Cultural Daily

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The Heidelberg Project: Thriving Against the Odds

Tod Hardin · Wednesday, August 14th, 2013

On the east side of Detroit, about two miles from downtown, you'll find some of the roughest and most down trodden neighborhoods in the city – those most often referenced in the national media as the worst of the worst. Fair? Perhaps, but we'll leave that question in the hands of others.

What we're most interested in is the oasis in the middle of the desert. It's known as The Heidelberg Project and it's the creation of internationally acclaimed artist and community activist, Tyree Guyton. Since 1986, it's been recognized around the world as a demonstration of the power of art and creativity to transform lives and offer hope and a bright vision for the future.

Guyton has masterfully created an open-air art installation using discarded objects to create a two block area full of color, symbolism, and intrigue. A far cry from what any outsider would expect to find here.

Despite a heavy travel schedule, Mr. Guyton was gracious enough to answer a few quick questions for us.

Tyree and Visitors, May 2010. Photo by Geronimo Patton.

TOD HARDIN: Why did you start the Heidelberg Project and what does it mean to you as an artist and a community leader?

TYREE GUYTON: Looking back now I know that I was given this vision straight from God. What it means to me now as an artist was that it was important to share the vision with the people in the community first, then the world, as a medicine of hope. What it means to me as a community leader — from a philosophical view — I was following the instructions or the vision that was given to me. I saw how it could lead and help people understand the importance of change. This project changed me.

TH: Has it evolved into what you envisioned?

TG: The Project is constantly evolving. It has superseded my expectations and it is still growing. It has reached people in over 140 countries.

TH: Is there more to come? In other words, is there still room for your vision to grow and if so, how?

TG: Yes because every day is a new beginning. As I study the works of many great philosophers I have come to understand that there is no end to creativity. The Heidelberg Project is taking me on a journey of new discovery. Tomorrow has no limit to what's possible. I think people have lost their ability to think and create for themselves.

TH: What is next for Tyree Guyton?

TG: A book, my dissertation, 30 years of Heidelberg in my own words in collaboration with my Director, Jenenne Whitfield. Also an upcoming show in New York (Oct 2013).
For more insight into The Heidelberg Project we are pleased to offer the following video showcase:

This entry was posted on Wednesday, August 14th, 2013 at 11:39 pm and is filed under Theatre, Discourse, Lifestyle
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