

Visual Art

New Seattle Public Art: Mad Homes

A block of houses on Capitol Hill temporarily transform into surreal artwork.

Posted by: Lisa Han on Jul 29, 2011 at 10:35AM



Ties That Bind by artist collective SuttonBeresCuller

The prognosis wasn't good for the five decaying houses squatting on a block of Bellevue Avenue East on North Capitol Hill. They were old, lopsided, and at odds with the historic art deco of the neighboring BelRoy apartment building. Even before the new development by Point32 was approved, preparations for the funeral had begun. That is, until Alison Milliman, founder of MadArt, walked by and saw something entirely different.

To her, the palsied walls and roofs were blank canvasses, ripe with memories and

metaphors to be retrieved before demolition. With Milliman's persistence and the approval of homeowners and developers, MadArt recruited 11 emerging artists to paint, saw, burn, and install temporary life into the homes.

Seven months later, they had an exhibit in a venue that was a far cry from the hushed environment of galleries. At **Mad Homes**, visitors can clamber through the 4,000-yard tangle of red polypropylene ratchet straps in *Ties That Bind* by SuttonBeresCuller, prod the latex rubber of Laura Ward's *Skin*, and walk through a sea of T-shirts in *interiors #1 (wall clothes)* by Luke Haynes. Put it this way—according to coordinator Jessica Powers, **"When visitors look for 'art' in the dishwasher, we don't stop them!"**

There's a sense of giddy freedom to it all, thanks to the transient nature of the medium. The project was meant to be "an open slate for artists to do something totally free and unexpected," said director Bryan Ohno. Artist collective SuttonBeresCuller took this to heart by knocking paths through walls and windows for their ratchet straps. "We didn't have to be so precious, which was nice," said Ben Beres. "It was really fun to be able to go look at these houses as a kind of material."

As the homes shifted and creaked in their beds, some artists were inspired to tackle ideas of transformation. Consider Ryan Molenkamp's *Strain*: Spindly wooden structures snake along the walls like giant crevasses to echo the terrain of the Northwest: "My work is informed by the ever-changing regional growth—the structures we build across the landscape—and having this work in this particular show creates an extra level of conversation between the piece and the house," he said.

Even after the motley makeup is removed, the memory of the homes will be a second gift to artists and visitors alike. Ward attests to that as she contemplates her own work: a peach-colored peel that captures the textures and stains of the house's exterior. "The experience of painting, sewing and assembling this piece will live with me forever, as will the conversations with people passing by."

Original URL: <http://www.seattlemet.com/blogs/culture-fiend/new-seattle-public-art-mad-homes-july-2011/>