is deeply hardwired into the logic of this city, ever since its founding as a colony on Karankawa and Mexican land. This is a moment of reckoning though, as names are reevaluated nationally in an attempt to rid places and institutions of white supremacist affiliations. At the same time, urban neighborhoods are embroiled in a steady re-taking of their territories by waves of wealthier and more privileged residents; these new residents and the organizations and institutions wooing and backing them impose new names onto the landscape. It is ironic that in Houston, as white supremacist names are being reconsidered and removed, the historical boundaries of the wards and their very names are being whittled away by hip-sounding monikers that ignore the history of the place. Who is made to feel disposable when that happens? What are the stories suppressed in that process? Maybe Lisa Harris's grandfather was right to never take the highways.

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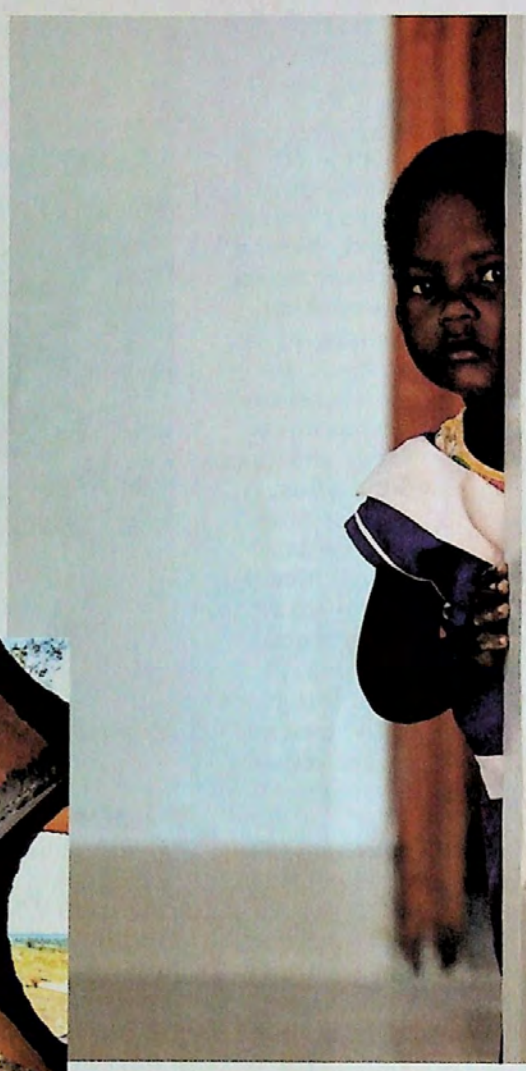

