Population 7 – Lyman Street Art Intervention

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Lyman Street Art Intervention
University of Massachusetts,
Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning
Frank Sleegers, Carli Foster, Elizabeth Englebretson, Yiwei Huang, Eric Wojtowicz
POLYPOLATION 7
LYMAN STREET ART INTERVENTION

POLYPOLATION 7 is a project by Umass Landscape Architecture Professor Frank Sleegers and graduate students Elizabeth Englebretson, Carli Porter, Doris Yiwei Huang and Eric Wojtowicz. It is an invitation to tour several established public artworks, public parks, and the temporary art interventions by POLYPOLATION 7. These works are located within Downtown Springfield and the Lyman Warehouse District.

Dates and Times:
All tours will begin and end at the Umass Amherst Design Center, 3-7 Elm Street, Springfield, MA 01103, on Court Square.

1st opening tour: Saturday, November 5 12:00-2:00
2nd tour: Sunday, November 6 12:00-2:00
Monday - Friday November 7 - 11: Tours by appointment

3rd tour: Saturday, November 12 12:00-2:00
Closing tour: Sunday, November 13 12:00-2:00

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Participation on the tours is on one’s own risk. Participants have to follow the instructions of the guides of POLYPOLATION 7. Wearing of robust shoes is obligatory. Special thanks to Cunklin Office Furniture and the City of Springfield.

1. Umass Amherst Design Center in Springfield, Court Square. Established 1909
2. Steiger’s Park
3. Steigers Square-Civic Park
4. Dureya Way
5. Mettatoon Street
6. Quadrangle Museum
7. The Wall of Life
8. Mattoon Street
9. Pynchon Plaza
10. Impressions and Expressions

END WORDS
REFERENCES
I have been doing mosaic mural street art in Springfield for a number of years, some with community involvement, some my own work and some clandestine installations. A few weeks ago I got an e-mail from Frank Sleegers inviting me to come on a walk to view the artwork that he and his students had installed in a project called POPULATION 7. I was interested in meeting other artists doing public art in the city and intrigued to see what they had done. We walked by and looked at some of my mosaics on the way to their installations at Lyman Street.

One of the effects of public art is that it adds beauty to the environment. It also makes the viewer think about the history and current situation of the place it is installed. And perhaps wonder about future possibilities. The work I saw did all of these things.

Doris’s train installation made me think about the days when trains were such an important part of the city. The piece itself was intriguing in that it was so different depending upon from where it was viewed. Eric’s piece put me between worlds— the living room with the couch and the TV, and the present world of a vacant lot littered with trash, but interesting trash. Carli’s sculpture referred to the trees, the lack of trees, and how to beautify this place by creating more trees with the available trash. Elizabeth’s pieces were more ethereal, the leaves seemingly floating in the air, defying gravity, but subject to the whims of the wind. The scraps of paper on the fence appeared to be random wind-blown pieces but on closer inspection had a powerful message written on them.

Frank’s work wasn’t up yet on the day of the walk, but I went to see it after it was installed. As a creator of mosaic murals, when I see I big brick or concrete wall I always think about what kind of mosaic would work there. Frank’s creation turned that huge wall into a work of art. By using the old stair imprints he brought me to when that neighborhood was a thriving place, and then right back into the present where it is a group of abandoned buildings and vacant lots. But an abandoned building now a thing of beauty.

I look forward to seeing more public art in Springfield by Frank, his students and other artists who beautify the city and inspire people to understand more of its history and culture.

Robert Markey, Fall 2011
POPULATION 7 started as an experiment in the fall of 2011 as an Urban Art Laboratory “Art – Place – Tour” with the vision to make a tangible impact to the culture of public art in Springfield. At first sight art seems to be not existent in the public realm. We are searching for an organic, sustainable concept with the potential to grow from inside to outside. Our goal is to invite to a discussion about public art and art in general that is introduced through minimal but diverse, economical eventually temporary, site-responsive interventions. We see our art as personal statements that we bring to Springfield to open up a dialogue. This dialogue has the intention to be inclusive to other groups or individual approaches to facilitate and encompass diversity. In this context the makers of POPULATION 7 are subjects of a discovery tour; they learn from the visitors as much as they share and give with their individual personal art work.

