

November 30, 2016

Culture Lab Detroit shines a light on the work of outstanding immigrant artists

By Sarah Rose Sharp



Photo courtesy of Chido Johnson.

As millions of people living in the United States hold our breath in the face of a president-elect who seems hell-bent on waging war on immigrants, a series of recent events orchestrated by Culture Lab Detroit proved themselves to be exceptionally timely.

"Culture Lab Detroit's 2016 theme is 'Walls,'" Culture Lab Detroit founder Jane Schulak says. "Participants in this year's programs are all connected by their interest in reconsidering the structures which define our lives."

This was certainly the case at "Art and the immigrant experience," a panel discussion featuring performers and artists Migguel Anggelo, Kia Arriaga, Rola Nashef, and Chido Johnson, and moderated by Gracie Xavier, director of corporate and economic development strategy at Global Detroit.

"We chose panelists whose work specifically addresses the immigrant identity, and the challenges of living between two cultural worlds," Schulak says. "This is more important today than it was even a week ago. It was particularly interesting to discuss the evolution of voting privileges for immigrants following this election. I think overall we found that we all have a deep connection to our cultural roots, but also evolve as members of the community we surround ourselves with.

"No matter what our background, we ultimately share the same human experience."

The panel, which took place earlier this month, was packed to standing room, and underscored the ways in which immigrants have an experience that is both unique and universal. Coming to the United States from Cuernavaca Morelos, Mexico (as did Kia Arriaga) is radically different than having roots in Nyadiri, Zimbabwe (as does Chido Johnson) or being born in Lebanon (as was Rola Nashef) — and yet each of these artist-immigrants can find some common ground in terms of art's power to assist in bridging the divide between their native and adopted homelands.

"The panel was interesting," Johnson says. "We all accepted that being from immigrant cultures as artists, we automatically felt we had roles to represent cultural context beyond our own individual expressions."

"One of the particular challenges we face as immigrants and artists is having to face cultural shock and having to find our voice in a different culture, and keep that voice alive and strong," Arriaga says. "For some of us, that voice should stay true to our values and traditions in order to communicate our ideas. In my case this is critical. It took me a while to decide that what I do is my real voice — in this case, Aztek culture and Ofrenda installations."

Arriaga takes an active role in education around misappropriations in her own culture; some of her artistic influences manifest in her work as an Aztek dancer and member of the Aztek group Kalpulli Tlahuikayotl.

"I did feel participating in the panel was refreshing," Arriaga says. "I often forget there's more immigrant artists who face the same challenges and issues. It was also refreshing to see how others based their success in hard work and never giving up. I think having a discussion with others is a way to empathize and feel that you are not alone facing those issues and the success stories are definitely an example of how to work towards our own goals."

Filmmaker Rola Nashef's award-winning feature, *Detroit Unleaded*, is the first Arab-American romantic comedy portraying second-generation Arab characters specific to Detroit and Dearborn. During the panel, she touched on the struggles she confronted in trying to represent her culture through a love story when expectations were trying to push her to sensationalize her culture within media negative stereotypes — in a sense, her political stance is to be nonpolitical.

"Arab-Americans are often forced into identity politics," Nashef says. "In my work, I wanted to present

characters completely outside the context of religion, nationality, and political affiliation therefor making room for interpersonal conflicts, friendship, and love."

Johnson, by contrast, is overtly political. Much of his visual art, collaborative projects — which includes his role as co-founder for the Zimbabwe Cultural Center in Detroit — and teaching is directly influenced by his activist upbringing and firsthand witness to Zimbabwe's political climate.

"Considering our Trump state, as a cultural practitioner, we should not weaken our [artistic and political] goals by changing them, but rather we may need to become more militant in how we accomplish them," Johnson says. "We can't dumb down our goals, our work is too important."

The final panelist, Brooklyn, New York-based, Venezuelan-born performer Migguel Anggelo, followed his panel appearance with a performance of his acclaimed show "Another Son of Venezuela" at the Detroit Institute of Arts recently as part of the museum's Friday Night Live! Anggelo, backed by his diverse and energetic band the Immigrants, combined personal storytelling, performance of original works and snippets of covers, and high-energy song and dance numbers to create a kind of sonic collage on the theme on immigrant identity. Like all of the artists on the panel, Anggelo demonstrated that immigrant narratives can be joyous and vibrant celebrations of life — even life that includes struggle and uncertainty.

Kudos to Culture Lab, for an ambitious season of scaling walls, and some timely food for thought in tumultuous times. On the subject of immigrant experience, Johnson says that aside from Native Americans, all U.S. residents are immigrants.

"We have to embrace and accept that," he says. "The so-called 'other' is ourselves. Immigrant artists have taken the role to represent 'other' spaces. The more we all do that, the more we blur the lines that divide our many nations."

CRAVE

November 30, 2016

Bring the Beat Back: Gary Simmons in Detroit

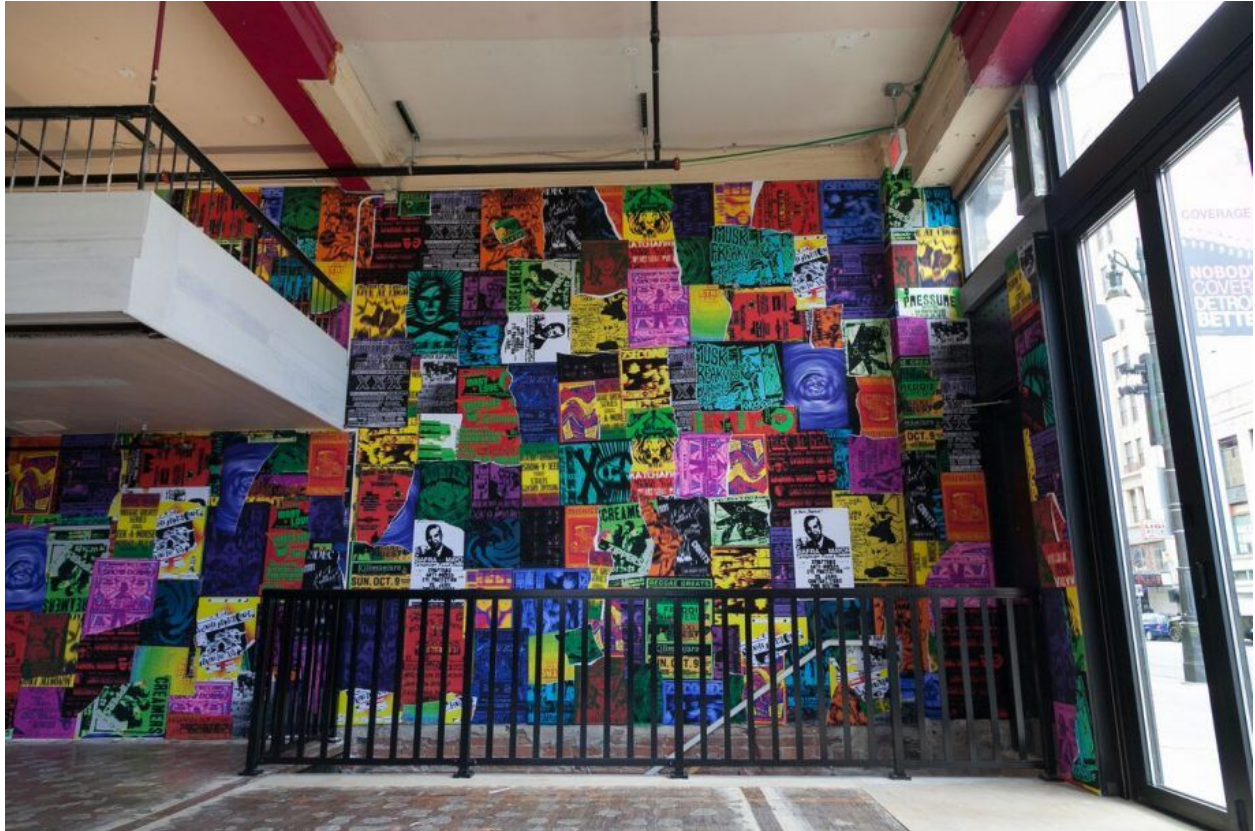
By Miss Rosen

Culture Lab Detroit and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit present Gary Simmons's amazing, immersive installation that celebrates the music scene.