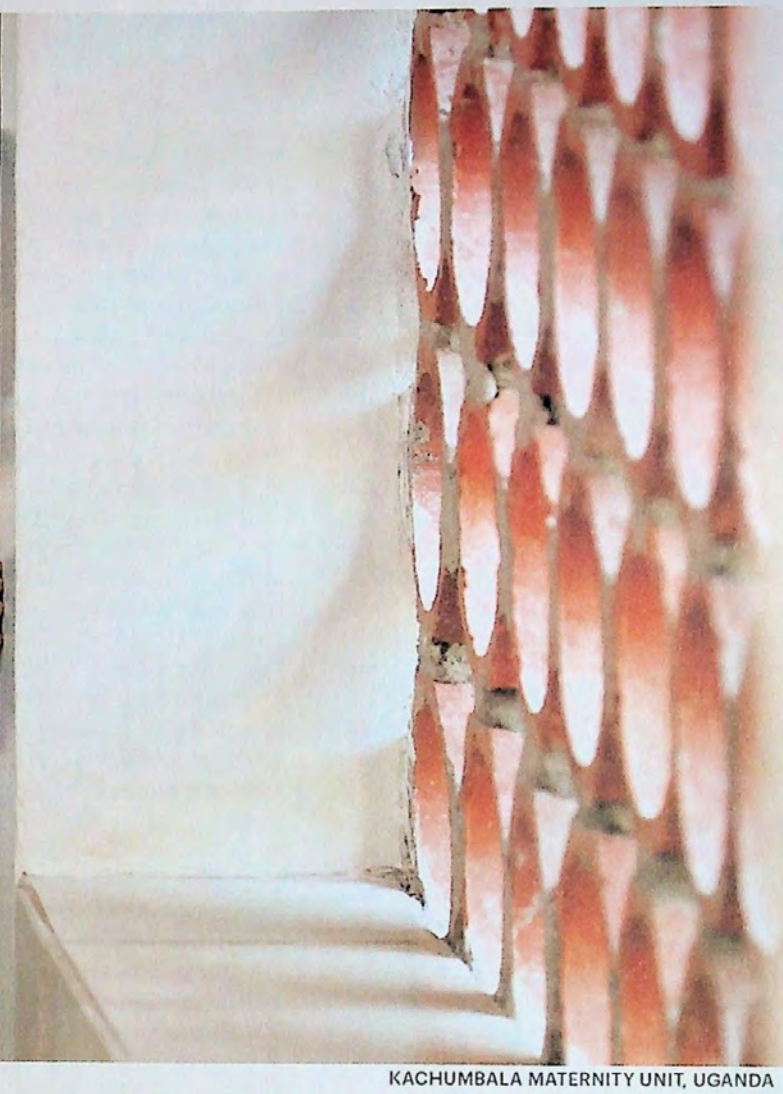

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BILL'S JUNK:
A STUDY IN LIVING WITH ART

by Bill Davenport

"Art can be disappointing, but junk always exceeds your expectations" is one of many mottoes at Bill's Junk. Its tiny Heights storefront is painted like a castle, but inside it's more like a closet: crowded with paintings, scraps, relics, driftwood, and bric-a-brac. Like its motley contents, the shop itself avoids labels; whether it's a store, a gallery, an installation, or an event depends on what you're looking for.

It began as my yard sale! In 2009, Francesca Fuchs and I had just finished renovating the building at 1125 E 11th Street, and had leftover lumber, doors, and hardware. I put everything I wanted to get rid of out on the sidewalk on Saturdays. I also had a twenty-year accumulation of thrift store art, and I started putting that out on the sidewalk, too.

I was also tired of storing my own old work. Like most artists, I had a garage full of pieces gathering dust. I decided I wasn't going to do that anymore. Anything I didn't want, whether I made it or not, was going out the door. Why should there be one rule for artworks by other people, and another for my own? Out on the sidewalk!

As the great sell-off began, people started to come by, then more people. Some were passers-by, but many were artworld acquaintances who gathered like vultures for a share in the spoils. One of them was Toby Kamps, then a curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He proposed putting the store in the museum as part of No Zoning, a show he was organizing about artists taking advantage of Houston's real estate anarchy.

After eighteen years as a Houston artist, the CAMH curator asked to exhibit, not my work, but my yard sale. Of course I agreed, but only if the CAMH installation was a real store, with everything for sale, cash-and-carry. Shopping is more fun than museum going. CAMH visitors' eyes would light up as they read the "Yes, Everything is Really for Sale" signs. The signs themselves sold well! Every day I would drive a new truckload of old art to the CAMH. I completely emptied my storage.

Today, Bill's Junk is still evolving. In this phase I find, buy, or make most things specifically for sale in the store, and host all sorts of art shows, pop-up shops, classes, and performances in the empty storefront next door.

Originally, Francesca and I bought the building at 1125 E 11th Street to meet some new needs: she needed taller walls for her paintings and we needed a second bathroom for our growing family. It had to be within commuting distance of Wilson Montessori Elementary and the Glassell School, both in Montrose, where we drove several times a day.

A couple decades ago, buildings in the Heights or Montrose that might suit these needs were cheap, but in 2006, we had about given up. We were exploring our options over fish tacos at El Rey on Washington Avenue, when Jill Whitten and Rob Proctor happened by. They had just finished a similar search for workspace for their art conservation business (they ended up converting a convenience store at 13th Street and Studewood), and mentioned that the 11th Street building (which we had all looked at but which was already under contract) was again available. Some deal had fallen through.

Francesca and I barely finished our tacos. We hurried to 11th Street and called the agent, pacing the sidewalk until he came, and bought the building within an hour: Or rather, we bought a piece of land encumbered by a two-story "Dangerous Building," a court-ordered designation that made it subject to a demolition by the Houston Police Department's Office of Neighborhood Protection. The ground floor was hip deep in trash and rats, the roof had been partly burnt away by squatters' campfires, and rain had rotted and collapsed part of the second floor, so you could see the sky through the holes. It was going to be great.

I'll skip the details of the two-year renovation odyssey except to say that, like all historic rehab projects, it cost way more than we planned, and took much more time. We moved in three weeks before Hurricane Ike.