Area and Place
The project area is the upper Lyman Warehouse District that was explored 2010 in two Urban Design Studios. These studios discovered great potentials for a downtown area only one mile from Court Square and the recently opened UMass Design Center. Vacant lots and vacant buildings dominate the scene of a formerly flourishing business district for food storage and production. The question is: can public art stop further decay and send out a positive signal and bring the upper Lyman Warehouse district back to the map and our attention?

The timely process to receive responses or permissions from owners was critical and was finally rewarded. Luckily, Conklin Office Furniture graciously allowed us to work on their property that is used as a random parking lot for their truck trailers. This firm generously also sponsored one permanent installation. Five other installations are temporary and work with materials retrieved from the site. This teaches us to reuse materials and resources. It also teaches us that change of the perception of place can derive from the diverse interpretations and facets of place and with respect to their history. The history of urban areas and urban form is important information because it reflects people’s involvement and passion of the past. Public art can create an additional layer of meaning to place.
Tour
The higher goal of POPULATION 7 is to connect the already existing public artworks and places in Downtown Springfield to create a comprehensive understanding along a guided tour that reframes the City. The 1.5 mile tour has ever changing perspectives and some of the stations due to the contributing participants that share their impressions and stories with the group. Visitors are not just spectators but experts. We started and ended the tour at the UMass Amherst Design Center at Court Square. This formerly vacant storefront was opened in 2010 and is a collaborative effort between the City of Springfield and UMass. The Design Center is used for public studio presentation, envisioning workshops, as a studio space, exhibition space for students work, a library of former design studios, and a place for receptions and openings.

Before we launched the first guided tour we were very lucky to connect to mural artist Robert Markey. He had been working for three years on leftover wall spaces in our area and pioneered spontaneous, not commissioned public art that begins to make a difference in Springfield. We were most happy that Robert Markey came to our first tour and explained his bold approach to our visitors.

Resumé and Outlook
POPULATION 7 Lyman Street Art Intervention introduced people in Springfield to art as a process-oriented strategy, re-thinking urban environments, and initiating a change of perception - tangible site responsive interventions as a narrative for new transformative aesthetic experiences. POPULATION 7 reclaimed an underutilized part of the City and brought it to public attention. In the future we want to expand the spirit of POPULATION 7 and reach out for new collaborations with artists, community groups, entrepreneurs and everybody who is excited about urban transformation through art.

Frank Sleegers
The UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield, MA was opened in the fall of 2010 as a collaborative effort between the City of Springfield, UMass Extension, the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning (LARP), the Art and Architecture Program and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The Design Center is a significant contribution in the University’s commitment to revitalizing the City and is part of the University’s larger Springfield Initiative, a plan to help revitalize the City. The mission of the Design Center is to create projects that are committed to revitalizing the City of Springfield.

Projects at the Design Center have included neighborhood revitalization, commercial/retail district improvements, and park and greenway designs. The Design Center is a place for exhibitions, community meetings, study and teaching space, or receptions.
Steiger’s Park was once home to a Steiger’s Department Store. Today the space occasionally hosts markets, and during the warmer months of the year, a 7 foot high sneaker from the Art and Soles Tour. The park has a high population of pigeons and people enjoy sitting on the benches.
The Historical Stearns Square was designed by the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and landscape architect Stanford White. It was once home to a well known statue called The Puritan by Augustus Saint-Gaudens and is still home to the fountain, which is in need of repair and missing several key pieces. The square was unveiled on Thanksgiving, 1887. Every Thursday night in the summer, the place hosts the Stearns Square Bike Night & Concert Series which features nationally known bands. There is a wide array of moto cyclists that come to downtown Springfield on Bike Night.

MOTORCYCLE RIDER was installed by Robert Markey to celebrate the Springfield Bike Night.
The Dureya brothers created the first gasoline powered commercial car. The car was constructed in the building adjacent to Dureya Way. The car was originally tested on the streets of Springfield, Ma. An art piece was created in scale with the Dureya car to honor the achievements of the builders.
5/DANCERS

"Every time I drove through the tunnel I looked at the concrete walls and thought, "this is a perfect venue for something." When I decided on the mirror mosaic dancers I didn't know if it was going to work. But after I put the first one up and stood back and looked at it, I knew that filling the tunnel with these dancers would be a work to be proud of, a work to create beauty in such an unlikely space."

