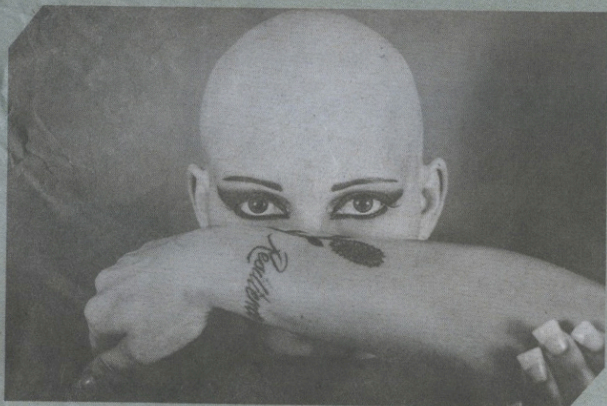


JUNE 12, 2014 // VOL. 15 + ISSUE 19 // FREE

tri City News

MONMOUTH'S NEWS & ARTS WEEKLY



SALONS LEADING RED BANK'S ART GALLERY SCENE

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INNOVATIVE CITIES DO THESE THINGS



ASBURY PARK — There are all types of cross-currents in the push to restore Asbury Park to its rightful place as one of the best small cities in this country, if not the world.

That's why we fight against the defeatism and small-mindedness of those who think conformist Hovnanian townhouses are the best we can do on the waterfront. Unfortunately, many of our elected officials have no vision — they should be citing examples of other projects and innovative redevelopers as inspiration for what we want. And help recruit them to come innovate here.

That's what visionary leaders in great cities do. We assure you Richard Daley, the former Chicago mayor or Jerry Brown when he was mayor of Oakland, wouldn't have sat back and let waterfront redeveloper iStar Financial bring them Hovnanian, whose specialty is mass-producing boring, uninspired housing on open space in the suburbs.

The moral of the story in Asbury Park is that you can't rely on the municipal government for inspiration or direction. They've been too inept. The best you can hope is that they stay out of the way.

Instead, it's creative citizens and business owners who've provided leadership to keep conformity from destroying Asbury Park. We also give a lot of credit to boardwalk redeveloper Madison Marquette. They have shown a ton of innovation and appreciation for keeping Asbury's boardwalk, and the city, as a unique place. Too bad iStar — which has a lock on the rest of the waterfront — doesn't have the same values.

This article is an example of the values that we're talking about. The subject is the upcoming "Promised Land" art exhibition on the boardwalk which will open in July in the Fifth Avenue pavilion.

The Promised Land project took a dozen talented artists, about nine from outside the city as well as three locals, who explored all sections of Asbury Park in an intensive five-day residency. They will create art for the Promised Land exhibit based on what they observed.

This project is brought to Asbury Park by a Washington, D.C. based non-profit arts organization called Transformer, which has made big waves in its 12 year existence down there. And Transformer will publicize this Asbury initiative through its networks throughout the country and abroad.

When Transformer co-founder and executive and artistic director Victoria Reis proposed it, Madison Marquette jumped to provide the exhibit space and the assistance of their staff. Madison Marquette is in good company here. Support for the Promised Land exhibit also comes from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

This is great stuff for Asbury Park. It's what you get in innovative cities. Projects like the Promised Land help put us on the map in the creative world beyond our borders. And it shows stakeholders — particularly other redevelopers and business owners — the values that should guide our city's comeback.

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transformer co-founder and executive and artistic director victoria reis at cafe volan in asbury

INNOVATIVE CITIES DO THESE THINGS

WASHINGTON D.C. ARTS GROUP BRINGS ASBURY INSPIRED SHOW TO CITY



above: the promised land art show will be held in this space on the asbury boardwalk

Because the search for creativity and innovation should be a part of everything done in this city. Period. That's how you achieve greatness.

Founded in 2002, Transformer's mission is to connect, promote, and support emerging artists, both in the DC area and internationally. They're based just a few blocks away from the White House, and Reis estimates that about 60 percent of the artists they work with are locals.

But that remaining 40 percent are a broad international assortment of talents, as they partner with other groups and organizations to expand their reach.

"We're really trying to create both peer networks for emerging visual artists and to build an audience for these artists," says Reis.

"Asbury Park has seen it all. Asbury Park really epitomizes American history since the 1870's, in so many ways. Everything that's happened in Asbury Park has happened elsewhere," Reis says.

"The more I thought about it, The more I thought it would be really exciting to invite artists to come here and explore national issues that they might be exploring in their own work anyway. But do it through the lens of Asbury Park's history as well as its present."

So Reis approached Madison Marquette with the proposal. They provided the space at the Fifth Avenue pavilion on the boardwalk, between Style Rocket and Madame Marie's.

Transformer has an extensive network in the art world, through the Andy Warhol Foundation and through their partnerships and other exhibitions. Reis used those connections to select the artists for

the Asbury Park project. She reached out to Maya Murphy at Recess in NYC, Jenn Hampton at Parlor Gallery in Asbury Park, and the 1026 art collective in Philadelphia. Reis also pulled from her network of DC artists.

From that pool of talent, the twelve Promised Land artists were picked: Jane Carver, Alison Kuo and Jessica Segall from New York, Raul Romero and Crystal Stokowski from Philadelphia, Lisa Marie Thalhammer and Tang From DC, Kevin Darmanie and Dahlia Elsayed from Newark, and Mike Richison, Scott Szegecki, and John Vigg from Asbury Park.

Transformer then immersed the artists in Asbury Park. From June 5 to 10, they provided accommodations and a full tour of Asbury Park notables. And we do mean full. Business owners, community leaders, former law enforcement, history buffs, real estate figures, and many, many more.

And the most important part: the well-rounded view included all sides of Asbury Park, East and West.

The artists are still probably recovering from that five-day infodump. The visitors, both local and otherwise, were struck by elements of Asbury Park's past and future which might end up in their work. And we mean the real Asbury Park, not just the postcard-pretty version.

"I think initially the artists were really struck by having to pay to go on the beach and what that meant in terms of disparity between the West Side and the East Side," Reis says. "It's about access, thinking about larger issues of access: who has it and who doesn't, who controls it, how to get it."

Others were interested in the pre-colonial Native American residents of the area, environmental issues, pop culture history, surfing, and other amuse-

ments.

Some, all, or none of these ideas will be expressed in all forms of art, from painted and silk-screened images to mixed media installations and performance art and more. The installation will start on July 22, with an opening reception for artists and locals on July 31. The first full day of the exhibition will kick off on August 1, and run through September 7.

Reis plans to incorporate programming into the exhibition too.

"It'll be driven by the projects that the artists end up presenting, and is still to be determined as they develop their projects. There'll probably be a mix of artist's talks, performative programs, interactive performances, different artist actions, some education programming working with area youth," Reis says.

There is a local connection here. Selecting Asbury Park didn't come out of nowhere. Reis grew up outside of Asbury Park. So she gets it.

"I grew up in Ocean Township, I graduated from Ocean Township High School in '88. And Asbury was our beach, one of my first jobs was working at Ducky's hot dog stand at the Fourth Avenue Pavilion," Reis says.

"I grew up here, and always had huge nostalgia for the area. And the community has continued to evolve as a very dynamic community, there's a lot of energy percolating here."

Find out more about Transformer at transformerdc.org.

[Associate Publisher Hannah Walker contributed writing and reporting to this article.]