

DETROIT

THE DREAM IS NOW

MICHEL ARNAUD



THE DESIGN, ART, AND RESURGENCE OF AN AMERICAN CITY

SCOTT HOCKING

Scott Hocking works above what appears to be a welding shop in a former garage in the North End. It is actually an artist residency run by two artists, who also have a kiln and woodworking shop on the premises. Hocking has the entire upper floor of the two-story building, in which every square inch is filled with books and materials from some of his assemblages. It is as fascinating to look at as one of his pieces. Hocking is known for creating site-specific installations inside the ruins of buildings in Detroit, but he is expanding his practice to areas beyond the city, such as Michigan's Upper Peninsula and as far away as Lille, France. He often uses the materials on-site to make the work and then documents the pieces with photography.





Portrait of the artist in his North End studio.

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Interview with
SCOTT HOCKING

MICHEL ARNAUD: *What are you working on?*

SCOTT HOCKING: A lot of my site-specific installations in Detroit are in abandoned buildings, and usually the only people who see them in person are metal scrappers, urban explorers, homeless people, and maybe the people coming to clean out or demo the building. Photographs end up being the work people see in exhibitions. This has been my style of working for about ten years now.

MA: *What do you think about the attention Detroit is getting these days?*

SH: Personally, I see it as a natural cycle. Like all things in nature, there's decline, decay, death, but then there's rebirth. I think the world watches Detroit a little differently because it was such a shining example of the American dream.

I see the city as growing in these concentric rings, radiating out farther and farther. But over time the inner rings started to decay and die, and those rings of death started to spread like ripples. Today the center is starting to be reborn, but there are still death rings around the city, and you can see places where rebirth has not happened and probably won't for a long time. It's a city of islands, of juxtapositions. All the stories about the economic collapse in 2007, about the auto industry leaving and the bankruptcy, were all happening during a time of revitalization. This didn't happen overnight. The city has been depopulating slowly over sixty years, and we've all been watching it change.

MA: *How did it influence your work as an artist? Do you feel a certain anonymity in Detroit?*

SH: I love the solitude that I find in the city. My nostalgia for Detroit is for when it was emptier. I've had to adapt my ideas as the emptiness gets filled. I do like to work in anonymity, and the abandoned spaces of Detroit were and are my solaces. I find beauty in the decay, beauty in the transition. The difference now is that urban exploring has become a worldwide trend. Nothing is really unexplored anymore. So as the city changes, I change the way I work.

MA: *Do you think that's because you grew up in this time of change?*

SH: Well, I like to say that Detroit has always been a city in transition. Maybe that's why creative people like it here. Artists get ideas here, myself included. It's a good home base.

But with all the people coming to Detroit, it doesn't mean they're all good. Some people are opportunists, speculators, profiteers. Some think it's hip to be here. Others come because they can afford it, and there's more space to live and work. But hey, a thriving city has all kinds of people—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

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A CITY IN TRANSITION.”