It has been great. We enjoy a mixed-use lifestyle common in many cities but unusual in Houston. We're both close to our studios. The house upstairs is quirky, but comfortable. The storefronts have taken my artistic work in an unexpected new direction, and I think, after almost ten years here, we're even going to get our money back!

Bill's Junk interiors and exteriors. Photos Tom Flaherty.

PYBURN'S FARMS FRESH FOODS: PLACE AND GROCERY SHOPPING IN HOUSTON

by Todd Romero

**Left, Zaniah Jackson.
Right, Pyburn's Grocery.
Photos Todd Romero.**

I realize that lunchtime is closing on us, as patrons gather, singly or in small groups, at the Pyburn's Farms Fresh Foods hot food counter. Steam rises from oxtails, chicken wings, boudin balls, and other delicacies—soul food by way of south Louisiana with stops in China (egg rolls), Mexico (menudo), and Italy (spaghetti). This is not your ordinary supermarket food counter, where the victuals are primarily prepared off-site before being assembled, reheated, and, at times, even cooked; dreary fare that is rarely attuned to place or clientele. It's a very different scene here.

Wearing a green Pyburn's t-shirt and hat, nine-year-old Zaniah Jackson, a seasoned store expert, percolates a wonderful, bright energy. She catches my eye, as if to suggest, hey, listen, this is important: "I have a lot of favorite parts of the store... jalapeños, the breakfast aisle, the snack aisle, the cereal aisle," trailing off just as a chorus of adults interjects, "Everything!" Zaniah's grandfather "Rev" Ivan Jackson, considers her with warm, smiling eyes. Rev, a reverend who lives in the neighborhood, works at Pyburn's—a busy man. New lunch counter arrivals nod, smile or exchange pleasantries, alternately calling him Rev or Ivan. He breaks from a variety of other tasks on Thursdays to make a special chicken wing recipe, which the Pyburn's Regional Manager Larry Johnson explains is a steady seller at the South Union store, the company's newest property and the only one of his markets that grocer John Vuong has built from the ground up. Place plays an important role in how he operates his Pyburn's Farms Fresh Foods stores. Vuong's stores primarily cater to food insecure or underserved areas in greater Houston. Independent grocery stores like his are more varied, engaging, and dynamic consumer and community places than the typical American supermarkets. Moreover, his approach to successfully running his string of grocery stores points to the crucial ways in which immigrant entrepreneurs are quietly reinventing food businesses in a manner that suggests a rather keen ear for tuning place to community needs in a complex competitive environment.

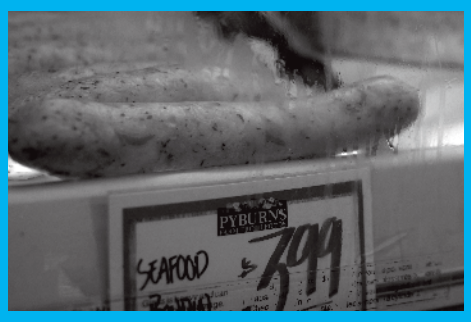
The Rodney Dangerfield of place, the modern supermarket gets no respect at all; at least from academics and critics, who see a contrived space as tired as the old comedian's set-piece quip. Cast as oversized, sterile and impersonal, the grocery store is most often viewed as a soulless shopping zone devoid of meaningful human interaction—a place embodying little community spirit. Comparing North American grocery shopping to the lively and engaging experience of her fieldwork at a long-established open-air market in her book *Porta Palazzo: The Anthropology of an Italian Market*, the anthropologist Rachel Black laments, "Back home in North America, buying food was always part of domestic drudgery, carried out in giant, impersonal supermarkets; these were solitary outings in which I rarely met or talked to a soul, not even in the long check–out lines." As she makes clear, her engaging ethnography builds on a longstanding strain in sociological and anthropological thought. The modern supermarket remains, in this view, corrosive to social bonds and serves as the locale where the connections between food production and consumption are magically erased—a dangerous place where the "delocalization" of the food system undermines sociability and community.

Such criticisms are not entirely wrongheaded. And, yet, the critique of the modern grocery store as a Janus-faced symbol of American plenty and empty consumerism resonates most loudly in neighborhoods of plenty. Play with the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, which defines food deserts as census tracts where a third or more of the residents live a mile away from the nearest supermarket, and you will quickly learn what a legion of researchers, activists, and food policy wonks have long known. The distribution of the archetypical supermarket marks high points in a depressing topography of want across impressive swaths of urban and rural America. Of course, Houston's pitched food access issues are deeply rooted. The larger story of segregation, institutional racism, educational inequality, and political hostility or neglect, among other issues, tied to the complex development of food deserts, remain beyond the scope of this essay. Food deserts neither solely develop nor can be magically resolved by the absence or presence of grocery stores—inequality remains a broader and more pernicious problem.