Robert Markey 2011


Started as a piece of Guerrilla art. The project was embraced by the city as a way to beautify Springfield.
POPULATION 7 began their work in early September 2011. The work on the site started on October 29th. Before installing the interventions we studied other public art projects and visited Turners Falls, MA. This old mill town experienced significant change in the recent years through public art, community gardening and grassroots cultural events. The achievements are tangible and can be accomplished with a small budget. Events like the second soap box race were attended by a diverse group of spectators and participants.
A tree that symbolizes the issues of littering that occurred yesterday and occurs today and what you can create with the litter. Trash, waste, garbage, unwanted objects are most clearly thought to be discharged into a garbage can of some sort and then taken by people of sanitation departments across the country in garbage trucks and placed in a landfill of some sort or a place to disintegrate the material further. However, some people do not dispose of their trash properly, and instead drop it on the side of the road, on a sidewalk, on a parking lot, on a neighbors’ property, etc. This behavior is commonly referred to as littering. Litter can be found in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Anywhere there are people, litter can be found. Litter can be found in areas where there aren’t people as well because sometimes in floats in water or it’s lifted and blown by the wind. Littering can also be found internationally, it’s a problem around the world. A large population of people is aware that littering causes negative environmental impacts. A large population remains unaware that littering causes negative environmental impacts. The life of a tree consists of growing, leafing out in the spring and falling leaves and fruits in autumn. Littering can be thought of in a similar way. Using discarded items found on and around the site, a tree was assembled. Beginning with longer more sturdy pieces of litter, a base and a trunk was created, followed by lighter pieces to create branching. The base, trunk, and branching was held together with screws. The foliage was created using smaller bits of litter such as papers, insulation, clothing, an earring, two forks, and other lighter materials found on site. There was a collection of bottles and other types of litter strategically placed surrounding the tree to represent leaf litter or fallen fruits from the tree. This tree brings to light the issue of littering and also how discarded items could be used to create a piece of art. The tree showed the diversity in litter that can be found.
The Living Room is a depiction of a familiar scene: a couch flanked with stacked tire end-tables on which trophies are placed. On the couch are a pair of adult pants, a child sized shirt, and a teddy bear. Originally conceived as a mutation of Martha Shwartz’s Bagel Garden, the idea changed completely once visits were made to the site. The inspiration evolved into something altogether new and, some have said, eerie.

Living Room is a statement about past lives lost or otherwise discarded. All of the materials found on site, harken to a time when these objects held meaning to somebody. Now they have been left for the elements to decay, but the ghosts of their intent still remain. What did these objects mean to the owner? Where is that owner now, and what life do they lead? Do they still remember what once had meaning to them, or are these objects meaningless relics from a time that is long forgotten? The arrangement is oriented towards the adjacent railroad tracks, watching the life of others pass day by day. The people on the train can look out and ponder: What life did these objects have before now? Who inhabited them? What did these objects mean to somebody? These questions should never be forgotten. Everything, even refuse, existed as something else to somebody at some point in time. What does our refuse say about our own lives?
When I first stepped into the site, I noticed the rail line up outside the fence. I knew that this is the thing that makes the site different. After I researched about the history of rail transportation development in Springfield, I made up my mind to do some art installations about the train. By the early part of the 20th century, commuter rail service was provided east of Worcester, with intercity rail continuing on west. The intercity trips were taken over by Amtrak on May 1, 1971, and on January 27, 1973 the MBTA acquired the line east of Framingham. So the shape of my train is the representative of the express train in Amtrak from Springfield to Albany, NY. And by the inspiration of some people use strings to create a kind of volume, I decided to use string to shape the outline of the train and connect it to the edge of railway! In this way, the train looks like coming from the upper side of the railway and landing on the ground.
This art installation is also reminding people of Springfield’s great history. This city has many “the firsts” in U.S or even in the world. This long and golden history of the past is now seeking its way to a brighter future. The train is coming from the sky to the ground, bringing not just the train itself, but also the memory of the past, and the hope for the future.
Both of these pieces were meant to be transitory. A chance to look at what is left behind and passed by. To bring new meaning and life to materials that we often disregard as “trash”.