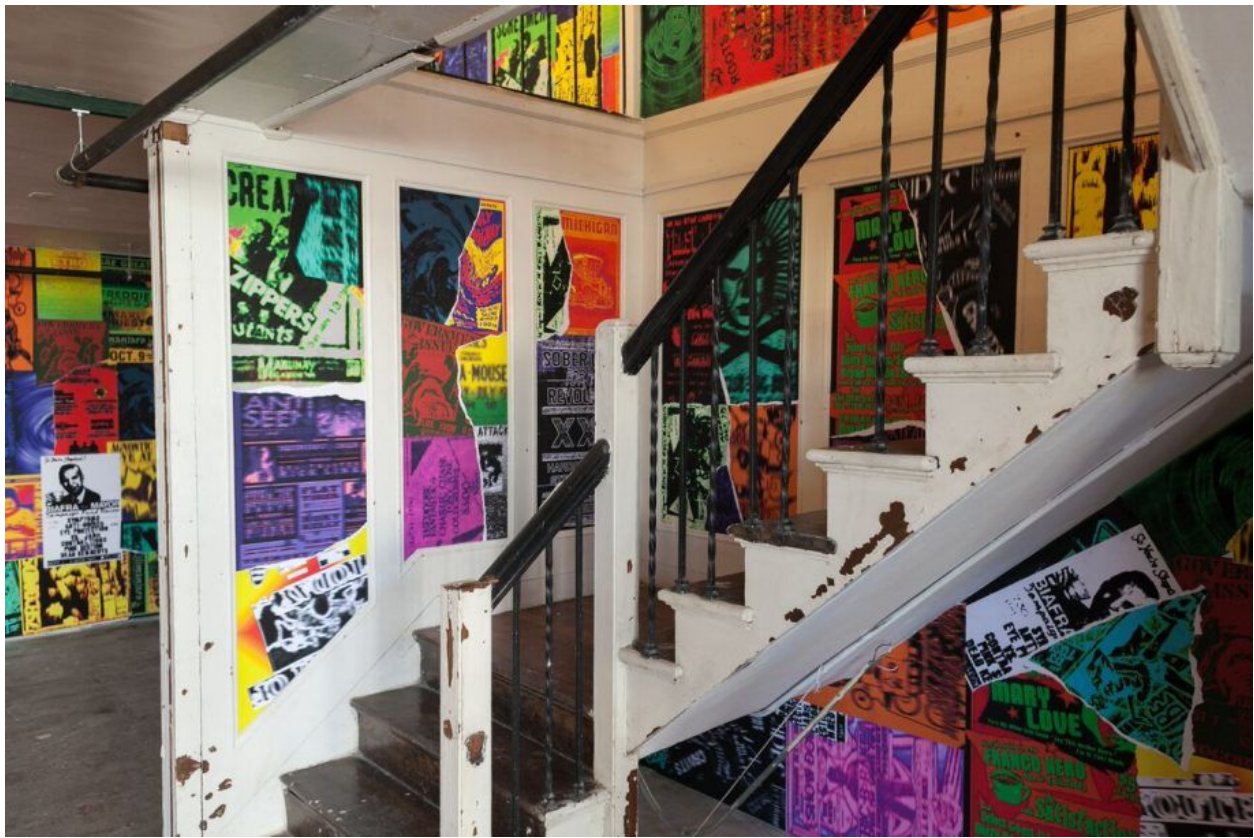
Native New Yorker Gary Simmons (b. 1964) creates art that will envelop you in its embrace, like a song that fills your ears then lingers in your brain. His work is immersive, so much so, that you perceive it with your eyes while you feel it in your soul.

Simmons has taken his talents to the city of Detroit, partnering with Culture Lab Detroit and Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, with the support of Bedrock, to create a public work currently on view at 1301 Broadway, #101, Detroit, now through January 1, 2017. The installation, his first public project in Detroit, is the latest iteration of an ongoing series that has taken form in Aspen, London, and San Francisco. Here, Simmons takes flight, creating the largest work to date, and the first one shown outside gallery walls.



Simmons has designed 13 posters that pay homage to the Detroit music scene that honor the wide array of cultures and styles that created them. The posters have been wheatpasted throughout the space, creating a wallpapered effect. But this is not the neat, sweet sensibility of interior design—this is the live wire energy that comes from guerilla techniques that comes from the streets.

The effect is intense, dense, and sensational. While promotional posters for bands and shows line public walls calling out for our attention as we move to and fro, when condensed into an interior space, they come alive in a sonic way. Though the images never make a sound, you can feel them vibrate like the bass in the floor when the club is live and everyone is turned.



The installation is eye candy overload, like maybe you ate a couple too many shrooms and suddenly the sounds that you are hearing come alive. You don't really know where to look first; you just have to take it in, feel the flow and enjoy the rhythms. Then, as you acclimate, you can get into the groove, taking in Simmons's mesmerizing homage to dub, Motown, punk, reggae, rock, punk, and techno.

"Music has always been a big influence on me and my work," Simmons told Bomb magazine—and the installation makes it clear the work has autobiographical overtones. The work speaks to a profound love that so many of us possess, a deeply personal relationship with the intangible power and beauty of music.



The same way that music gets under your skin and into your bones, this is what Simmons does with his installation. He brings us into a silent room and deafens us with the sonic possibilities of the silent image. Your pupils dilate as your pulse picks up, your heart beating “one, two, one, two” in time with the drums. You know it, you feel it—you’ve been here before. It all comes rushing back like a memory buried deep within: the rush of freedom that music brings, like the spirit finally freed from the cage of flesh.

It is nothing short of delicious.

All photos: ©John Froelich, Courtesy of Culture Lab Detroit

BIZBASH

October 7, 2016

See an Inspired Tabletop Design That Used 80 Dozen Eggs

By Carla Hay

A dinner for Culture Lab Detroit included a creative egg-decorated table design from David Stark.



Photo: Susie Montagna/David Stark Design and Production

DETROIT When designer/artist David Stark created the decor for a Culture Lab Detroit dinner on September 16, he took inspiration from Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen's Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, a multimedia examination of chicken breeding. Vanmechelen incorporates Cosmopolitan Chicken Project in his solo exhibition at the Detroit art gallery Wasserman Projects, where the dinner was

held for about 55 guests. Stark, the founder of David Stark Design and Production, said of the table decor: "The design was simple and chic, and the repetition of the egg en masse created carpets of mottled, luminous color, which ran down the lengths of the tables. The tables were dressed in natural canvas. We built raw wood risers that held open egg cartons, hosting 80 dozen eggs. After the party, the eggs went to the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm to be sold alongside their produce."

Culture Lab Detroit's fourth annual program, which took place September 15 and 16 in various locations around the city, attracted about 1,200 attendees, according to the organization. The event—which includes installations, public discussions, and dinners—aims to foster conversations and collaborations between Detroit and the international art, architecture, and design communities. This year's program theme was "Walls." Stark has been a notable participant in activities for the nonprofit Culture Lab Detroit, such as in 2015 when he created a local pop-up shop called Culture Lab Detroit Designs.

Culture Lab Detroit founder Jane Schulak said, "From the very beginning, Culture Lab Detroit has been about bringing people together, whether through conversation, collaboration, or, in the case of David Stark's imaginative design of a contemporary salon, a meal among friends."

COOL HUNTING

September 21, 2016

Culture Lab Detroit 2016: Walls

By David Graver

An actionable discourse on the tactile and metaphoric walls within the Motor City

A quick conversation with a Detroiter—one of those born and raised, or transplanted for school who stuck around after, and even the ones who sought out inexpensive real estate and a fresh start later in life—reveals (regardless of how bold or subtle) an authentic passion for the city's past, present and future. For those of us in the Motor City for this year's Culture Lab Detroit—the fourth annual iteration—conversation was key. The forum itself presented two open-to-the-public conversations featuring global art and design figures who addressed Detroit topics. But this influx of talent and their discourse represents only some of the worth. Visibility plays a role, tangible longterm projects factor in, and extended exposure to the city's frequent developments seal the deal. Culture Lab Detroit is a platform for change, and while everyone has their opinions on what Detroit needs, this forum's founder Jane Schulak knows exactly what she must do: facilitate connections; micro and macro, personal and professional.



Schulak makes clear what she hopes to accomplish year after year. "This is a platform for connectivity," she explains to CH. "I hope to raise the bar with each iteration, while furthering the connection between Detroit and rest of the world." She goes about it by programming the two nights of conversations and building tangential activities for guests: dinners, tours and an art exhibition. Through the cultural and urban immersion, she hopes to initiate more than dialogue—but tangible, commercial, design-driven projects. In some ways, this has already happened (a previous Culture Lab brought together restaurateur Alice Waters and the two owners of Detroit's farm-to-table Rose's Fine Food, and saw the latter spending time at Waters' home, learning industry insights from an expert). But more are in

development and Schulak hopes to share the news of large-scale collaborations soon.



Returning to this year's theme, "Walls" stands to mean many things for Culture Lab. "Detroit is full of walls," Schulak continues. "Some are beautiful, others not so. There are metaphysical walls, as well," she adds, in a way referencing the city's sprawl, the impact of blight on neighborhoods and inadequate public transportation means. The two nights were subdivided, one addressing the more specific topic of "Sliding Walls: Reimagining the Architecture of Cultural Space" and the other on the idea of "Throwing Stones: Art and

Social Progress," which translated, more or less, to the walls built by personal, artistic and cultural messaging. And the roster for both lived up to expectations.

For the "Sliding Walls" dialogue, Culture Lab Detroit brought architect Elizabeth Diller, artist and author Trevor Paglen and Pérez Art Museum Miami's Director Franklin Sirmans to the stage. In advance of the talk, we spoke with Paglen who shared that "Honestly, it was the people," that encouraged him to take part. "It's an interdisciplinary group who I have a great admiration for and whose work I know reasonably well."



Paglen's mass surveillance and data-driven art has long removed walls, so to speak. Diller, on the other hand, has imagined some of the most important structures—from NYC's Highline to LA's The Broad. Sirmans, whose museum changed the way indoor and outdoor art can be united, shares with CH, "In some ways you can draw connections between here and what we have in Miami, and how they are demographically different than other cities in America." He also references the sprawl of Miami-Dade County and that of Detroit.

Within the hour-long conversation (moderated by the Knight Foundation's Dennis Scholl) many put forward ideas stemming from their own experiences. But ground was truly broken when Diller addressed the idea of gentrification, specifically in the context of her Highline project. Upon its completion, and since, real estate prices have surged around the above ground park. This wasn't anything she was aware would happen with the development. And while she acknowledges it most likely pushed people away, she made clear that cities (and the neighborhoods inside) exist in cycles. Right now the Highline draws

millions. It may not always. Elements of the city will expand elsewhere and attention will be drawn there.