Nonetheless, the history of the American supermarket is instructive. In the 1930s, midsized chains muscled out small independent stores that had predominated. A&P markets proved an important bellwether; centralizing distribution and employing economies of scale to drive down costs and raise profits. The Great Depression stalled the development of the supermarket, but the end of World War II witnessed the growing dominance of supermarkets that popped up wherever postwar suburbs developed. Independent grocery stores proved the rarest of birds, never fully extinct but increasingly difficult to find. As supermarket chains came to dominate the market, enjoying more than 60% market share by the late 1950s, they largely eschewed inner city areas to develop new properties. They pitched their wares at a growing suburban and largely white middle class.

In the absence of large supermarkets in underserved areas, an impressive array of smaller independents has emerged to market groceries to Houston's increasingly diverse communities. Using Harris County Appraisal District information in a 2015 article, The *Houston Chronicle* Data Reporter John D. Harden estimated that 500,000 Houstonians live in food deserts. At the beginning of the same year, a jubilant business article in the newspaper noted that it was a banner year for retail development, according the 22nd Annual Wulfe & Company Real Estate Survey, with the grocery sector leading the charge with 32 new supermarkets planned. Eleven months later, Harden's piece reported that one new grocery store was built in a Houston food desert, a lone outpost of the German discount grocer Aldi. He identified 98 different grocery stores in underserved areas with bigger chains—Fiesta (12 stores), H-E-B (7 stores), Kroger (6 stores), Randalls (4 stores), and Wal-Mart (3 stores)—only comprising 24% of the market for a sizeable chunk of the city's population. Independent grocery stores matter a great deal in Houston's food system.

A shrewd businessman, John Vuong flourishes in underserved markets often avoided by bigger food retailers. He is a compact, thoughtful man with a warm smile contained by a careful manner. At age seventeen, he arrived in Houston from South Vietnam to Houston, part of the second wave (c. 1978-1982) of Vietnamese immigration to



"The Pyburn's meat market offers all of the basics but specializes in high-quality boudin and other house-made sausages, stuffed pork chops, and other specialty items that speak to the Creole and Cajun foodways of numerous Houstonians with roots in South Louisiana."

the United States. He joined a quickly growing community that would profoundly shape the city's history, especially how Houstonians eat, now possessing an abiding love of Bánh mì, phố, and Viet-Cajun crawfish, among other riches. Well before this fare became commonplace in the city, Vuong found the American food system alien. "It is very different in Vietnam," he explained to me a few years ago, "there are no grocery stores that carry everything like we do here." Often a daily activity, shopping unfolded in open air markets with "two or three hundred vendors," each specializing in a foodstuff. "So, you would have to walk, maybe, the whole open market to get what you need." It was completely different than how Americans shop. When the market was oriented around Vietnamese housewives shopping for daily family meals, he underscored, freshness proved the supreme consumer value—wise purveyors delivered or failed.

Shopping for food in the United States proved a strange exercise. Open air markets akin, perhaps, on Vietnamese terms, to the Italian market that Rachel Black celebrated, were not to be found in 1980s Houston. Instead, Vuong discovered food proved difficult to secure in his corner of the city. "It was very difficult," he reflected. "I did not have any transportation and I could not afford to live anywhere else but in those underserved areas." Unhappily, he became accustomed to walking a mile or more to the grocery store. "It was hard," he recalled, "and that was when I had an idea of coming back to the underserved areas to offer fresh food."

As a young man, Vuong briefly worked in a 7-Eleven convenience store before earning an Associate Degree in electronics, a field he left after being laid off. Joining other Vietnamese-Americans, he fished the Texas Gulf Coast as a crabber and shrimper for nine years. During the period, he "dreamed of having a grocery store" and carefully "saved up money to start up a business." Vuong secured his first store in 1994, quickly learning that the business proved "very competitive" but developed a successful approach to flourish in underserved areas that the big chains often avoided.

