

ALLEY CULTURE

AC NEWS V13 #2
SPRING 2012

DETROIT CEREMONY AND ART
FOUNDED 1995

WHICH DETROIT?

There is a convenience in ignoring what others have done, and are doing, in favor of what some would like to say is based upon what they see and know, right here and now. However, everything is not always what you see, nor can you know what you didn't see, when you are new to Detroit.

The social experts, visiting scholars and even some artists have successfully elevated 'deteriorated,' 'hopeless,' and 'abandonment' to a seemingly normal and accepted reality. Such portrayal of what our eyes see is often a shameful representation of truth, disrespectful of history, and the hopes and dreams of long-time residents.

With such outsiders, I have little to no shared past. I cannot easily forget nor dismiss all those who have been here and the many who have died, however the manner of their passing. Many of their lives were lived each day with diligence and duty to work for livelihood, creativity, love and active involvement in civic and family affairs. Yet, such lives attract no interest and are hardly the source of any real investigation. Current interests seem to be the preoccupation of outsiders in order to advance their agendas.

I've shared many years with other Detroit residents fixing homes with very small budgets. Watched children born into loving homes and raised on the streets of Detroit in communities where people never stopped doing the right thing. Children attended public schools and after school activities all year round. At the same time, the transformation of the urban environment began by digging by hand with shovels, first in backyard gardens, then clearing vacant lots with neighborhood children and teens. No grants. No corporate volunteers.

Efforts were often opposed by city workers, city planners, police, and community non-profits who still held onto dreams of building rows of prefab housing units on the government's dime. Our help in the neighborhood came from many living without meaningful employment, on the fringes of existence, searching for payable work and opportunity for their children.

And, we took time to attend the funerals of teenagers, young men and women, and our elderly neighbors who lived their entire lives in Detroit.

Now, there are those wanting to be a Detroiter? Support Detroit? Which Detroit? The new invaders are suburbanites, out-of-staters, or investors. Most criminal are the downtown welfare capitalists creating a space where you will soon be pressed to find anyone from Detroit, and these new arrivals will own it all. While sports entertain millions only a few get very wealthy. We are currently witnessing the corporate leaders consumed with empire building struggling to grab pieces of downtown and our wallets.

There aren't enough reporters who will give up their angles and report the story they are being told. Well, perhaps there's a greater reason. Let people judge the accuracy and meaning of a seemingly simple story.

With the transformation of everyday life by technological inventions, we should recognize by now the failed promises and embrace the fact that not all solutions will come from new technology. Not many look where the proven solutions are found in traditional wisdom of humanity, discussed in kitchens, backyards, garages, and in the hearts and minds of the people. And, most of all solutions are found in the daily 'doing' of what needs to be done. The unchangeable 'everyday life' is guided by nature and the demands of changing seasons but our human needs remain the same: winter, spring, summer or fall.

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SPRING 2012 AT ALLEY CULTURE

V O P 2 0 1 2
voice of the people

Opening
Friday 20 April - 7PM
April 21 - May 19
Friday & Saturday 3 - 6PM

Alley Culture presented the first VOP in 2005 (images at AC's web site) as a response to the "quiet" that seemed to have settled on the world's psyche. Bush had just scored round two, we were at war with the world, and at war against our own people, the press was still in lock down from 2001. Jobs were trickling out of country in batches of 20,000 or 50,000. Now, in 2012, there isn't a light bulb left on in a factory. We have given away the means of production. We're still at the wars, and raising the stakes of the war on our citizens with the recent signing of NDAA. Guantanamo is still an unacceptable reality. Between 2005 and now it has surfaced that *somebody* has taken our money as well. Enough looting to empty out half the houses on a block in neighborhoods from Phoenix to Detroit. The people now living in their cars or tents seem to have been relieved of their savings and pensions along with their homes. The looters of lives, livelihoods, homes, freedoms and the earth have created an abstraction of living from their strange perch.

"For what?!" Richard Mock almost yelled into CJAM's mic in 2000, "This global devastation is being wrought for an abstraction. Money is an abstraction!" *voice of the people 2012* is an installation curated and hung by the people.

OCCUPIED THOUGHTS

The Occupy Movement is coming towards being a year old at this point, although it already feels as though we might as well be talking about '67 as both have fallen into the media's collective trash bin titled "The Past." Remnants of Occupy still linger (although the same can be said of summer '67). Occupied spaces, social centers, eviction defense, and a host of other small operations in Detroit all still cling onto the Occupy banner.

The phenomenon seems strange at first. The definitive aspect of Occupy Wall Street was its unique process and institution: the General Assembly or GA. GAs are a phenomenon that started in Europe in countries like Greece and Spain, both of which have a tradition of radical protest. So when Occupy Wall Street started, the original organizers adopted the same radical platform.

This institution is no longer in place in Detroit, or at least it is far from what it used to be. Still, we have a dozen or so micro-projects united by their claim to the first few weeks of Occupy Detroit. While it seems silly to claim to be Occupy Detroit, the projects that are still intact have learned the best aspects of the first few weeks of camping, as well as the best parts of Occupy's European counterparts.