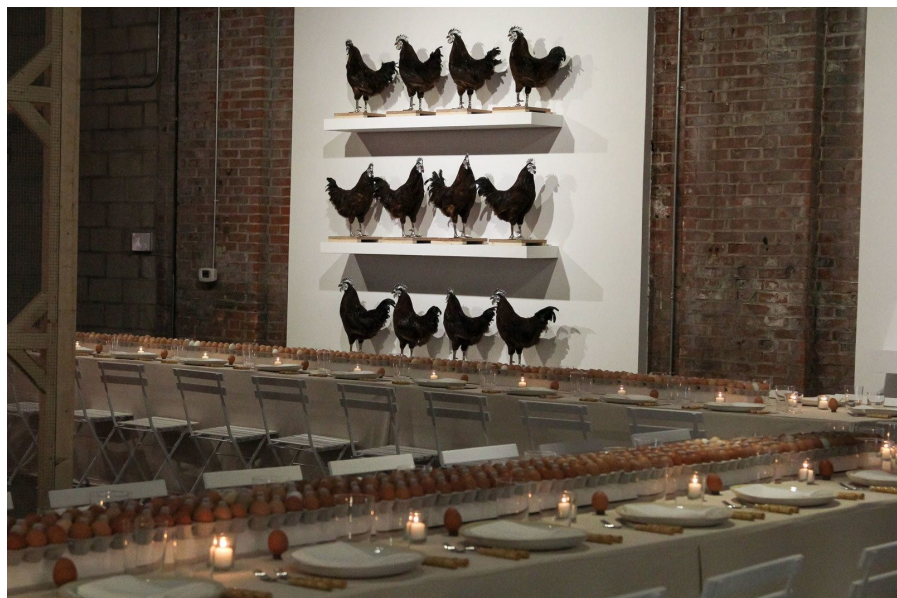


This is the way cities function, and this is the way Detroit has functioned. Design-driven projects right now are reinvigorating areas, and real estate prices. There is the potential for this to expand, contract or even develop competition.

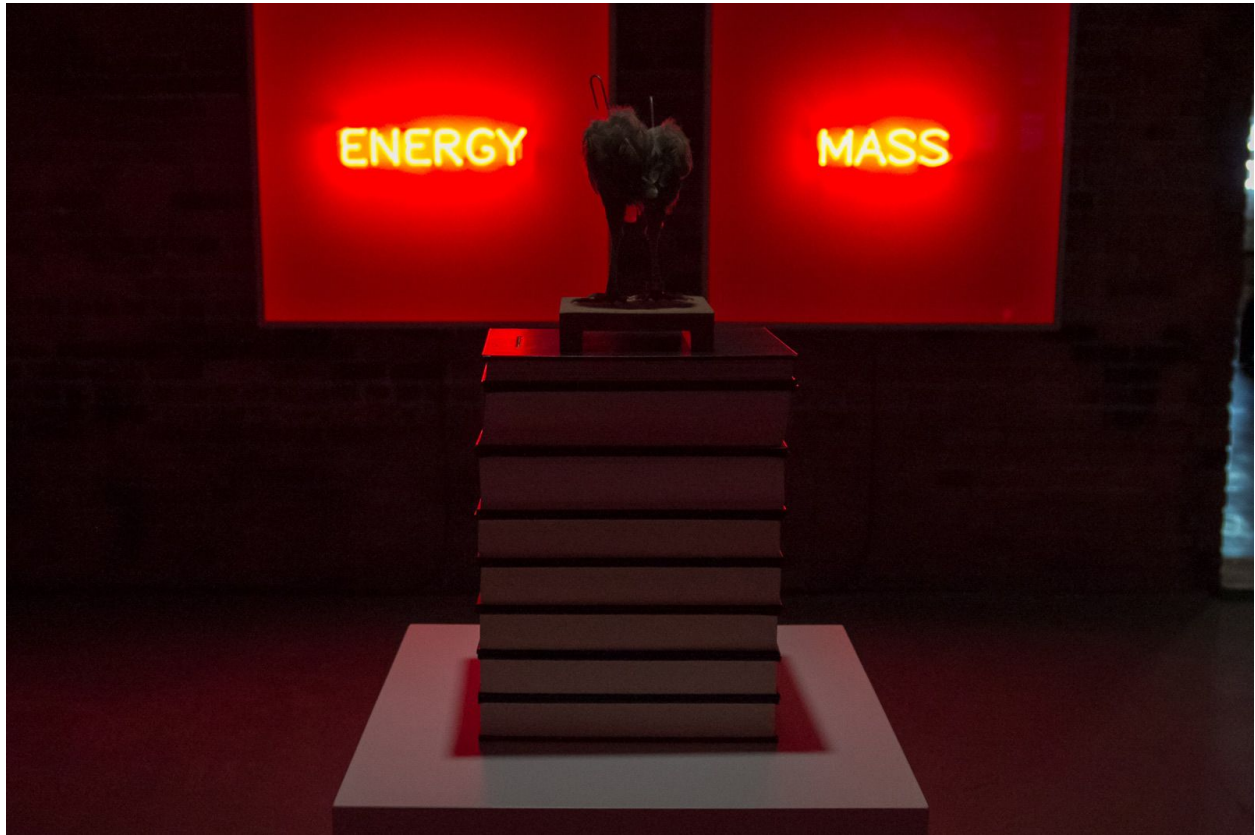
The following night's conversation, held in the North End's Jam Handy, carried even more potency. Moderated by the Detroit Institute of Art's Director Salvador Salort-Pons, artist

Adam Pendleton, Storefront for Art and Architecture founder Eva Franch i Gilabert, and artist Glenn Kaino initiated a dialogue about the changing city—and the city spoke back. Pendleton's observation that Detroit's population is 80% black people and that the crowd at Culture Lab wasn't representative of that brought a grounded reality to the dialogue. A statement from an attendee requested that we change the language around Detroit's shift. The word "abandoned" does not represent these neighborhoods, she made clear. And with that, the panelists delved into the fundamentals of language's impact. The evening closed with another speaker from the crowd who heard what was being said and wanted to remind people that arts and humanities go hand-in-hand and beyond dialogue—even wide-exposure, artist-led dialogue—people must put their hands to work repairing the city he loves. And he is right.

Beyond the big conversations—and the Gary Simmons exhibition Culture Lab presented with MOCAD—the rest of the forum was about exploration. A dinner at the Wasserman Projects art gallery exposed guests to a new cultural hub—filled with the very eccentric 20-year-long Cosmopolitan Chicken Project. Neighborhood tours showed areas of decay and areas of reemergence—neither



to be gawked at, but rather to allow for the transfer of information and context. And even the restaurants selected, from the aforementioned Rose's Fine Food to the masterful Asian-fusion haven Katoi and The Skip (an indoor/outdoor venue downtown in a side alley known as The Belt), reveal the city's potency.



It's worth noting that in the days following Culture Lab, we continued to convey what we had learned in Detroit to those back home in NYC. The experiences were uncommon. The dialogue was top-tier. A city opens up in unexpected ways with the proper guidance. At the bare minimum, Schulak and her organization do allow people—speakers, guests and perhaps even residents—to fall in love with the city again. But the founder makes clear that this is only the first step and tactile developmental projects must be the ultimate outcome. Everyone can have a good conversation when given all the necessary ingredients. Here, however, the conversations are just the first component for longterm, impactful change.

Gary Simmons image by John Froelich, all other images courtesy of Culture Lab Detroit

BLOUINARTINFO

September 21, 2016

Report From Detroit: Culture Lab 2016

By Taylor Dafoe

"I think that there is an opportunity in next few years for Detroit to change the global dialogue about how our world and our communities can collectively transform themselves into a new generation contending with new industrial and environmental challenges," artist Glenn Kaino told Artinfo at Culture Lab Detroit, a two-day symposium exploring how art and architecture can tackle systemic issues such as urban blight and economic disparity — national issues laid bare in Detroit. Said Kaino: "I've been struck that, from the minute I've been here, every person I've spoken to has been so hopeful and has spoken about the city with such passion and love."

The city was a symbol for the national economic recession several years ago, and it has since become a symbol for rejuvenation. But is the city really rejuvenated?



In comes Culture Lab Detroit, an annual public conference that brings together artists, architects, and other influential cultural figures to address this and other issues.

Culture Lab was founded in 2014 by Jane Schulak, one of Detroit's most active patrons of the arts. The first edition, which featured architect David Adjaye, artist Theaster Gates, and artist design duo Fernando and Humberto

Campana, addressed the ways in which art and architecture intersect issues of urbanity. Last year's event, the second edition, tackled architecture and urban farms and green-spaces, and featured such speakers as architects Sou Fujimoto and Reed Kroloff, landscape designer Walter Hood, and chef and food activist Alice Waters.

The narrative of Detroit's downfall is well-known: the nation's industrial capital brought down by suburbanization, scandal, and the floundering auto industry it helped to create. The city hit rock bottom from 2008-13, and nearly brought its art community with it. The city filed for bankruptcy, the largest municipality in the history of the country to do so; its population dropped by nearly 25%, an unprecedented figure for a major American city; and its infamous mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick, resigned

after being indicted on felony charges. (He's currently serving a 28-year sentence.) The city even tried to sell the 60,000-piece art collection of its most famous museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts (which had become city-owned due to its own financial problems), to pay its bills.

Since then, the story of the city's rejuvenation has become equally well known, perhaps because of its predictability: a city ravaged and abandoned rebuilds itself through art. And indeed, at first glance, the city's art scene looks to be thriving. Cultural institutions are setting up shop in abandoned industrial buildings, ad-hoc arts spaces are popping up in skate-parks and forgotten storefronts, and its museums — DIA and Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) — are back to national relevance. But perhaps the art scene isn't quite as fresh as it seems. For instance, the large majority of it is funded by philanthropy — a handful of major patrons, in particular. This isn't new, of course — the vast majority of the art world has become reliant on private funding — nor is it necessarily a bad thing. But at the very least, it doesn't seem like a model built for long-term success.