Most of his thirteen stores follow a similar formula. As he explains, Vuong acquires struggling grocery stores "at a fair price that helps me with startup costs. I can keep my costs lower. That way I don't have to make a lot of sales to stay in business." This approach served as the foundation for a smart business strategy tailoring neighborhood stores to place in interesting ways. Dry goods in the store are more-or-less a breakeven proposition. Independents lack the buying power to secure the low prices offered by larger competitors. Vuong structures the Pyburn's stores around a unique business model. He provides fresh fruit and vegetables at competitive prices. But the key to Pyburn's appeal remains the hot food counter described above and a meat market that departs from the big retail model by appealing deeply to place. The Pyburn's meat market offers all of the basics but specializes in high-quality boudin and other house-made sausages, stuffed pork chops, and other specialty items that speak to the Creole and Cajun foodways of numerous Houstonians with roots in South Louisiana.

Thomas Smith, Jr., a senior-citizen and regular at the Missouri City Pyburn's, sits in the blue motorized wheelchair that he uses to visit from the Oak Tree apartment complex across the street. He enthusiastically praises the courteousness of the staff and the quality and variety of food available. "It's like the neighborhood, for me," he explains, when I asked why he comes into the store several times a day. "I love coming in here, meeting people." Like most everyone I spoke with at different Pyburn's locations, he lingered on the house-made sausages and semi-prepared foods like the stuffed pork chops. When I asked him if there were one item he would encourage a Pyburn's newcomer to try from the hot kitchen, Smith got serious, paused for a moment, and answered in an unquestioning tone: "The oxtails." A South Union store regular, Gertharine Laws, who Rev Jackson affectionately refers to as "City Lady," also highlights the store's friendly service. She's not a neighborhood shopper but hits the hot lunch counter regularly and "loves" the meat market. "You can't get that kind of meat, especially where I live, homemade sausage, boudin, pork chops, all that back there." For Laws, the tastes of South Louisiana make their way back to Humble, TX via Vuong's South Union store. She also recommends the oxtails.

After Laws departs, Pyburn's Regional Manager Larry Johnson explains to me some new additions that they are working on for the South Union store's hot food counter. Portability is important, he stresses, for mobile workers seeking lunch. Not everyone can hunker down over a styrofoam box of oxtails, rice, and greens. I spy a couple of hard-hat guys chatting in line and see his point. He highlights a new fish sandwich before lingering on, what strikes me as an impressive stroke of genius, oxtail tacos, which encompass so much about place and Houston. The migration, loss, opportunity, and reinvention that make the city offers unique dividends like a dish employs a Mexican and Soul Food grammar to create something new and beautiful. I'll be back for the tacos.

by Lynne McCabe

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

When I was asked to write an artist's take on creative placemaking for this issue of *Cite* I had no intention of talking about love. And then, Ted Purves died.

For those of you who did not have the good fortune to know Ted, he was brilliant and generous. A man with too many accomplishments to list here but some highlights include playing bass and singing in an Illinois punk band; marrying the smart and talented Susanne Cockrell, with whom he collaborated in not only raising a good and beautiful son; and also the creation of many thoughtful artworks. He launched the first Masters in Fine Arts curriculum in Social Practice at California College of the Arts in 2005, which is where I met him. And, he wrote the important, *What We Want is Free*, a book that looked to understand and contextualize a new type of art practice bubbling up in the early to mid 2000s.

This new practice, termed "Relational Aesthetics" by Nicholas Bourriaid, has since expanded to include everything from Joseph Beuys's "Social Sculpture," to Claire Bishop's definition of socially engaged practice. This genre of artistic practice has subsequently been instrumentally employed for some time now by non-profit and local government agencies alike, as a strategy for "creative placemaking."

Led by Ted, the CCA MFA in Social Practices was a program where practitioners of this type of work came from all over the world to passionately argue over what we felt were the most important issues to address in the field, such as what are the ethics of a socially engaged art practice? What is the moral obligation of the artist when working with or for people? Is there one? We struggled with the dichotomy that the funding and further success of many socially engaged art projects was dependent upon gaining recognition from the very capitalist art world systems these works were purportedly resisting. Methodology and models of best practices were hotly debated.

Ted and I would often use the opportunity of getting our kids together at the park to continue these conversations. Over time it became apparent that my propensity for Marxist and feminist critique, almost to the exclusion of all else, frustrated the hell out of him. The frustration was often mutual – in my youthful inexperience and idealism I regarded his thinking about the potential for inclusivity and real social change as naïve and privileged. Ten years later I have now come to the realization that his thinking was far more deft and nuanced than I understood at the time.

