

The Detroit News

# Features

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'Guys and Dolls'

The odds are 6 to 1 the hard way that you'll love this Fisher Theatre production. *Page 5D*

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# Rediscovered treasures



*Photos by Robin Buckson / The Detroit News*

"Relics," a room-sized installation, investigates the aftermath of the city's industrial past. Artists Clinton Snider, left, and Scott Hocking built 600 boxes and filled them with arrangements of discarded stuff they found in alleys, on streets and in abandoned buildings.

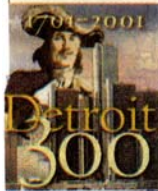


# The Detroit Institute of Arts' hip perspective reveals artwork hidden – or thrown – away

By Joy Hakanson Colby  
The Detroit News

**T**HANKS to Detroit artist Michael D. Hall, 18 paintings that have been buried in the Detroit Institute of Arts' storeroom for decades are going on exhibit again. Lighted to the hilt and bearing new labels, they are ready to find a new audience.

But wait. Why are these pictures hanging face to the wall so we can see only their backsides?



And what about the gallery next door? Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider have covered walls and floor there with 600 boxes containing discarded they found in Detroit alleys, streets and abandoned buildings. Surprisingly —

their transformed trash looks museum worthy.

Downstairs, Tyree Guyton filled the Prentiss Court with a skeletal house decorated with old shoes, election posters and toy cars. Shades of his much-publicized Heidelberg Project, the huge outdoor installation on the city's near east side.

Even the stately great hall, where the armor lives, gets a wake-up call from a quartet of pop culture murals created by the Destroy All Monsters collective composed of Los Angeles



Mike Kelley built out of river trash an oversize statue honoring astronaut John Glenn.

artists Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw and Detroiter Cary Loren.

Welcome to the DIA's exhibit, Artists Take on Detroit, which opens to the public on Friday and lasts until the end of December. The show contains 10 installations by 15 artists with connections to Detroit. It's meant to be the museum's final salute to the city's tricentennial. As birthday parties go, this one is in a class by itself.

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Detroit artist Michael Hall hung paintings face to the wall and filled a dumpster with information for "The Persistence of Memory," his installation at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

## 'Artists Take on Detroit: Projects for the Tricentennial'

Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. (313) 833-7900  
10 a.m.-4 p.m. Weds.-Thurs., until 9 p.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekends  
Oct. 19-Dec. 31.

Exhibit is free with museum admission of \$4 adults, \$1 children.

For the first time in the DIA's history, an exhibition catalogue will be published online rather than in book form. Check out [www.dia.org/artiststake](http://www.dia.org/artiststake) in about three weeks.

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## TRASH

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DIA director Graham Beal suggested the theme and curator MaryAnn Wilkinson selected artists, who could turn their perceptions of Detroit into installations. The whole project came together in a little less than a year.

Participating artists received an honorarium and materials allowance from the museum. However, Wilkinson refused to disclose the amounts.

Expect something quirky, amusing or thought-provoking with each installation, a hybrid art form that can contain a little bit of everything from sculpture to performance to video and beyond. This is the kind of art that surrounds the spectator, often irritating or puzzling us as we are pulled into the artist's orbit.

It is unsettling at first to walk into a museum gallery and see paintings hung face to the wall in Hall's installation. What's more, the centerpiece is an overturned Dumpster upholstered with information along with reproductions of the unseen images.

The artist was given free rein of the museum storeroom and he selected 18 paintings by 16 artists, whose work was acquired between 1920 and 1990.

"These pictures had been sequestered for many years," says Hall, the local art community's Renaissance man, known as a sculptor, free-lance curator, critic, collector and owner of the Hamtramck gallery called Great American Stuff.

"They all have interesting histories

on the back, a side the public never gets to see."

He points out a Carlos Lopez work with a 1939 World's Fair label and Fred Papsdorf's Flowers, with a label from the Museum of Modern Art's historic Magic Realism exhibit in 1943. Charles Pollock, an older brother of Jackson Pollock, is represented by a painting done for the government's WPA program during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"These artists have been largely forgotten," Hall says. "Yet, because they all represented Detroit very well in their time, I decided to be their cheerleader. The piece is about art as a community and cultural phenomenon and about memory as it relates to art."

As for the dumpster, Hall used it as a receptacle for collecting and compacting memory. Not, he says, as a metaphor for wasted art careers.

Moving outside the DIA, Hocking and Snider investigated another aspect of Detroit's past in *Relics*. They collected objects representing the aftermath of Detroit's industrial heyday — tire treads, a fire alarm, a lavatory sink, bits of signage, rusty chains and such.

They have been accumulating since March, storing materials in the two small houses they rent in Hamtramck. They constructed their 600 boxes in a friend's garage, using \$3,000 of their materials allowance for wood.

Each box contains a still life made of transformed trash.

"We see beauty in the city," Snider says. "Especially when you bring discarded things away from bad environ-

ments like alleys and burned houses."

Both artists are recent graduates of the College for Creative Studies. They have put in 10-16 hour days at the museum installing their first major piece, which covers four walls and the floor.

What will happen to the work after the exhibit closes? Hocking says they don't want to think about the future.

Another installation with an iffy future is Mike Kelley's *Blackout*, which is based on a statue of astronaut John Glenn that stands inside the John Glenn High School in Westland, where the artist grew up.

Kelley covered his version of the sculpture with ceramic shards and other debris he gathered on an abandoned island in the Detroit River. The stuff was shipped to his studio in Los Angeles, where he worked it into a massive installation that also includes six large pallets covered with shards.

*Strange Fruit: Rock Apocrypha* also features Kelley as one-third of the Destroy All Monsters collective with Jim Shaw and Cary Loren, owner of the Book Beat in Oak Park. Shaw and Kelley did the four big paintings patterned after circus banners and Loren is responsible for the video that focuses on Detroit entertainment and subculture personalities of the 1960s and '70s.

This installation had a former life at the Netherlands' Boymans Museum in Rotterdam and the Seattle Museum, where each institution commissioned two banners. In fact, Destroy All Monsters, which started in Ann Arbor in the early 1970s as a band, was invited to Japan in 1996 and has developed some-

thing of a cult following internationally since its 1995 reunion exhibit at the Book Beat.

"We were a noise band, performing guerilla-style at fraternity houses when we were students," Loren says. "We wore weird costumes, looked very strange and were usually kicked out after 10 minutes."

Loren recalls Detroit as unusual and special during the era of the Baby Boomers youth, with such pop culture figures as Captain Jolly, Milky the Clown and Poop Deck Paul.

It's safe to say there's something for just about everyone in *Artists Take on Detroit*.

For sheer beauty, it's Joseph Wesner's video of rowing on the Detroit River and Petah Coyne's wax tribute to the city's Irish-American immigrant women installed in the museum's Gothic Chapel.

Ronit Eisenback and Peter Sparling bring together video, dance and sculpture in *Fast Forward, Play Back*, while Deborah Grotfeld and Tricia Ward help reclaim a neighborhood in *Riches of Detroit*. Lorella Di Cintio and Jon-sara Ruth rescue a lost museum painting that is too fragile to hang by projecting it on the ceiling of one of the Italian galleries.

Taken all together, the artists' take on Detroit adds up to a different picture of the city — one that took 300 years to discover.

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