This year's Culture Lab Detroit, held from September 15 -16, tried to tackle this issue. The event was themed around "walls" — not only architectural structures, but points of societal division, historical definition, and so on. (Not to mention the most topical wall — the one along the U.S./Mexico border, proposed by a current presidential nominee.) Panelists included artists Trevor Paglen, Adam Pendleton, and Glenn Kaino; MacArthur fellow and National Design Award-winning architect Elizabeth Diller; Director of the Pérez Art Museum in Miami, Franklin Sirmans; and Eva Franch i Gilabert, the director of Storefront for Art and Architecture.



The theme was subdivided into two separate panels, one each night. The first, featuring Paglen, Diller, and Sirmans, and moderated by Dennis Scholl, a prominent arts patron and former Vice President of the Arts of the Knight Foundation, addressed the role of the contemporary art museum, in this a time when such cultural institutions are going through something of

an identity crisis: major museums have been forced to get creative in the battle to keep attendance figures up, presenting populist programming, bringing in high-profile architects for costly-redesigns or expansions, opening cafés as carefully curated as the art, and so on; while every other week wealthy art collectors are opening their own museums for off their private collections. The second, with Pendleton, Kaino, and Franch i Gilabert, moderated by DIA Director Salvador Salort-Pons, tackled the idea of art and activism.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the event was the audience. The turnout was great, but more than that, nearly every person seemed to be demonstrably engaged in the discussion, and not because of

their interest in art or architecture (important though that may have been in addition), but for their interest in Detroit.

On the second night of talks, Adam Pendleton captured this well while expressing his consternation at participating in such panel at all. Citing Glenn Ligon's response to a public installation by Thomas Hirschhorn at a housing project in the Bronx, Pendleton discussed how the anxiety he had over funding the arts in Detroit when the illiteracy and poverty rate in the city are at alarming levels. "We as artists, curators, museum directors are in this cycle of talking about things through abstractions," Pendleton said. Art can have "tremendous social value. But the kids have to know how to read." He went on: "At this particular moment, it's hard for me to speak to this audience as an artist, even though that's what I am.... If you're funding an [art] project for \$30 million and a few blocks away a house of learning is falling apart, there's a problem. What so often happens in the art world is that we assume art is good, just because we say its 'art.'"

"It's like the house is fire and [we're] watering the garden." It's a stark metaphor for the current state the arts in Detroit — especially coming at a well-funded symposium dedicated to the arts — but one that needed vocalizing.

However, the best metaphor for the whole event came right after that. During the audience Q&A following the second panel, a man in the back grabbed the mic, and began to preach, sermon-style, about the merits of merely showing up: "Everyone here is missing the point. Arts are the humanities," he said. "If you're here, you're a humanitarian."

As he talked, he approached the stage; when he got there, he turned around, addressing the audience instead of the panelists. "There's an African proverb that says, 'Each one, teach one.' Give a pencil if you can." The crowd applauded. Then, before almost literally dropping the mic, he plugged his live audio business.

September 15, 2016

How Detroit Is Becoming a Lasting Destination for the Arts

By Christian Viveros-Fauné

The Motor City has picked itself up, dusted itself off, and is ready to face the future.



Gary Simmons in front Untitled installation, Culture Lab Detroit. Photo by John Froelich Courts.

On July 18, 2013, the city of Detroit filed for bankruptcy, citing \$18 billion worth of debt. Tens of thousands of properties in the city were deserted, falling victim to disrepair, arson, and demolition. Like most places with too many buildings and too few people, Detroit was—and continues to be—likened to a ghost town. The once bustling metropolis, which boasted a population of 1.86 million in 1950, had its population plummet to just 677,116 residents in the latest Census.

Despite Detroit's current reputation as the US capital of ruin porn, the scrappy city is in the process of

writing its own regeneration story. Led in part by several of the city's older arts institutions plus a relative newcomer to the local scene—the four year-old Culture Lab Detroit—the struggling burg has turned to the field of culture for ideas. Among other efforts, the Motor City has spent the last few years hosting a set of landmark conversations about the role that art, design, architecture and urbanism can play in reshaping its future.

This week, Culture Lab Detroit—with participation from the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) and the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)—has scheduled the fourth such conference to discuss creative possibilities for what was once America's undisputed capital of industry. This year's edition is set to take place over two nights: Thursday, September 15, and Friday, September 16 will be fully devoted to the timely theme of "walls." Expect variations on the subject of vertical separations—from the socioeconomic to the theoretical-multidisciplinary and, no doubt, the fancifully bigoted, such as the wall that, per one presidential candidate, Mexico is somehow expected to pay for.

Among the participants on hand to bring this and other crucial debates to life are the following notables: artists Trevor Paglen, Adam Pendleton, and Glenn Kaino, the architect Elizabeth Diller (of Diller Scofidio + Renfro fame), Pérez Art Museum director Franklin Sirmans, director of the Storefront for Art and Architecture Eva Franch i Gilabert, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation president Dennis Scholl, and Detroit Institute of Arts director Salvador Salort-Pons. This is not the first time Culture Lab Detroit has gathered such sparkling company on the shores of Lake Erie. Past sessions have included luminaries David Adjaye, Theaster Gates, Sou Fujimoto, the Campana Brothers and David Stark, among others.

Additionally, Culture Lab Detroit and MOCAD recently launched their first joint artist's commission. The inaugural work consists of a brightly hued, site-specific public installation by conceptual artist Gary Simmons that occupies a disused corner of Detroit's downtown. Done with the support of Bedrock, a local real estate company, the LA-based artist has turned an empty storefront into a contiguous swath of brilliant hoarding by wheat-pasting its interior with explosively colored 1960s and '70s music posters. Drawn from original material promoting extant punk, reggae and dub acts, Simmons has manually and digitally scrambled his wallpaper to resemble subcultural mold.

Things get trippier when one learns about the past lives of his chosen site: It was once a smoke shop, a massage parlor and, most fittingly, a music club.



Gary Simmons in front Untitled installation, Culture Lab Detroit. Photo by John Froelich Courts.

Another frame of reference for this week's motor-mouthed events is a recently inaugurated solo exhibition at MOCAD by New York artist Sanford Biggers. Titled "Subjective Cosmology," the show features a mural-sized work, a video installation, an original score (performed by Biggers' band Moon Medicin), and two prone sculptures shaped like toppled giants. One, Laocoön, consists of a huge balloon version of the Bill Cosby cartoon creation Fat Albert. A modern-day Trojan horse for the allegedly squeaky-clean values of the embattled comedian, the ginormous vinyl sculpture does double duty as a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade inflatable for Black Lives Matter—mostly by assuming the position of a post-choke hold Eric Garner.

Detroit is otherwise impressively kitted out in colorful murals by recognized and underacknowledged street artists, such as Shepard Fairey and Katie Craig. These grace various districts of the city: downtown, southwest, the Grand River corridor and Eastern Market, which is home this month to a festival of muralists from around the world. Add to this the significant rebirth of DIA, which just announced the start of a three-year, multimillion-dollar campaign to deepen its commitment to African American art.

Anyone remember when DIA's 60,000-piece collection was almost sold to foot the city's unpaid bills? That was only three years ago.

Since then, Detroit has picked itself up, dusted itself off, and got its bootstrapping art on. It's enough to turn a critic into a fan.

OAKLAND PRESS

September 14, 2016

Culture Lab hosts public art installations on Thursday and Friday

By Eric Steingold

The 2016 edition of Culture Lab, a two-day series of discussions, dinners and public art installations centered on fostering collaboration between Detroit's art community and the international art community at-large, is set to open Sept. 15-16.

This year's event is focused primarily upon the theme of "Walls" – be them literal or ideological– and the ways in which these walls inform and limit understanding of culture and art, and art's role in bring about social justice. The theme will be on full display at Culture Lab's inaugural opening Sept. 15, in which Gary Simmons will plaster the walls of the space at 1301 Broadway with self-created concert fly posters.

The installment references musical styles that have come to define Detroit's cultural outreach globally, including Motown soul, rock 'n roll, and techno. Simmons' work aims to act as an auditory biography of Simmons himself, as well as to provide an ethnographic study of American culture over the last half-century.

The installation has been on display before. However, the Detroit iteration will include 13 posters that specifically pertain to Detroit music, with posters from acts such as the MC5, and conjures the DIY spirit of Detroit's art scene, while hinting at deeper sociocultural problems within urban areas themselves.

"Culture Lab Detroit is about making connections between minds, fields, and communities," says Culture Lab Detroit founder Jane Schulak in a press release, "This exciting project is a perfect example of that."

In addition to Simmons' opening, Culture Lab Detroit brings together an cast of designers and will feature conversations with artists Dennis, Franklin Sirmans, Trevor Paglen, and Elizabeth Diller, a founding partner at renown design studio Diller, Scofidio, + Renfro, and the first architect to be awarded the MacArthur Genius grant.

Admission to the discussions is free. For more information on this year's Culture Lab Detroit programs, visit www.culturelabdetroit.org.

The event kicks off Thursday with a champagne reception beginning at 6 p.m. at the College for Creative Studies, Benson & Edith Ford Conference Center at the A. Alfred Taubman Center for Design

Education, 460 W. Baltimore St., Detroit.

September 14, 2016

NYC artist Gary Simmons papers Detroit with vintage music posters

By Mark Stryker



Photo: Kimberly P. Mitchell, Detroit Free Press

Artist Gary Simmons was deep into music growing up in New York. He was especially fascinated with cities that were producing innovative musicians, new sounds and styles and independent scenes. Los Angeles was like that. Washington, D.C. too. And, of course, Detroit.

