



THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

EXHIBITIONS

ARTISTS TAKE ON **DETROIT**

PROJECTS FOR THE TRICENTENNIAL

The Detroit
Institute of Arts

Artists' Take on Detroit: Projects for the Tricentennial

October 19 - December 28, 2001

In recognition of Detroit's tricentennial year, the Detroit Institute of Arts has asked 15 artists to create installations taking the city as the theme. The result is an exhibition of 10 projects by Detroiters and non-Detroiters who examine aspects of the city's past and present; their own relationship to the city; and the museum's history. The installations incorporate video and still photography, text and sound, and sculpture in a variety of materials; they will be located in the museum's special exhibition galleries and other spaces throughout the building. Taken together, the projects present a lyrical and abstract vision of the city. This collective view neither reinforces old clichés nor looks through rose-colored glasses but rather presents fresh thoughts about the image and idea of Detroit.

OCTOBER 19 - DECEMBER 31, 2001

In recognition of Detroit's
tricentennial year, the
Detroit Institute of Arts
has asked a number
of artists to create
installations taking
the city as the theme.

Petah Coyne
Altar Mary

Destroy All Monsters Collective
Strange Fruit: Rock Apocrypha

Lorella Di Cintio and Jensara Ruth
Traces of Then and Now

Ronit Eisenbach and Peter Sparling
Fast Forward, Play Back

Deborah Grotfeldt and Tricia Ward
Riches of Detroit: Faces of Detroit

Tyree Guyton
Open House

Michael Hall
A Persistence of Memory

Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider
Relios

Mike Kelley
Blackout

Joseph Wesner
Voyageurs

ARTISTS TAKE ON DETROIT

Director's Foreword

With "Artists Take on Detroit: Projects for the Tricentennial," the Detroit Institute of Arts continues its celebration of the city's three-hundredth anniversary. For this project, the museum invited a number of artists to create installations that "take on" a challenging subject: the large and diverse city of Detroit. The artists selected use a wide variety of media including sculpture, painting, dance, and video, to explore aspects of the city's geography and history, its natural grandeur, and its industrial achievement. Given the nature of these projects, rather than the traditional publication, we have opted to produce a Web-based catalogue, the flexibility of which matches the open-ended nature of the works on view and allows us to convey more than the visual aspects of selected works. Our thanks go to the curators of the exhibition and authors of the catalogue, MaryAnn Wilkinson and Rebecca Hart. Most particularly, I would like to express my appreciation to the artists, who have contributed their "takes" on Detroit and, in doing so, heightened our perception of the city we live in.

Graham W. J. Beal

Director, The Detroit Institute of Arts

Introduction

Artists Take on Detroit: Projects for the Tricentennial **October 19 – December 31, 2001**

During a year in which hundreds of events have celebrated Detroit's three-hundredth birthday, "Artists Take on Detroit: Projects for the Tricentennial" is both one of the last and most ambitious. Ten installations by fifteen artists show a side to life in the city that runs counter to many widespread attitudes toward Detroit. The choice of installation art to express these ideas is deliberate. The aesthetic power of this idiom comes from the direct participation of the viewer, who is encouraged not simply to observe the work of art but rather to enter into a real experience. These works are participatory even if the interaction is simply navigation through the space. Each implies a relationship between the physical location and aesthetic content, and its immediacy makes a direct connection to actual visual, historical, or social conditions. The projects challenge the viewer's expectations about artistic materials and conventions and bridge traditional art boundaries. Installation art at the Detroit Institute of Arts has had a long, if sporadic, history. In the mid-1970s, the "Works in Progress" series gave artists — primarily local ones such as Nancy Gordon and Jim Pallas — public spaces within the museum to transform. Installation work was deemphasized during the 1980s in favor of more traditional approaches to exhibition planning, but the concept picked up again in the mid-1990s with "Interventions" (1995), "Changing Spaces: Artists' Projects from the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia" (1997), "Slim's Bike" (1999), and "Bill Viola: Video Installations" (2000). Over the years, the museum-going audience in Detroit has thus had the opportunity to experience the transformative aesthetic that fuels installation art.

Conceived on a more ambitious scale, "Artists Take on Detroit" expands on the emphases of those earlier shows. Original plans for the show envisioned works located outside the museum building, even embedded in Detroit neighborhoods. As the exhibition evolved, the projects drew ever closer to the museum, many taking their cues from the relationship of the museum to the community, the visitor to the museum, or the artists to the museum. The DIA building as a site was integral to most of the projects, some even co-opting gallery spaces and challenging traditional notions of gallery display. The exhibition flows from quiet to noisy spaces, interactive to contemplative galleries, social to intimate areas. Viewers' experience of the individual installations, however, leads inexorably to considerations of the way the installations work together as a whole and to thoughts about the complexity of life and ideas in Detroit. None of the projects deal directly with themes that might be considered stereotypically Detroit — jazz, cars, civil rights — but these issues are touched on obliquely in a number of places.