I had come to San Francisco suspicious of such endeavors due to my experience of working directly with local government in Scotland in projects that deployed socially engaged artists and their practices as agents of urban regeneration. With few exceptions it had been my experience that the majority of these well-meaning projects served to give the impression of care and investment in the regeneration of many architecturally brutalized and economically beleaguered communities. In other words, they were public relations tools. All the while the projects merely become a distraction to the people who lived there from the harsh fact that they were still being underserved in basic infrastructure needs like working street lights, grocery stores, safe spaces for children to play, and reliable bus services.

Immediately after receiving my BA (hons) from the Environmental Art Dept. of Glasgow School of Art, I naively accepted a position as one of these very agents and was employed by Glasgow city council as the "community coordinator" for an ongoing large-scale public art project in one of the city's forgotten housing projects. My primary purpose being to remedy issues that had arisen out of a lack of diversity in artist selection and little or no community conversations in the preliminary planning stages of the public art project.

Seeing the expectations of a community dashed, and the limitations of my role as an artist in preventing it or remedying it, had instilled in me a deep cynicism and a harsh criticality of the assumed beatific potential of this kind of practice. This cynicism informed my thinking and the work I was producing at the time I was accepted at CCA. When I started to see these same practices adopted in my new home of San Francisco, I was struck by an even darker side to positioning socially engaged art as an instrument in creative placemaking that exacerbates gentrification. A process capable of ultimately destroying said "creative place," and neighborhood.

Outside of class Ted and Suzanne welcomed me and the other students into their home, and community. This holistic approach to building loving networks of support and exchange extended beyond teaching into their own art practice.

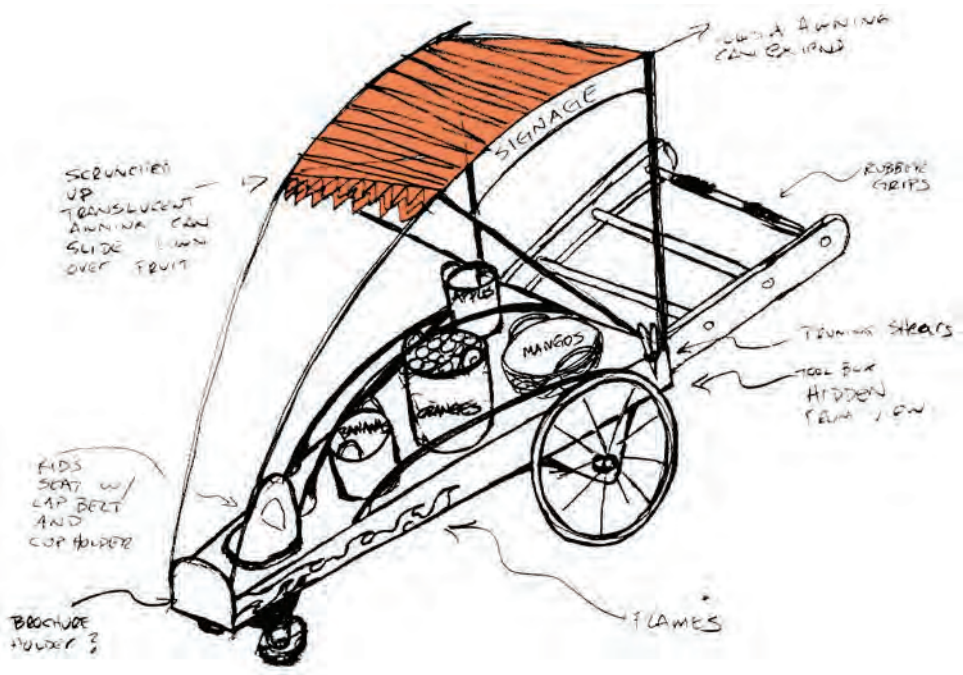
Ted remained optimistic. He really did believe that done right this work could change lives; he embodied this optimism in every part of his life. This ethos was specifically demonstrated in his collaborative social sculpture Amity Works he made with his wife, Susanne Cockrell from 2004 to 2007. The project sought to explore community-built relationships by circumnavigating capitalist systems, instead building upon the cultural economies of generosity and gift giving. Over the course of three years Amity Works serviced the community by collecting and redistributing neighborhood surplus fruit, much of it planted by Italian immigrants, many who settled in the Temescal district of Oakland in the 1960s. The project centered around various events that brought the community together to uncover and discuss its rich history. The central image, a mobile fruit barrow, used to collect and redistribute the fruit, also served to make Ted and Susanne's intent to build a relational economy legible. As they moved through the neighborhood with the barrow they collected both fruit and oral histories, redistributing them back to their community "preserved" in the form of either marmalade or history-filled postcards that were free to all.