"From the time I was a teenager, Detroit was always a place that I looked at that had this super-rich music foundation," said Simmons, speaking by phone from New York. "Everything from Motown to house music and techno. This was an incredible city that has all of this history — the MC5, the Stooges, you name the techno DJ. It just keeps going and going and going."

"I've always wanted to do an installation in Detroit."

At 52, Simmons is getting his wish. The celebrated artist, known for exploring ideas of race, culture and class through drawing, sculpture and installation, is creating a site-specific work in a vacant storefront at 1301 Broadway (at Gratiot), next door to longtime neighborhood resident Henry the Hatter. The exhibition, which opens to the public on Thursday, is an immersive environment created from hundreds of old-school concert posters, evocative of the late '60s through the early '80s. Simmons alters them and uses them to coat the walls in a vibrant wash of saturated color, typography and memory.

The posters, which Simmons collected at flea markets or from the Internet, are digitally scanned and transformed through erasures, tears and color manipulations. About a dozen of them are Detroit-centric, referencing bands like the MC5 or Hot Rod-theme events. The effect promises to be a hallucinatory mosaic — the erasures, juxtapositions and repetitions evoking a disorienting haze of distorted memories and scrambled context.

The exhibition arrives as part of Culture Lab Detroit 2016, a two-day conference including panel discussions and projects centered on the role of design in reshaping Detroit.

In its fourth year, Culture Lab typically includes a community-based project or exhibition that moves beyond the public panels and private networking dinners. The Simmons installation, which will remain open through the end of the year, connects with the 2016 conference theme of "walls" — an exploration of architectural structures, interior spaces and barriers that separate us from each other based on race, culture, gender, politics and class.



The installation was commissioned by Culture Lab Detroit in collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit and Dan Gilbert's Bedrock Real Estate Services. Culture Lab was founded by Birmingham resident Jane Schulak and is funded by a consortium of foundations, businesses, individuals and others.

Simmons has had one-man shows at the Studio Museum of Harlem, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and the Perez Art Museum in Miami, and his work has appeared in leading museum shows around the world. Detroiters who saw the "30 Americans" touring exhibition of

contemporary African-American artists at the Detroit Institute of Arts last year will certainly remember seeing his work, even if they can't recall his name. Simmons' "Duck, Duck, Noose" (1992) is a devastating installation in which Ku Klux Klan hats sit on stools in a classroom-like circle — while an empty noose hangs in the center.

Simmons' best-known works are his so-called erasure drawings, in which he takes popular culture images

rooted in racial stereotypes, like those from old cartoons, and renders them in chalk on slate and then rub parts of them away. MOCAD executive director Elysia Borowy-Reeder said that new Detroit installation would draw similarly on themes of identity and uncertainty, while referencing Detroit music history and employing the artist's newer medium of the printed, transformed poster.

Simmons has created similar installations in London, San Francisco and Aspen, though the Detroit version will be the largest in the series to date.

"The whole premise of the work is the act of mining histories, and in this case it's music," said Simmons. "The posters are specific to a time when the way we received information about subcultures — about bands playing, records dropping and things like that — you'd hear about through fliers on the street. I always loved the graphic qualities of those posters. To get somebody's attention you had to have a really strong image."



Simmons laments the speed of today's digital culture.

Almost as soon as a piece of music is created, it's distributed all over the world via the Internet. When information traveled more slowly, the relative isolation made it easier for distinctive local scenes to develop, rather than everything being absorbed quickly into a more generic digital stream of popular culture.

Simmons' installation meditates on these issues, giving the illusion of a predigital age, as well as touching subtly on politics and identity. Simmons said the work hovers between representation and abstraction.

"Your memory sort of bridges the gaps between the abstract and representation," he said. "When you recall something, it's not a true memory. You're patching in certain areas, and there are parts disappearing the further you get from the experience. The same thing happens with these posters. You can vaguely decipher what band it is, but not the location. You're filling the gaps. ..."

"I love the way the posters layer over one another, offering bits and pieces, shards of the past."

Photos by Kimberly P. Mitchell, Detroit Free Press.

COOL HUNTING

September 14, 2016

Gary Simmons' Music Fly-Poster Installation for Culture Lab Detroit

By David Graver

Kicking off the design forum with a large-scale public art exhibition

There's no denying Detroit's rich musical history and its global impact on both singers and songwriters. This was one element touched upon when we last attended Culture Lab Detroit—a multi-day, multi-venue forum on actionable design and creativity in the Motor City. To commence this year's iteration, artist Gary Simmons has pasted his fly-poster art exhibition, for the first time ever, in a large public space and not only does it reference Detroit's musical history but also corresponds directly with this year's theme: walls. The culture lab's conversations will center around the idea of walls, "be they architectural or theoretical, historical or speculative." And Simmons' visually-stunning exhibition, presented with the help of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (MOCAD), breathes new life into decaying walls, all the while making note of the walls torn down by Detroit's musical presence.

"I had already been interesting in doing something in Detroit. There's such an interesting vibe to the city. Music is such a part of the culture," Simmons explains to CH. Much of his work circles around music, and the cultures (and sub-cultures) that support certain genres. The programmers of Culture Lab Detroit, along with MOCAD, were aware of Simmons' Anthony Meier Fine Arts exhibition in June and reached out to gallery. Simmons leapt at the opportunity to travel again with his work, and to incorporate more elements of '70s and '80s punk culture, '60s soul and Motown.





"For me, the most interesting work around installations is to do site-specific," Simmons continues. Detroit provided ample edge to the notion of site-specific. "There are so many incredible buildings in Detroit that are abandoned or in decay, yet there's big reconstruction and reclamation. A lot of renovation to the beautiful and old." At his current venue, which sports large windows faced toward the street and passersby, he played with the history. "I leave traces of what was there. I leave a lot of the architecture as it is. The balcony and mezzanine are left alone, and the molding is in place. I then accentuate it, with my own version of the past." Simmons muses about the value of erasure and the want to build spaces between representation and abstraction. Some of his more acclaimed earlier work, done in chalk, harkens back to all of this. Detroit, as a city, and this venue itself, aren't chalkboards, but morphing cityscapes and fleeting meaning and rebirth bind these communication platforms.

In addition to his previously shown fly-posters, Simmons developed 13 new ones for this exhibition. "As I get invited to different cities along the way, I kind of add in those new locations to the process—it's an additive process and exhibition." Simmons collages and layers at each city location, and then tears them down only to get added on and layered at their next stop. For Detroit, he's added many genres. "It's visually sampling, in the way that music has long sampled from what came before it. They all kind of feed off of each other," he says. He looked toward certain periods and withdrew relevant acts. He also blends in auto industry references, from biker culture to hot rods.

Installation took four days at the Detroit location, something Simmons attributes to the venue being very different than the contained, controlled space of a gallery and its white walls. "You know those

dimensions ahead of time. Here you are forced into making certain decisions on the fly. That creates problems but also interesting, unexpected moments," he concludes. There is something wondrous about it all—an amalgamation of the past spanning across diverse cultures. And while it's a valuable exhibition unto itself, it's quite the à propos inauguration of Culture Lab Detroit.



Gary Simmons' installation will be open to the public from 15 September to 1 January 2017, at 1301 Broadway #101, Detroit

Work in progress installation images by Noé Angelito



DETROIT
HUSTLES
HARDER

Welcome (Back) to Detroit

A FRESH LOOK AT EVERYONE’S FAVORITE UNDERDOG

by Alex Trajkovski

No city has epitomized the American dream quite like Motor City. Henry Ford’s \$5-a-day wage? The *Happy Days* theme song? Both made in Detroit. It’s where young Aretha Franklin got her start singing gospel and *Creem* begat rock journalism from a gritty head shop. Yet decades of racial tension, business decline, mass exodus, and growth of concentrated poverty have overshadowed these narratives.

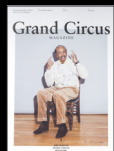
Over the past several years, stories of Detroit have largely read the same: America’s former manufacturing giant is circling the drain—the largest city in U.S. history to file for bankruptcy. Magazine features have breathlessly described a *Mad Max* hinterland into which intrepid photographers venture to capture the apocalyptic ruin porn—then never returned.

But this is far from that kind of story. Prompted by affordable rent, companies are moving to downtown Detroit in droves. Educated millennials are relocating to what they see as a burgeoning creative playground. Long-abandoned storefronts and once-quiet blocks are being reactivated, along with a deeper sense of community and civic pride. Real problems persist, but Detroit is quietly, efficiently rebuilding. From city planners dreaming of a multi-modal future, to a billionaire businessman attracting tech talent, to an activist beckoning world-class artists, to a 70-year-old pizza joint elevating the city’s culinary prestige—here, in the latest iteration of GOOD Cities, we look at who and what is behind Detroit’s resurgence.



Required Reading

Grand Circus Magazine



This beautiful biannual journal covers the current state of Detroit culture, architecture, art, urbanism, and fashion.

How To Live In Detroit Without Being A Jackass
By Aaron Foley



This humorous guide navigates unassuming readers through the most fascinating city they don't yet understand. It's a poignant book that shows why Detroit will never morph into Brooklyn—don't worry, that's a good thing.

Thanks for the View, Mr. Mies: Lafayette Park, Detroit
Edited by Danielle Aubert, Lana Cavar, and Natasha Chandani



An inspiring foray into the steel, glass, and lively green spaces of Lafayette Park, this book is a Modernist time capsule documenting a strong community bound together by world-class design.




Motor City Sounds

Local producer and musician Charles Trees shares cuts from some of Detroit's standout acts and classics.