The “Abicus” (fishing line and fallen leaves) removes fallen Poplar leaves from the ground and the natural order. These Poplar leaves are given a new life, a third act, a new relationship with the inhabitants of the city and a new relationship with the environmental elements of the site. On the line the leaves are stuck between the tree and the earth. The wind pushes and pulls them up and down the line but they can only move as far as the fishing line allows. I am asking the viewer to interact with these leaves in their new context. Using a stick found on site viewers can push them against the wind, spin them on the line, group them into new patterns. Taking notice of the leaves as single objects and as groups. Interacting with the natural world through a manmade design. In time the leaves will break free from the fishing line and be able to rejoin the ecological lifecycle and all that will be left is the manmade remnants of human order and control.
“Those of us who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war.”

Martin Luther King Jr., excerpt from MLK addressing the crowd after marching against the Vietnam war in Chicago, March 25, 1967

In the piece, “Message on the fences”, the viewer is asked to pause and find the message written on scraps of windblown paper. Urban environments are littered with scraps of things that have been or could have been. Scraps of paper, discarded or misplaced eventually picked up by the wind, ending up stuck on the chain link fences that line the streets or in the corners of alley ways. What do these scraps of culture tell us. If these scraps were collected and organized would they tell a different story. Over time the message will fade again as the wind and urban environment tear and render unreadable the trace but for a few weeks the message will be clear to those who take the time to stop and look.
The first ideas were created by Chris Johnson (BSLA 2011) as a warm-up exercise in the 2010 Senior Urban Design Studio in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at UMass Amherst. The challenge presented to students was to envision a recognizable low-budget design intervention for the upper Lyman warehouse district that would help enliven the appearance of the area. Chris discovered the traces of old stairwells and rooms on the exterior wall of an old warehouse on Lyman Street. He proposed to paint black silhouettes on the brick façade to reference the once vibrant activities that took place on Lyman Street. The figures visually reoccupied the virtual rooms and enlivened the street scene. I was especially excited by the simplicity and expressive power of the idea. The silhouettes would read as legible, superimposed interventions mutually reinforcing old and new. Like a palimpsest, the information of the old building would read through.

I decided to develop and integrate Chris’ idea. When I wrote to the building’s owner, Conklin Office Furniture, I included in the letter a collage of the original idea to illustrate how public art could change the perception of a place. Three days later Fran Arnold, who has owned the building for many years, called me to say he was excited that we were considering his building to be part of the project...COMMUNITY SPIRIT takes the original idea, while adding some features that take it to another level.
The silhouettes are taken from real persons: these individuals come together on the wall and create a group that shares ideas that can overcome the materiality of the challenges in downtown Springfield. Change begins with a common, positive spirit and vision. The decision to paint the seven silhouettes in bright orange transcends the characters from the past to the present and reality of today’s life. The blue color of the authors in the bottom emphasizes a spectator’s role. The color scheme is a reference to the German HAFENSAFARI urban art project in Hamburg (hafensafari.de). This project rediscovers leftover urban territories in the port area of Hamburg through public art and has been meaningful to me as one of the initiators and authors.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT brings people back, physically and imaginary. The silhouettes stand for the ones who believe in this change: residents, entrepreneurs, artists, planners, professors, and the students of the Population 7 project. It wants to embrace this positive energy and encourages others to follow. COMMUNITY SPIRIT strives to create an active landmark in the underutilized and neglected area around Lyman Street. It invites and encourages other artists to continue and expand their art in public spaces in Springfield and to contribute in making it a vibrant place to live and work.

The depicted characters are (from top to bottom, left to right): Michael DiPasquale, Director of the UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield; Laura Selmani, UMass Regional Planning Student; Yiewi Wang, Carli Foster, Elizabeth Englebretson, Eric Wojtowicz, UMass Landscape Architecture Students and co-authors of POPULATION 7 Lyman Street Art Intervention; Scott Hansen, Principal Planner, Springfield Office of Planning and Economic Development; Chris Johnson, BSLA 2011, and Frank Sleegers, Assistant Professor, UMass Amherst, authors of COMMUNITY SPIRIT.

7/THE WALL OF LIFE

Created in 2008 by Markey and volunteer members of the community of all ages and backgrounds, the project was organized by AQCA and the Springfield Museums, and was funded with proceeds from the Second Saturday Walking Tours, a partnership between AQCA and the Museums.

My work combines the visual and the conceptual. I want the visual statement to be profound, to be questioning and to be a source of inspiration and of beauty. Conceptually, my work often speaks about hope, about humor and about the human condition: what it is and what it could be. Much of my earlier work was visually brutal, showing the suffering which one group of people cause to another. My later work pushes this brutality beneath the surface, showing more the beauty and hope which is possible.