In his essay "Blows Against the Empire" contained in *What We Want is Free*, Ted proposed this kind of gift economy, based on generosity, as an act of resolute resistance. A punk response to the cynicism and capitalism with which the art world seems inebriated. But try as I might when we talked, I just couldn't get comfortable with this approach.

Like all forms of social exchange, gift giving is specific to the community and economy in which it is experienced. Ted saw the giving of a gift and its subsequent ties of obligation as a strategy for creating "kinship." However, in working-class Scotland where I grew up, and other similar cultures, the "obligation" inherent in the exchange does not always serve to bind together but instead delineates clearly the haves and the have-nots. Something is now owed.

Shared fruit from "Temescal Amity Works" (July 2004-January 2007).

"What unites us is a common need for connection. The work, the real creative placemaking is to make a space for that connection. As we look to the rebuilding of not only our city of Houston but cities across the country, it is my assertion that we need to acknowledge this collective need as the solution."



Cart design by Ted Purves and Susanne Cockrell, "Temescal Amity Works."

More recently we saw this partly manifest here in Houston in the distrust of authorities and the Red Cross during Hurricane Harvey, with people preferring to depend on each other instead. When one party has access to privilege and resources that the other does not have (and perhaps never will), a power imbalance is injected into the exchange, with suspicion replacing gratitude to make us conscious once more of our lack.

Ted's optimism was in itself an act of resistance to the pernicious sense of scarcity that pervades not only the art world but, as we see from current political discourse, seemingly every community regardless of their privilege or resources.

At the end of one of our particularly frustrating discussions, a weary Ted turned to me and said, "Sure, it's easy to point out what's wrong with these practices. It's easy to make critical work that merely points a finger at their failings and sort of simultaneously pats yourself on the back for being smart in figuring it out. But what are you offering in these broken models' stead? What really are you giving us? What are you willing to risk? And where is your generosity?"

This challenge to turn away from cynicism towards a more generative, generous practice produced an ache in me. Upon self-reflection, I realized I felt paralyzed and exhausted making work that only reflected what was lacking in the various methodologies and practitioners of socially engaged art. How could this circulatory negation ever add anything positive to the discourse? As a result, I have spent the ensuing years attempting to embrace Ted's challenge in my own practice which brings me back to the question, What does love have to do with all this?

It is my proposition that a radical love, one predicated on our assumed mutual perfection and not our lack may offer a strategy towards a new methodology for the engagement of artists attempting to take up Ted's challenge.

The French feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray in her book, *The Way Of Love*, eloquently describes an interpersonal relational model as the "... constitution of two worlds open and in relation with one other, and which give birth to a third world as work in common and space-time to be shared."

This model repudiates a presumptive lack in either party as they enter the relationship, in exchange for an active constantly negotiated and co-created state of becoming. Language and culture are created, not by a collapsing of the space between two to become one, but by a respectful attendance to the space between both. Community and "artist" subsequently conjuring a third space that is in a constant state of negotiation and becoming.

What unites us is a common need for connection. The work, the real creative placemaking is to make a space for that connection. As we look to the rebuilding of not only our city of Houston but cities across the country, it is my assertion that we need to acknowledge this collective need as the solution. Not a gift, but many gifts, a process of exchange, a becoming, together. If expanded upon as a foundation for socially engaged work in service, I believe this approach could hold the answer to the fraught class/privilege issues that arise for me in the radical gift economy model Ted so believed in.

As I write this almost ten years after my conversation with Ted, in a community still dealing with the aftermath of one of the worst disasters in its history, my beloved adopted home city of Houston, I am struck by the urgency for our collective creative communities, now more than ever, to turn away from the alienating cynicism of late capitalist culture and find a way to conjure Irigaray's third world.

Ted's challenges—"What are you offering in these broken models' stead? What really are you giving us? What are you willing to risk? And where is your generosity?"—seemed to me to be momentarily answered when the people of Houston came together in the aftermath of Harvey.

However, the question now is, How do we sustain this? Specifically, how do we resist the pitfalls of gentrification that creative placemaking can fall into, as we rebuild? How do we as artist and architects act as agents on behalf of existent cultures in the neighborhoods worst hit, many of which are also unsurprisingly amongst the most underserved neighborhoods in town, and protect them? What lessons learned from NOLA after Hurricane Katrina can we put into place to stop the price gouging of rents and the opportunistic land grabs of developers?