1. Andrés – *Mighty Tribe EP*
2. Slufter / Ben Christensen – “Samus”/ “Fasa”
3. Ritual Howls – *Into the Water*
4. Julian Kendall – *Julian Kendall EP*
5. MGUN – *Gentium*
6. Theo Parrish – *Roots Revisited*
7. Danny Brown – “When It Rain”
8. ZelooperZ – *Bothic*
9. Iggy Pop – “Lust for Life”

SNAPSHOT

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>NICKNAME “Paris of the West” and “Motor City”</p> <p>POPULATION Approximately 700,000 in the city; 5.7 million in metro Detroit-Windsor area</p> <p>FOUNDED 1701 by French explorer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac</p> <p>KNOWN FOR Music (techno, Motown, The White Stripes); cars (Ford, GM, Chrysler); architecture (Yamasaki, Kahn, Van Der Rohe, Saarinen)</p> |  <p>SIZE 139 square miles—San Francisco, Boston, and Manhattan can fit within Detroit's city limits</p> | <p>RECENT HAPPENINGS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan '14: Nine philanthropies and \$330 million dollars saves the Detroit Institute of Arts collection from being sold off • June '15: Richard Branson launches direct Virgin Atlantic line between Detroit and London • Dec '15: Detroit becomes UNESCO's first U.S. “City of Design” • May '16: Venice Biennale honors Detroit with special exhibition |
|--|--|--|

Itinerary

THREE MUST-SEE SPOTS



Lafayette Greens

In 2010, the Lafayette Building was torn down, leaving a triangle-shaped hole in the heart of downtown Detroit's urban fabric. It was quickly redesigned into a useful green space growing organic produce.



Ponyride

Deep in Detroit's oldest neighborhood sits this 30,000 square-foot warehouse-turned-incubator in which entrepreneurs and artists share space, resources, and a sense of community. Former tenants often stick around—Ponyride alum Detroit Denim recently opened a flagship storefront in the city's Rivertown Warehouse District.



MBAD African Bead Museum

Owner and curator Olayami Dabls's cultural institution is a shrine to African culture, created for a city that is 80 percent black. The museum is full of sculptures, beads, and pottery dating back hundreds of years and hosts 18 impressive outdoor sculptures on its grounds.

The Big Dogs

FOUR NAMES YOU NEED TO KNOW



Mike Duggan

The mayor since January 2014 who won as a write-in candidate has been overseeing the restructuring of Detroit post-bankruptcy.



Dan Gilbert

The billionaire CEO of Quicken Loans has helped revive downtown Detroit and brought back light rail transportation.



Maurice Cox

The city's planning director is focused on improving quality of life for residents by fixing basic city services, while also looking toward Detroit's future—like by designing more walkable infrastructure.



Fernando Palazuelo

The Madrid-born developer—who has helped revitalize cities like Lima, Peru—is planning to revamp the Packard Plant, a derelict mile-long factory including nearly 50 buildings.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Who's Getting Their Hands Dirty

A LOOK AT THE PEOPLE, ORGANIZATIONS, AND BUSINESSES DRIVING THE RESURGENCE

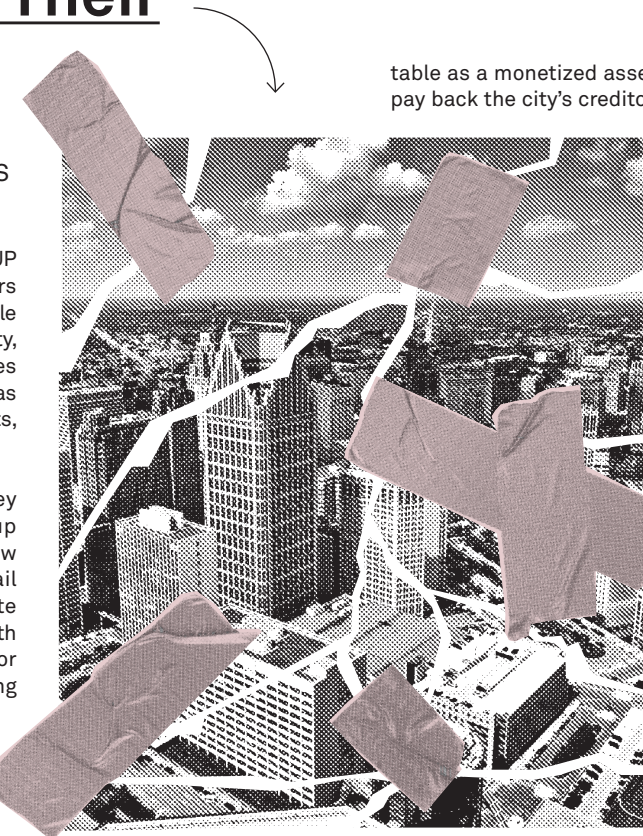
DINNER AND A MOVEMENT: Detroit SOUP facilitates micro-grants at monthly dinners where attendees pay \$5 to eat, listen to people pitch a variety of ideas to improve the city, and vote for their favorite. The winner takes home the evening's pool. The organization has raised more than \$120,000 dollars for artists, entrepreneurs, and educators since 2010.

THE MAYOR OF MIDTOWN: Sue Mosey presides over Midtown Detroit, a group partially responsible for attracting new businesses, cultivating a burgeoning retail scene, and helping maintain Wayne State University. The district owes much of its health to the nonprofit, which has campaigned for more efficient permitting while conserving city services.

GUARDIANS OF THE ARTS: In 2014, the Ford Foundation, Kresge Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and others contributed funds to save the Detroit Institute of Arts' collection from auction. Kevyn Orr, the city's former emergency manager tasked with overseeing the bankruptcy, contentiously placed the government-owned DIA's stockpile on the

table as a monetized asset in 2013 as a potential way to pay back the city's creditors. Christie's appraised a small but meaningful percentage of the collection—which includes works by Van Gogh and Rembrandt—at over \$800 million.

SILICON VALIANT: In August 2010, Dan Gilbert moved mortgage lender Quicken Loans from a sleepy suburb to downtown Detroit. Dozens of businesses soon followed, filling the 60 buildings overseen by his real estate company Rock Ventures. From household names like Twitter and Microsoft to more niche companies like International Bancard and Loveland Technologies, most of the firms relocating have been tech-based—a clear demonstration of Gilbert's vision. By extension, foot traffic has increased to a level where retailers are comfortable returning to the district: athleisure brand Kit and Ace and Nike joined hometown hero and men's fashion house John Varvatos on downtown's historic Woodward Avenue.



Q&A



Photo by Lisa Spindler

The Cultural Coordinator

Arts patron-turned-activist Jane Schukak founded Culture Lab Detroit (CLD) in 2013 as an annual gathering of creatives who head to Motor City from all over the world to exchange ideas and collaborate on projects. Famed chef Alice Waters and artist Trevor Paglen are just a few of past CLD participants. With its 2016 program set for September, this year's event aims to further foster the city's ever-evolving cultural landscape. Here, Schukak shares her perspective on shaping Detroit's future.

How is CLD using design to help Detroit's neighborhoods?

Perhaps a better way to put it is: “How are Detroit's neighborhoods helping CLD?” Their participation helps us select and explore issues relevant to them at the root level—issues that also resonate within the larger design community. This year,

with our theme “Walls,” we will explore new ways to move through a city, catalyze social change through art, and negotiate the ever-shifting divide between public and private space.

As Detroit continues to evolve, what can be done to encourage progress?

We can challenge flawed media narratives that erroneously portray the immense opportunity Detroit offers as being linked to the so-called “\$100 house” instead of its true assets: its people and culture. Detroit does have a low cost of living, including affordable housing, but so do many other cities. No other place offers the same chance to be part of such a vital, diverse, and inspiring community of artists, activists, and beautiful people.

Interested in attending CLD? All programs are free and open to the public. Find out more at culturelabdetroit.org



A Cut Above

AN ABANDONED RAILWAY IS REVIVED WITH A SECOND LIFE

Of Detroit's 33,958 total acres, a paltry 6.3 percent of that is allotted to park space. Although an urban parks renaissance flourishes in other cities, Detroit remains starved for communal public life due in part to its lack of accessible gathering places, which boost quality of life, strengthen civic identity, and create opportunities for city dwellers to mingle.

But Detroit's landscape is changing, thanks to forward-thinking organizations and developers focused on reactivating unused or vacated spaces. For example, the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy took on a 1.15-mile abandoned stretch of former Grand Trunk Western Railroad line, transforming it into the Dequindre Cut, a recreational parkway for bikers, joggers, and pedestrians. The path is part of a larger project, the Inner Circle Greenway, which will ultimately encircle and connect all of Detroit's neighborhoods with a 26-mile-long, car-free route.

Here, Chad Rochkind, urbanist and director of Human Scale Studio, assesses the Cut as an example of public works that point to a city investing in its future.

Aesthetics

RATING 9/10

From Antietam Avenue to Lafayette Boulevard, visitors are afforded striking views of the Lafayette Towers, perhaps the best example of Modernist social housing in the United States. The Dequindre Cut also houses an impressive outdoor urban art gallery and its overpasses are decorated with murals and reproductions of famous paintings from the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Dexterity

RATING 5/10

With little available street furniture or programmed space, there is a lack of designated area meant for lingering. As is, the Cut encourages promenading over rest, and is perhaps most useful as a route for cyclists. But the Conservancy aims to create a shipping container marketplace along its stretch by June 2017, which will invite people to pause and enjoy the surroundings.