In the first few days of camping, there was a clear divide. This divide led to the creation of the term "in the suburbs" on one side of camp. While people *from* the suburbs did not necessarily disrupt anything, it was the people who, even when they were south of 8 Mile, were mentally *in* the suburbs that had a hard time grappling with new surroundings. These campers grasped tightly to the institutions of Occupy Detroit: the General Assembly, the "security committee," or any other number of subcommittees, or subcommittees of subcommittees.

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(Which Detroit? *con't from front*) Neighborliness stands out as a major solution. As I recover from the repair of 'I told you not to lift that heavy stuff all by yourself' operation, my snow shovel is not in my hand for the first time. No better way to demonstrate winter neighborliness than my keeping your walk clear for your neighbor and strangers. Thank goodness I have some neighbors helping me out.

Perseverance and staying in one place for several generations gives you a chance to see the fruits of traditional solutions to human problems. Stories of such ordinary solutions are all around Detroit. Many Detroiters share similar kinds of rituals every year. Slowly rebuilding our homes, neighborhoods, deepening friendships with old friends. Can't believe the little neighborhood girls with knock knees are now proud mothers raising their children with love, care, and support. Babies born on our block are so, so special and yet not a mention of a 'new' Detroit in the local papers. Years of such birthday celebrations, weddings, showers, graduations, never stopped.

Try being more personal and really helping youth in Detroit. African American superstars fill the sports and entertainment pages of newspapers, but few stories of young men and women's desires to have

a home to call their own. At twelve a boy, one of five siblings plus a few cousins, living down the street, was not thinking of owning a home. Now, he's twenty-four, a father, and will soon own a home in a community.

The big solutions won't be from the government and grants. There are big solutions to be found by learning from all these seemingly small solutions. The sad song of the day everybody is singing is, 'Can I get a grant?' Too many times it's just for someone to 'do their own thing' without having to deal with the consequences. A bad solution is to surround yourself with others who really need a job and will do whatever it takes to keep that grant and get more. Non-profits find it hard to challenge the bankers, the corporations, the mis-educational institutions after they get that grant.

Let's sing another old Motown classic, 'Can I get a witness?' A real goal is to increase the size of a circle and friendship network. Actively choose personal visits to someone's home to share appreciation for good work in the community. All too often, such needed personal appreciation is ignored and has been replaced by faceless, non-physical, emails.

I, and friends of Our Detroit, Our Solutions prefer to 'do it.' Check back in ten years, or move on a block, stay at least three generations, and 'do it.' Do the good things for more than your self.

—John Gruchala, has been active in his community since the 1970s and growing food for family, friends, and with neighborhood children since mid-1990s. He has been approached by so many cameras and planners from around the world in recent years, he's begun to appreciate the Jehovah's Witnesses on his porch. They keep the guy with the camera or portfolio at bay.

questions & comments contact Alley Culture — ac@coast.eml.cc

(Occupied *con't from front*) None of this is what made Occupy Detroit something important, and I would guess the same is true for the movements in Spain or Greece. While it is important that a whole group of people were introduced to ways of organizing and communicating that they may not have seen before, the more amazing part of Occupy Detroit was its ability to create a *culture* of protest and rebellion.

A bunch of 20-somethings dressed in typical black bloc clothes on a cold Sunday morning doing yoga with the homeless, a six-foot Vietnam vet donating a tarp that would eventually be hoisted and secured by a 5' 3" homeless Vietnamese man who put all the kids that were just lounging around to work tying tarps, or the image of a girl with a Mohawk walking with her dog down the middle of the street towards cops blaring the horns and flashing their lights as if she were walking down Woodward on any old day: these are what gave Occupy Detroit a long lasting effect on protest in Detroit, and these are the things future protesters should take from.



Christine Hughes, *Compost #2*, 2012, pencil, 10 X 21"

Rather than dependence on institutions as the sum of—or worse, a body that can control—the demonstration or the camp site, a good portion of people set up camp, tents facing each other in spoke patterns, and began working and organizing. When there was a protest, it didn't require the stamp of Occupy, a union, or any other group. It only required that people show up out of a realization of mutual benefit or a support of mutual aid and solidarity.

Building a radical movement requires a radical culture. Depending on a new mode of organization for institutions is simply radical reformism, and is only the same relationship we already have with the state. What does it matter how an institution is organized if it is still a body that dictates orders to the people rather than the people dictating orders to it?

The culture of mutual aid is why the folks at the 5900 space on Michigan Avenue can lay a claim to Occupy Detroit. It's why the folks reclaiming and rebuilding abandoned homes to house the homeless can lay a claim to Occupy Detroit. It's why all the people defending their homes from eviction can lay a claim to Occupy Detroit. It is why anyone organizing something with neighbors and friends, as if there is no other way to do it, can lay a claim to Occupy Detroit. It's the radical culture that makes the GA model successful in places like Spain, Greece, Wall Street or Woodward Avenue, and not the institution that makes the culture.

—Mikey Elster

ALLEY CULTURE'S 13th ANNUAL SEED EXCHANGE

SUNDAY 18 MARCH 2012 • 2:00 - 4:00PM



WinterRoot's project launch

Wildflowers of Detroit

a collaborative community owned and directed technology project
mapping Detroit's wild plants, majestic trees, fruits, seed crops

Bring your saved seeds, experiments, questions, and muffins.

The coffee pot will be on.