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ART REVIEW

MG Gallery and Sentence Drawing Sentence

By Claire Light | Nov 02, 2008



In the Bay Area, when we hear the word "culture," we hide our checkbooks. We're the "second city" in a state that has gone from one of the best-funded to one of the worst-funded in the nation for the arts, and it shows. We're permitted pragmatism -- arts-in-education, arts as salvation for at-risk youth -- and we're permitted entertainment, as long as we pay for it ourselves. But cultural traditions, community building, the echo chamber of aesthetic conversations ... none of these is of any value during a war, or a recession.

There is no money for space rental or improvement, no money for staff salaries, no money for materials, expert consulting, or artist fees. I won't ride this hobbyhorse too far. Suffice it to write that the crazy local real estate market and the loss of much of California's operational funding for small arts nonprofits since 2001 have made our public community arts infrastructure a fantasy.

However, the Bay Area arts scene has a couple things going for it: 1) we won't admit we're provincial, and 2) individuals continually?contiguously waste non-existent resources on unsustainable and short-lived *private* arts infrastructure. This phenomenon is known as the community storefront gallery, and thank god for it, too. If it weren't for our overeducated local Quixotes and Rosinantes, that vast grey area between art school and museum collections would be an empty field in the Bay right about now.

That's one way to look at the newest exemplar, the MG Gallery in Oakland's Temescal district. M and G stand for Kari Marboe and Adam Green, life and project partners who found a house to live in on the Oakland end of Shattuck that also possessed a strange wannabe barbershop space sticking out onto the sidewalk in front. The space is an add-on: two tiny, low-ceilinged rooms with no back or storage areas, and a large picture window to each room bearing on the street.

It's more of a diorama than a gallery, a fact Marboe says they're ready to exploit. The gallery entity is still in transition: intended for a nonprofit, MG has no fiscal sponsorship or tax exempt status yet. Marboe has no camera-ready soundbite of a mission statement, either; the impetus is strong but the ideas are still fuzzy. There will be something about local artists, something about site-specific installations, something about audience engagement and drawing the community together. *Something*.

As frustrating as the vagueness is, the gallery's third exhibition, **Sentence Drawing Sentence**, a mild revision of [exquisite corpse](#) processes, speaks its own and the gallery's intentions quite clearly.



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The larger room displays single sheet exquisite corpses -- text followed by image, followed by text, etc. -- created by groups in a "sentence drawing sentence" event held on October 11. On the ceiling hang larger scrolls of paper created over a longer period through individual engagement with a roller device. In the smaller room hang photographs of folks mugging in front of a wall sign. This was the weaker portion of an exhibition that might have suffered from too straightened a focus. But even this segment underlined the overall openness and community sensibility of the space and its organizers.

Marboe and the show's curator, George Pfau, say that their neighbors have been walking into the gallery to play the game and take pictures, and opening the gallery has caused excitement in a neighborhood just a few blocks too far from the amenities to the north and south. So **Sentence Drawing Sentence**, with its easy access to participation singly or in groups, its inviting display of results, and its unchallenging conceptualism, is the perfect project to introduce the space to the neighborhood. It's a bit like a sophisticated version of ceramic-painting shops: hands-on arts for grown-ups -- a little creativity in your day.

It's a promising formula for the new gallery: a cheerfully painted, light-filled space (there are skylights in each room), a low-budget creativity that has already conquered the difficult cinderblock walls, and a clear, if inarticulate, community service aesthetic and ethic. If the funding issue can be tamed, MG Gallery is poised right at the opening of a number of Bay Area paths: community studio, residency space, artists collective, local gallery. Any of these is fine, and necessary, but MG has the potential to create a very modest but high-energy combination.

If they can avoid the personal (ego, ambition, cliquishness) and public (funding, funding, and, uh, funding) pitfalls that make these private/public dots on the landscape implode with geologic regularity, they might have the next hot idea, or hotspot. Here's hoping.

Sentence Drawing Sentence runs through the end of November 2008. A live event involving group game-playing takes place on Saturday, November 15 at 3 pm. MG Gallery is open 10-2 Saturdays and Mondays.

RESOURCES

→ [MG Gallery](#) 

www.sentencedrawingsentence.com

www.indiedrawingsgig.com