Accessibility

RATING 8/10

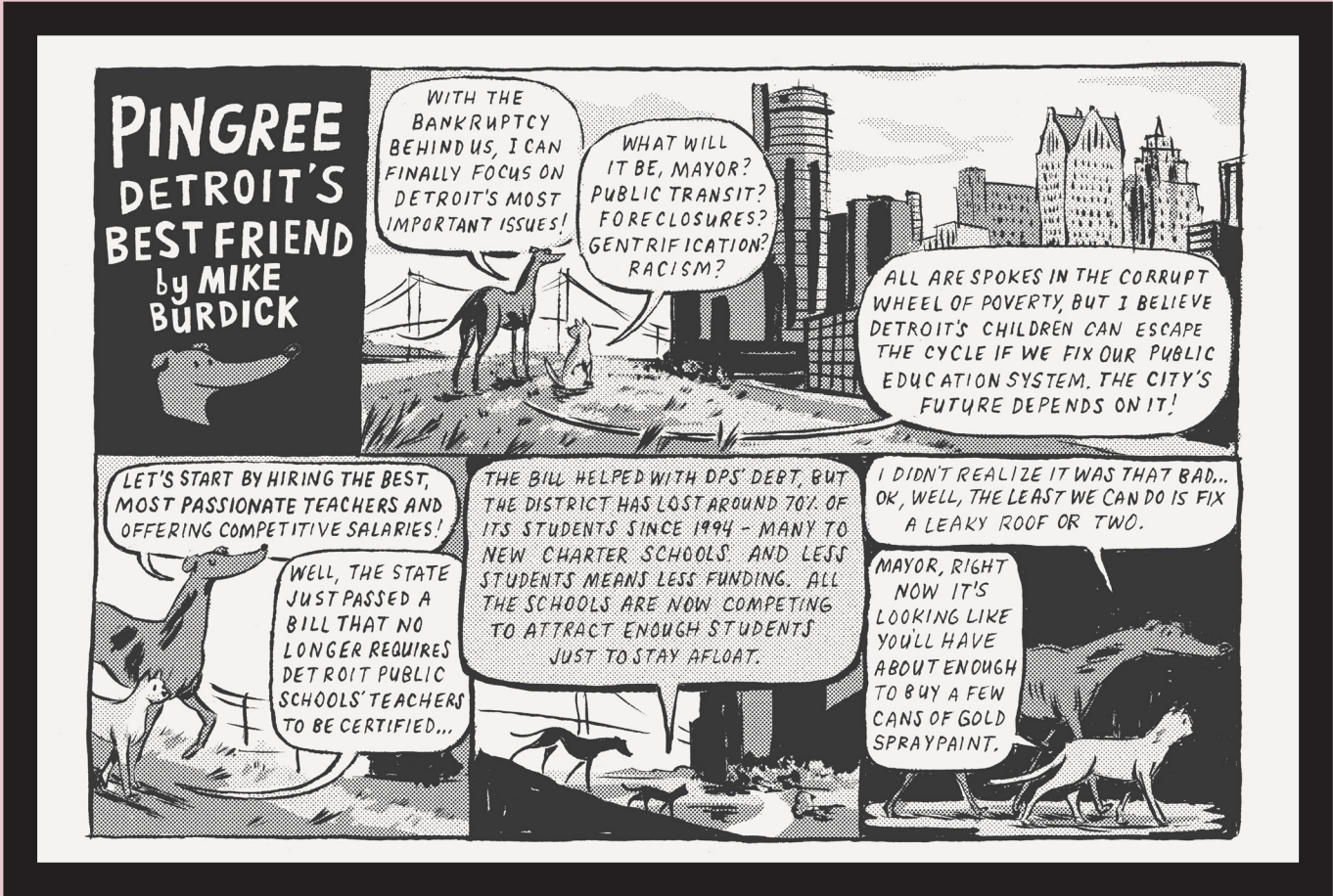
Seven staggered official entry points—as well as a few unofficial ones—make the Cut easily accessible for various neighborhoods, creating a dynamic flow of human movement and diverse public life.

Connectivity

RATING 10/10

The city has been marred by ongoing freeway expansion, which has destroyed whole neighborhoods and divided others, physically separating Detroiters from one another. The Cut has functioned as a fantastic connecting force in the heart of the city, even for those without a car. As rumors persist of a comparable project emerging at May's Creek—a similar railway that spreads just west of the Cut—there's hope that this path may one day connect all the way to southwest of the city.

Photo by Michelle and Chris Gerard



Despite overall progress, Detroit still has plenty of work to do. The three key problems on its punch list :

PUBLIC SCHOOL DEBT

Detroit's public education system is saddled with about \$500 million in debt, forcing administrators to funnel education dollars into paying off loans, instead of helping students. **WHO'S ON IT?** Lawmakers, including the state's Republican governor Rick Snyder, recently signed a bill that splits the district in two: a new one to educate the 46,000 public school students and an older district that exists to tackle the debt. It's a short-term solution, but at least tax revenue will go toward classrooms.

HOME FORECLOSURES

More than one in three Detroiters have had their homes foreclosed on in the past decade. Last year alone, Wayne County saw a record 28,000 tax foreclosures, which affect homeowners who fail to pay their property taxes. **WHO'S ON IT?** The Tricycle Collective raises funds for families whose homes are undergoing tax foreclosure, who then use this money to bid on their own homes at auction. Last year, 10 Detroit families were able to buy back their homes.

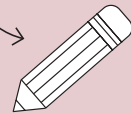
WATER SHUT-OFFS

In 2015, the city cut off water service to more than 23,000 homeowners who couldn't pay their bills, even as local businesses and government facilities that defaulted continued to have access. The United Nations went so far as to label the situation a "human rights violation." **WHO'S ON IT?** The Detroit Water Brigade, a volunteer-led organization, is fighting back with an awareness campaign, stockpiling water by the bottle, issuing rainwater collection systems, and distributing cold weather gear to residents whose home heating systems rely on warm water circulating through pipes.

—Cody Gomez



Illustrator Mike Burdick has been drawing a political comic featuring canine character Pingree, "Detroit's best friend," for the last few years, publishing the strip on his Instagram feed, @michaeeugene. The artist's fictional greyhound was inspired by real-life 1890s Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree, who has been championed as the city's greatest mayor and nicknamed the "Idol of the People" for his dedication to social reform.



Food Fight

INTRIGUE OVER DETROIT'S FAVORITE EATS

Art by Mike Burdick

THE SQUARE "SLICE": Detroit's impending culinary domination is evident as its signature pizza crowds the Instagram feeds of foodies everywhere. Buddy's Rendezvous has been perfecting its version of Detroit-style pizza since 1946, when the distinct technique of cooking square pies in repurposed auto factory storage trays was born. First used to house nuts and bolts, the blue-steel trays are the single necessary component that allows the crust to caramelize—a hallmark of the method. The tray's creases hold in the melting fat as it bakes and the toppings are tucked beneath the sauce to avoid sogginess. Wesley Pikula, Buddy's vice president of operations, talks us through the delicious layers.

CLASSIC BEEFS: When asked about Detroit's culinary standouts, most people defer to the famed Coney dog: a beef hot dog topped with beanless chili and hit with mustard and diced onions. It's a snack that prompts passionate debate and has been known to cause rifts amongst families and friends. Detroiters swear allegiance to one of two local establishments: American Coney Island, headed by Gust Keros, or Lafayette Coney Island, run by his brother, Bill Keros. As local folklore goes, the siblings opened American upon emigrating from Greece, but a spat drove Bill to split off—he debuted Lafayette next door, a mere 10 feet away. More than seven decades later, they're still operating their respective restaurants side-by-side. The differences in their chili recipes are subtle (Lafayette's Spanish onions are much sweeter than American's white onions) but no less contentious.

LOCAL FLAVOR

The **sauce** is a mixture of California tomatoes and spices (salt, oregano, and pepper—the usual suspects). Quality is paramount, as the proportion of sauce is greater than your typical pie.

Buddy's uses ground **Wisconsin Brick cheese**—a cousin of Monterey Jack.

For **toppings**, pepperoni is the most traditional, though anything goes. It's imperative they stay beneath the blanket of cheese and sauce.

"**Lean dough**," as it's called, is made fresh daily with no oil, sugar, or shortening added to the flour—for that crunch. Water used in the dough comes, of course, from the Great Lakes.

After years of use—in some cases a near-half century spent in and out of the oven—a natural seasoning accumulates on the sides of the **blue-steel pan**. The cookware is never washed to avoid rusting.



DETROIT FREE PRESS VS. DETROIT NEWS

While a chilly coexistence seems to be working for Coney dog kings American and Lafayette, other times enemies must join forces to survive in this cruel world. Consider the *Detroit Free Press*, the city's liberal newspaper, and the conservative *Detroit News*. In 1987, these rivals put aside their opposing views and came together in a century-long agreement

under the Detroit Media Partnership. The alliance combined their operations, which initially resulted in a comically heavy Sunday edition—though now it's published only by the *Free Press*, with an editorial page from the *News*. They also merged their editorial staffs, which still function separately, into the same downtown Detroit building. Both papers have managed to stay afloat for now.

NEXT STEPS

(Trying to) Keep it Moving

AN IMPENDING VOTE WILL DETERMINE IF DETROIT'S TRANSIT SYSTEM WILL STAY FRACTURED OR GET FIXED

The tale of James Robertson, aka "the Walking Man," had all the makings of a viral hit. When the *Detroit Free Press* broke the story last year, Robertson's round-trip commute from his Detroit home to his auto job in provincial Oakland County was a 21-mile trek through one of dozens of local communities that have opted out of bus service. After the story ran, online fundraisers gathered just over \$360,000 in donations for Detroit's decisive pedestrian.

