COOL HUNTING

Gary Simmons' Music Fly-Poster Installation for Culture Lab Detroit

Culture:

Kicking off the design forum with a large-scale public art exhibition

By, David Graver
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There's no denying Detroit's rich musical history and its global impact on both singers and songwriters. This was one element touched upon when we last attended Culture Lab Detroit—a multi-day, multi-venue forum on actionable design and creativity in the Motor City. To commence this year's iteration, artist Gary Simmons has pasted his fly-poster art exhibition, for the first time ever, in a large public space and not only does it reference Detroit's musical history but also corresponds directly with this year's theme: walls. The culture lab's conversations will center around the idea of walls, "be they architectural or theoretical, historical or speculative." And Simmons' visually-stunning exhibition, presented with the help of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (MOCAD), breathes new life into decaying walls, all the while making note of the walls torn down by Detroit's musical presence.

"I had already been interesting in doing something in Detroit. There's such an interesting vibe to the city. Music is such a part of the culture," Simmons explains to CH. Much of his work circles around music, and the cultures (and sub-cultures) that support certain genres. The programmers of Culture Lab Detroit, along with MOCAD, were aware of Simmons' Anthony Meier Fine Arts exhibition in June and reached out to gallery. Simmons leapt at the opportunity to travel again with his work, and to incorporate more elements of '70s and '80s punk culture, '60s soul and Motown.

"For me, the most interesting work around installations is to do site-specific," Simmons continues. Detroit provided ample edge to the notion of site-specific. "There are so many incredible buildings in Detroit that are abandoned or in decay, yet there's big reconstruction and reclamation. A lot of renovation to the beautiful and old." At his current venue, which sports large windows faced toward the street and passersby by, he played with the history. "I leave traces of what was there. I leave a lot of the architecture as it is. The balcony and mezzanine are left alone, and the molding is in place. I then accentuate it, with my own version of the past." Simmons muses about the value of erasure and the want to build spaces between representation and abstraction. Some of his more acclaimed earlier work, done in chalk, harkens back to all of this. Detroit,

as a city, and this venue itself, aren't chalkboards, but morphing cityscapes and fleeting meaning and rebirth bind these communication platforms.

In addition to his previously shown fly-posters, Simmons developed 13 new ones for this exhibition. "As I get invited to different cities along the way, I kind of add in those new locations to the process—it's an additive process and exhibition." Simmons collages and layers at each city location, and then tears them down only to get added on and layered at their next stop. For Detroit, he's added many genres. "It's visually sampling, in the way that music has long sampled from what came before it. They all kind of feed off of each other," he says. He looked toward certain periods and withdrew relevant acts. He also blends in auto industry references, from biker culture to hot rods.

Installation took four days at the Detroit location, something Simmons attributes to the venue being very different than the contained, controlled space of a gallery and its white walls. "You know those dimensions ahead of time. Here you are forced into making certain decisions on the fly. That creates problems but also interesting, unexpected moments," he concludes. There is something wondrous about it all—an amalgamation of the past spanning across diverse

cultures. And while it's a valuable exhibition unto itself, it's quite the à propos inauguration of Culture Lab Detroit.

Gary Simmons' installation will be open to the public from 15 September to 1 January 2017, at 1301 Broadway #101, Detroit

Work in progress installation images by Noé Angelito