Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Community Installation at Social Study

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Social Study store on York Boulevard in Highland Park is hosting a series of window installations aimed at engaging the neighborhood in conversations about the variety of changes involved in their rapidly growing community. Their first featured artist is Mike Mollett, a Mount Washington local and an installation artist. We caught up with Mike to discuss his work and his take on this rapidly transforming neighborhood.

How long have you lived in the area?

Since December of 1999, (I've been in) lower Mount Washington. Before that, Eagle Rock. So, in this valley since 1996.

What do you find inspiring about the Highland Park neighborhood?

Well, it's the human diversity, the hills, the lingering uniqueness that has been Highland Park for decades— the casualness. I'm not a big fan of all the gentrification going on, that's no draw for me, but of course without it, the store wouldn't be here.

When did you start making installations with mixed media, and what initially attracted you to using the materials you use?

I was doing mixed media stuff in the early '80s: I was doing some windows for DADA Fest L.A. Not my sticks, not the pipes and linear stuff, which is what I primarily use now, but I did a window at Matters of Space, about three years ago. It didn't have the (current) community aspect, and all the text were non-sequiturs scattered around the floor. So this is more pointed, with a poet's mind, more thinking of community, of my work. These poles and branches are part of a family, a larger community.

Mike Mollett in front of his installation at Highland Park's Social Study

Is there anything you feel is particularly important for Highland Park to talk about on a community level?

Lately, it's the rising home and rental crisis, you know, probably the influx of hipsters, good and bad, for a community.

I liked a lot of the old shops and stores: auto repair, funky botanicas, old hair salons … It's almost like, well, you know: when the Europeans came and all the Native Americans were around, they (the Europeans) started wiping them out.

In a way, (Highland Park) is a small battle zone. And not just Highland Park: Highland Park is just a recent one, that has held its own.

My piece is probably more relatable to newer arrivals (to Highland Park,) because they might be more attuned to different sorts of art. But if you look at the materials, most of it is not new, not purchased, not man-made. It is local material, it's very grounded in the neighborhood.

Is there anything you want your audience to consider when they experience the installation?
Well, (in this installation,) there are roots on the floor, and they were dug up less than a mile away. Everything else in the piece grows out of the soil, if (it has not been) processed by us humans: it has had a life of its own, as far as trees and plant material.
I'm interested in patina, the surface of a thing, how it has weathered. What does that have to say? I'm interested in the conversation. A PVC pipe and a piece of bamboo comb: what could they be saying in a conceptual and maybe in a fantastic sense? And what is their relationship?
…And really, we all have a relationship to our community, to our own family and friends… (as well as) the internet and social media. This sort of deals with that in a very subtle, but I think a huge, conceptual way.
This audience might know that much of this (material) was just gleaned, collected and gathered a mile from here over years, and even over the last week or so. And in a way it's still alive. There may be a scent from the roots.

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