The shocking narrative instantiated the shortcomings of the city's public transit system and the frustration of those who rely on it. The city itself is nearly 139 square miles and holds the dubious distinction of having the highest car insurance rates in the country, according to personal finance website NerdWallet, as well as a completely unreliable bus system. Many suburban communities have declined bus service altogether, which leaves large pockets of dead zones. Although the core of Detroit has been attracting educated millennials who clamor for effective public transit, the narrow-mindedness that fuels suburban fear keeps the region segregated.

This November, however, the residents of Ann Arbor and the metro Detroit area will be asked to approve a property tax, known as a millage, that would fund the first-ever comprehensive transit system linking the disparate parts of the beleaguered region—at a cost of roughly \$8 per month, per taxpayer. To call this decision monumental would understate its importance to the health of the city's economy and ability to draw

in young citizens, as well as the role improved transit would play in limiting the continuing sprawl of the suburbs.

The Regional Transit Authority's multimodal master plan is extensive. Rapid transit buses would flow through the area's main arteries—Woodward, Gratiot, and Michigan Avenues. Express lines would finally connect the Detroit Metropolitan Airport to the city core 20 miles away. Regional rail would extend 40 miles from leafy Ann Arbor to the heart of New Center in Detroit. And cross-county buses would be overlaid across the grid, tying all four counties together.

If approved, the plan will shape the next 20 years of transit planning. Transit authorities expect the interconnected system to reach more than one million residents, 300 schools, and 100 grocery stores—plus support 67,800 new jobs. Residents of denser cities like Detroit and Ann Arbor support the plan, while more insular communities, such as affluent aforementioned Oakland County, prefer the fragmented nature of the region. L. Brooks Patterson, the contentious county executive of Oakland County, scoffed at contemporary planning ideas with a smug statement posted on his official website: "I love sprawl. I need it. I promote it. Oakland County can't get enough of it."

Come this fall—unless the proposal is killed by the RTA board, which would prevent it from being presented to voters—the ballots will be cast to decide the future of how metro Detroit gets around.

HISTORY LESSON

Before 1956, Detroit boasted the largest streetcar system in the nation. In fact, once upon a time, every major U.S. city had a streetcar system, but they were "torn out in a vast criminal conspiracy that is as well documented as it was inevitable," as urban designer Jeff Speck details in his 2013 book, *Walkable City*. He's referencing National City Lines—a company created by General Motors, Mack Truck, Firestone Tire, and others—which bought and systematically closed the networks for a decade until a 1947 indictment halted the process. After the conspiracy was proven in 1949, a judge slapped every company involved with a \$5,000 fine, while their executives were forced to cough up a paltry \$1 each.

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JULIE
MEHRETU
FOR THE THOUGHT LEADERS ISSUE

FALL 2016

OPEN BORDERS

Culture Lab Detroit pushes the boundaries of architecture, exploring placemaking in social space.

BY ANTWAUN SARGENT

This month, Culture Lab Detroit, the annual discussion series founded in 2013 by Jane Schulak that brings together artists, architects and theorists, will explore the idea of how expanding access to public spaces can foster opportunity. Among the speakers is Franklin Sirmans, director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami. “Our institutional identity is inextricably tied to the surrounding community. We seek to be one and the same,” says Sirmans, who will speak on a panel entitled “Sliding Walls: Reimagining the Architecture of Social Space.”

For Sirmans, sliding walls are not only about expanding a museum’s mission. “At Pérez Art Museum Miami, this means outreach, it means public programming, it means making sure all third graders have an experience at the museum with our top-caliber educators,” he says. “This idea could be seen in a museum’s architecture, which includes not just galleries, but also theaters, libraries, classrooms, cafes or spaces designed for leisure.”

Eva Franch i Gilabert, executive director and chief curator of Storefront for Art and Architecture, will also be present at the series as a participant in the “Stones Thrown: Art and Social Progress” program. “Storefront’s mission throughout the years has consistently been to exhibit, produce and connect alternative ideas that challenge the status quo,” she says. “Through our program of exhibitions, events, competitions and publications, we see our role as instigator within the cultural sphere very aligned with the stone thrower, but one that is loaded with very specific vectors of desire.

“There are two ways of waging wars: One is by throwing stones and one is by putting them next to each other. As an architect building cultural edifices, I am interested in both,” Franch i Gilabert continues. She says her remarks will focus on the production of social and collective forms that are not just perpetuations of existing forms of power. “To produce new forms that allow for human and environmental sustainability, that achieve higher levels of freedom and equality, and that empower those not seated at the decision-making table, might take more than just an aesthetic or a rhetoric; it might take a Trojan Horse strategy,” she adds.

While discussions around establishing more democratic future forms internationally take place at the Detroit event, the artist Gary Simmons will present an installation that explores erasure, public nostalgia and how walls can be used to reimagine the built environment. Simmons will reconsider the structures that define everyday interaction by wallpapering a site in the Motor City with musical flypaper, and his installation will incorporate ephemeral promotional posters—some even sourced from Detroit’s techno scene. “The Detroit music scene has always been interesting for me because of its invention and styles of different forms—its Motown, its bands like MC5, its techno and hip-hop. It’s got a great and rich musical tapestry.”

“I’m not sure where this inclusive, flexible architecture is headed,” says Sirmans, “but I’m excited.”



Culture Lab Detroit founder Jane Schulak

PHOTO BY LISA SPINDLER

BLOUINARTINFO

VISUAL ARTS / GALLERIES / ARTICLE

Gary Simmons Installation to Inaugurate Culture Lab Detroit

BY TAYLOR DAFOE | AUGUST 31, 2016



Installation view of Gary Simmons at Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco

(Courtesy of Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco / Photo credit: JKA Photography, San Francisco)

The theme of this year's Culture Lab Detroit (CLD), a two-day series of discussions, dinners, and public projects set to open on September 15, is "Walls"—architectural structures, ontological boundaries, and so on. In the case of artist Gary Simmons, who will inaugurate this year's program, walls serve as substrate.

Channeling the city's rich history of Motown, punk, dub, and techno music, Simmons will cover the walls of a historic Detroit space with self-created musical flypaper posters. Vibrant

and evocative of the Detroit's famed DIY art subcultures and chip-on-its-shoulder disposition, the public installation also hint at the larger economic, racial, and sociopolitical issues that have pervaded the once-great American city for the last quarter of a century. Simmons's project marks the first major collaboration between CLD and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD).

Simmons has presented this project before — at the Baldwin Gallery in Aspen, the Simon Lee Gallery in London, and, most recently, at Anthony Meier Fine Arts in San Francisco. However, whereas in the past he has collected and altered existing posters and flyers, for the Detroit iteration, the artist has created a new set of 13 posters that reference specific music from the city, such as Motown acts and the MC5. It will also be the largest version of the project, and the first to be exhibited publically — an important new aspect, given the themes the project is exploring.

Simmons has exhibited internationally, and has work in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art LA, The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Whitney Museum in New York. Last year, he was featured in the 56th International "All the World's Futures" exhibition organized by the Venice Biennale.

In addition to Simmons's project, this year's Culture Lab Detroit will feature public conversations with artists Trevor Paglen, Adam Pendleton, and Glenn Kaino, as well as Elizabeth Diller, a founding partner of Diller Scofidio + Renfro; Franklin Sirmans, the director of the Pérez Art Museum in Miami; and Eva Franch i Gilabert, the director of Storefront for Art and Architecture.

June 25, 2016

Culture Lab Detroit to explore the 'walls' between us

By Mark Stryker



When most people think of "walls," the first think that comes to mind are the structures that define buildings and interior spaces. But walls are also literal and metaphorical barriers that mark territories and separate us from each other based on race, culture, class, gender and politics.

Entering its fourth year, Culture Lab Detroit, a catalyst for collaboration and conversation about the role of design in reshaping the city, is devoting its 2016 programming to the concept of walls.

Scheduled for Sept. 15-16, the conference will bring together a starry cast of internationally known architects, artists and museum leaders to explore how walls in all their meanings impact life in cities: the way people interact with each other, negotiate and redefine the borders between public and private spaces and the ability of art and design to promote social justice.

"I see 'walls' as a very broad topic," said Culture Lab Detroit founder Jane Schulak. "It doesn't just suggest architectural structures but also cultural ones — and these can be racial or social divisions or simply the boundaries around an artistic practice."

The major public events are two panel discussions, one centered on the architecture of social space and the second about art and social progress. Panelists include such figures as celebrated architects and designers Elizabeth Diller and Eva Franch i Gilabert; artists Trevor Paglen, Adam Pendleton and Glenn Kaino; and Franklin Sirmans, director of the Perez Art Museum in Miami. All these figures are interdisciplinary minded, working at the intersection of various kinds of art, design and architecture, often with an ultimate eye toward social justice.

"All of this is very appropriate to what Detroit is dealing with at the moment," Schulak said.

Admission to the panel discussions is free. The moderators for the conversations are Salvador Salort-Pons, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Dennis Scholl, former vice president for arts for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation of Miami.

Culture Lab Detroit 2016

Sept. 15: "Sliding Walls: Re-imagining the Architecture of Social Space"

6:30 p.m. A. Alfred Taubman Center for Design Education, College for Creative Studies, 460 W. Baltimore St., Detroit

Elizabeth Diller, founding partner, Diller Scofidio + Renfro
Trevor Paglen, artist
Franklin Sirmans, director, Pérez Art Museum Miami

Moderator: Dennis Scholl, former vice president for arts, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Sept. 16: "Stones Thrown: Art and Social Progress"

6:30 p.m. The Jam Handy, 2900 E. Grand Blvd, Detroit.

Eva Franch i Gilabert, director, Storefront for Art and Architecture
Glenn Kaino, artist
Adam Pendleton, artist

Photo: Elizabeth Diller by Abe Morrell.