Through a shared spirit of hope, creativity, and imagination, the ten projects in this exhibition reveal new facets of the definition of Detroit. The works themselves are transient and will cease to exist in their current form when the exhibition ends, but their visual impact and intellectual challenges will endure, making this exhibition a fitting end to a celebratory year.

[Relics](#), by Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider, updates the tradition of assemblage so characteristic of art in Detroit. The installation's primary feature is a grid of hundreds of two-foot square boxes, each containing a piece of cast-off machinery, a portion of a decayed wall, or some other formally interesting but no longer useful object. The boxes are placed seemingly at random but the installation as a whole has a strong internal visual logic. It overwhelms the viewer with sheer numbers and variations. This twenty-first century version of a *Wunderkammer* puts on display, instead of the natural wonders and objects of earlier centuries, the ennobled remains of twentieth-century industry.

MaryAnn Wilkinson

Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Detroit Institute of Arts

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**Scott Hocking
Clinton Snider**
Relics

Focuses on the interplay between humans and nature through the investigation of Detroit's physical remains.



Scott Hocking Clinton Snider

Relics

Hocking and Snider see Detroit as part of the continuing rhythm of creation, decay, and rebirth. Their cyclical view of time contrasts with industry's dependence on innovation and obsolescence. Exploring abandoned factories, churches, homes, and schools, they collect objects that are on the verge of being reclaimed by nature—weathered, rusty, decaying.

Returning to the studio, Hocking and Snider sort the objects, sometimes by type (bottles with bottles) or by color or texture. At other times, they alter the pieces, cutting or adding to them, creating a new context. In *Relics* the artists use the grid as the organizing factor, filling hundreds of boxes with recycled materials. In this space, the individual units together result in resonances and cacophonies, and the installation as a whole inspires awe. The word "relics" recalls the ancient or obsolete, but can also refer to objects infused with religious and mystical meaning.

Artists' Statement

Focusing on the interplay between man and nature within the city of Detroit, Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider create installations using fragments of the urban landscape as inspiration and medium. Using objects as metaphor, they are interested in presenting the viewer with the play between opposites and the cycles that seem to pervade life. Seeing the city itself as an example of the transition from creation to decay, and once again rebirth, the two artists find evidence of this natural process within the shells of abandoned industrial buildings, churches, homes, apartments, junk yards, marinas, railways, and overgrown fields. Presented in an all encompassing installation, *Relics* will literally surround and support the patrons who enter the room, flooding the senses with information. Through this process they hope to reveal not only the underlying beauty of Detroit's own metamorphoses, but the ongoing nature of life itself.



Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider
Relics
Installation, 2001

ARTISTS TAKE ON **DETROIT**



Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider – RELICS installation, 2001



Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider – detail of RELICS installation, 2001

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Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider – detail of RELICS installation, 2001



Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider – detail of RELICS installation, 2001

Video Transcript (Relics interview)

Clinton Snider

I think the name relics came from some discussions, too, What we were going to initially--there was an idea of having really rusted objects.

Scott Hocking

You can call it "Garbage," you can call it "Fragments of Detroit's Past." It just seemed like best name.

Clinton Snider

It's really the birthplace of industry, so it's really rich in that sense, this areas is, and like any other American city at the same time.

Scott Hocking

We've never worked together before, but we've talked a lot about the experience of going out on your own to these buildings, and especially going into one for the first time, where you encounter such an overload of information there's so much stuff in them, there's so much history and just everything's falling apart. The paint is now fragmented into a million little chips of paint. Everything is just input, it's pixilated almost. So the idea of this piece, a lot of it came about from the feelings you get when you're out there, experiencing Detroit in that way. It's very overwhelming, it's an intense experience. We're not necessarily trying to recreate that, but we did want to get a sense of overwhelming information.

Clinton Snider

That's close to the kernel of the idea, when we were first talking about this that we wanted to get at is sort of arrest people when they come in.

Scott Hocking

When you walk into our piece, it doesn't matter what you were thinking beforehand, and it doesn't matter what's going to happen, but for that instant you should be affected enough to really be in that present moment, not realizing anything else. Whatever you've been thinking suddenly there's so information that it's taking over the present moment and that's really important. People are attracted to certain boxes and say things like "Hey, I want that box when you're done" or "Can I buy two boxes?" whatever, but the room is a piece, it's one installation.

Clinton Snider

Then, from that, you can divide it into six hundred different little ideas that sometimes are, sometimes they may be kind of political, some of the boxes are, sometimes they're very personal, relate to ourselves personally or people we know, and sometimes they're looking at something on a cultural level.

Credits

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition "Artists Take on Detroit: Projects for the Tricentennial" at the Detroit Institute of Arts, October 19 - December 31, 2001.

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Relics

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