Currently I am working primarily in oil painting, sculpture and mosaic murals. In my paintings I work with layers of intense color creating a deep almost primval feeling space. My sculptures are outdoor installations using steel, stone, glass, wood and mosaic. The sculptures often have a political or social motif. The murals are often done in collaboration with community organizations.

Robert Markey, Artist/ Musician
Mattoon Street is within the boundary of 10 minutes’ walk from downtown Springfield. In this street every year in September, there will be an art festival which gathers the artists from different backgrounds all over the Springfield.

The 39th The Mattoon Street Arts Festival is held on Saturday and Sunday, September 10 & 11, 2011, and the festival features more than exhibitors, food vendors, and strolling musicians.

The 40th Festival will be held on Saturday and Sunday, September 8 & 9, 2012.
The Springfield Museums Quadrangle is a grand open space flanked by four surrounding museums: the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, the Natural Science Museum, and the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum. The open square itself is the home of the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden. The entrance to the Quadrangle is Merrick Park. Within this park is Augustus Saint Gaudens’s statue: The Puritan. The Quadrangle itself is open and inviting. The Dr. Seuss statues of various characters throughout the body of Dr. Seuss literature invite children of all ages to explore around, on, and through them. The architecture of the surrounding buildings is modeled in the ‘Italian Renaissance City Library (1912)’ style. The grandeur of the facades gives the quadrangle a definitive sense of space and belonging to the open space.
Pynchon Plaza(1977): named after William Pynchon, who founded Springfield in 1636, it is the home of contemporary art pieces such as Everglades by Isaac Witkin, and Reaching Woman by Lu Stubbs. Upon its opening it received accolades from the American Institute of Architecture for ‘enhancing the quality of the urban environment’. The park was originally financed as a bicentennial project with both state and local funding. It was hailed as a symbol of pride within Springfield.

Soon enough, however, the park fell to disarray. The steep staircase was hard to navigate by ordinary people. The glass elevator became a canvas for graffiti artists. The reflecting pool became a swimming hole for the urban youth. The waterfall system was used by locals to wash their clothes. As years went on, it seemed more and more difficult for efforts to revive the park to take hold. The sense of pride that the park was supposed to embody seemed to have gone. But the efforts have not given up, and so a new movement has taken hold to instill renovations within the park, including restoring the operation of the waterfall and the reflecting pool. A wrought-iron fence that blocked access to the park from the street has been removed, and the lighting systems have been upgraded and benches installed. What was once closed in has been reopened to bring back the vitality of the community. Reopened in 2010 after several UMass Landscape Architecture and Architecture studios made design proposals with public participation. Residents from Springfield brought this issue to the upper political and administrative level.
I 1/Impressions and Expressions
Carli Foster: Springfield, MA has a lot of potential to be a center for the arts. The art intervention does not end with this tour, it is only a beginning. Hopefully in the future there will be more community involvement with creating public artwork, temporary or permanent. The city has many blank walls and empty lots, add some movement to them.

Elizabeth Englebretson: You cannot produce Community Art without the Community. If the people of the community are all engaged or invited into the process of making the art then the opportunity for empowerment and the sense of ownership is not present. The Art intervention by Population 7 has served to highlight the Lyman District but none of the work was produced by the community of Springfield. Now that the area has been highlighted my hope is that the next phase of Population 7 will invite and encourage the people of Springfield to make their voices heard through Art.

Yiwei Huang: It is my pleasure to help to bring something back to this community during my first year staying in this country, and very glad to see the final outcome and those nice feedbacks from the artists and communities. Springfield has quite a potential to become a city fulfilling with the culture of art and installations.

Eric Wojtowicz: The Urban Art Design studio should be a venue to address issues of the community. It should be used as a bridge and an opportunity to involve the community as a way to express emotion, concern, hope, and all other human emotion that each of us hold. By doing so the disassociated reconnect with their world; those who feel they have nothing to own their lives.

Frank Sleegers: I was very happy about all the great responses. I am excited to continue this project to explore rich forms of art and engaging collaborations.

Thank you: Lisa Davol from Riverculture for introducing us to the inspiring strategies of Turners Falls. Evan Plotkin and Robert Markey for guiding and accompanying us on our first tour. Laura Selmani for her advice in editing this booklet.

Edited by: Yiwei Huang and Frank Sleepers, December 2011
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