Ted was the embodiment of radical love in action. In his family life, in his art practice, and in how he taught and ran the MFA program at CCA. It is my assertion that the tools of socially engaged art and creative placemaking can bring about the culture of generosity and radical love that Ted challenged me to create. We find ourselves in a unique position full of possibilities wrought by Harvey's destruction. If we mindfully go forward with the intent to conjure Irigaray's "third world as work in common and space-time to be shared" as we plan and shape the rebuilding of our city, we can sustain and propagate, along the way, the idea of our city as a resistor to the cruel culture of misogyny, racism, and hatred of the Other, which has dominated so much of our recent political/social discourse. We can build upon the radical love that transformed strangers into fleets of people risking their lives for the unknown/unknowable Other.

As it turns out, the question is not What's love got to do with it? but What are you going to do with your love?

A TERROIR OF CONCRETE & STRIP MALLS?

By David Leftwich

Photo by Paul Hester.

Two hundred million years ago, France was underwater. A fact revealed in the beginning of "Bourgogne, The Birthplace of Terroir," a short video produced by the Bourgogne Wine Board. The video goes on to outline the geological events that formed what became the Burgundy region of France and produced the soils and tastes that make the region's wines unique.

This is the essence of "terroir." The concept food-science writer Harold McGee describes as "the entire physical environment of the vineyard: soil, its structure and mineral content; the water held in the soil; the vineyard's elevation, slope, and orientation; and the microclimate" affecting the taste of wine and food.

However, as cultural anthropologist, Amy Trubek, points out in *The Taste of Place*, the origins of terroir are as much cultural and economic as scientific. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, French winemakers, tastemakers, and farmers began developing the ideas of terroir and the more official appellation d'origine contrôlée (protected designation of origin) to protect both their culinary heritage and their economic investments. Today, these ideas both preserve traditional foodways and, at times, reinforce darker nationalistic tendencies.

Terroir, it turns out, is about how human culture as well as soil and weather shape the culinary tastes of a region.

Like France, Houston was once under an ancient sea. And, despite the miles of concrete, asphalt, and strip malls, you can find hints that this and other geological events can shape taste in Houston. I've bitten into collards and mustards grown in sandy soil between Houston and Port Lavaca that have a salty tang, making them some of the best greens I've ever eaten. I've noticed the subtle differences in salinity and taste of oysters harvested from different parts of Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. In 2011, during the height of the drought, the citrus grown in the area was some of the best I've had because the dry conditions concentrated the flavors, even as farmers struggled to save their crops.

But these tastes are fleeting. In Houston, we've developed over most of the agriculture we had and, as the area's population continues to grow, Gulf fisheries have, unfortunately, become less influential in shaping how and what we eat. The Mexican Revolution and the Battle of Dien Bien Phu are now more important to what Houston eats than ancient seabeds and shifting tectonic plates. Though our geography—the bayous and bays and the proximity of the Gulf—helped make it possible for those events to influence what we eat.

So arguably, Houston may not have gout du terroir in the traditional sense of taste of the soil but we have it in the other sense of that French phrase, local taste—tastes that are being shaped by a history and culture of diversity. In Harris County, where according to Rice's Kinder Institute in 2014 the population was 41.8 percent Latino, 31.4 percent Anglo, 18.5 percent African American, and 6.8 percent Asian, that diversity has become key to understanding what we eat, but it also makes it impossible to define a single terroir or cuisine for the area. We are developing regional cuisines based not on what's harvested here but who lives here.

The central tenants of those cuisines will vary depending on whether you are a second-generation Vietnamese, a seventh-generation Tejano, a fourth-generation Anglo, or a first-generation Honduran; whether your great-grandparents were African Americans from southwest Louisiana or immigrated from Lebanon; or whether you recently arrived from Nigeria, Syria, Mexico, or India.

As these tastes fight the culinary white noise of the corporate grocery store aisles, what is emerging are cuisines shaped by global events, the Gulf of Mexico, international trade (often through the Port of Houston), and, as is often the case in Houston, by immigration—cuisines that as the United States approaches Houston's level of diversity may serve as a model for how the nation lives and eats. Though the best way for that to happen may be less attempting to define it and instead to listen, observe, and eat.

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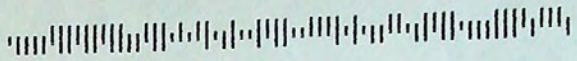

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