

STREETOPIA, from page 10

E.L.: When people cook and eat together, it really breaks down a lot of barriers. And I think if you're going to ask people to participate in something as engaging as Streetopia, it's really important to provide food and that space for people to come together. With The Free Cafe, we put a lot of faith in the idea that if we made a kitchen where people can come and help decide what the menu's gonna be and then make it together, it would work. We believed that people would set the tone for how to behave in there. It kind of went against the model (of the soup kitchen). So that's the values we were talking about, people being offered the opportunity to come together and us believing that that is actually possible in a time where it doesn't seem like a lot of authorities actually believe that people can organize and do things for themselves without being told what to do.

A.G.: What was another exhibit or performance or piece of art in Streetopia that you thought was particularly impactful?

E.L.: A really interesting partnership developed through Streetopia was a

collaboration between an activist group in the Tenderloin called the San Francisco Drug Users Union and a pretty well-known San Francisco artist named Barry McGee. The Drug Users Union are a group of self-identified drug users who have come together to organize and agitate around changing drug policy in San Francisco, and one of their big issues is trying to bring a safe intravenous injection use site to San

IF YOU GO

Know Your City will present "Streetopia: Talkback and Panel with Author Erick Lyle" at 6 p.m. March 24 at the Independent Publishing Resource Center, 1001 SE Division St., Portland. The event is free (\$6 suggested donation).

Francisco. The Drug Users Union canvassed their constituents and asked what they would like a potential safe injection site to be like. So (the Drug Users Union) worked with a designer to make mock-ups of all of these fantasy safe injection sites and presented information about what current sites are like and how prevalent they are in other parts of the world.

Barry had installed his work in the bathroom, which was kind of a cool way to talk about, "Well this is where people are using drugs now, unsafely, alone - in the bathroom." People OD and die in bathrooms alone all the time in the Tenderloin because there's no safe place to use. After that, we helped the group construct a replica of a safe injection booth that they placed in the window of their storefront and then Barry decorated with his art. So it was a provocative piece, and it really brought a lot of attention to

their efforts.

A.G.: Why is it so important to document and revisit Streetopia, the event, in this book?

E.L.: There's a really special legacy of Bay Area utopian thinking and activism and art and literature, social movements and experimental ways of living that have had a tremendous impact on our thought in this country - in our art and literature, etc. A lot of that is under threat as this city undergoes such a great economic cleansing. Streetopia really brought a lot of the values and ideas together in one place. By making a book, we could send the seeds of that out into the world in as many directions as possible in a kind of time capsule way. It seemed that the book would provide future inspiration for people we do not know yet and would be a platform to speak from around the country about these issues that are happening everywhere.

A.G.: Why are artists so important in particular to resistance movements?

E.L.: It was very easy to get a lot of people together to offer artistic support to an art show that would draw a lot of attention to the displacement that was about to come to the Tenderloin. The goal for us was just to make this massive thing happen so that nobody could ignore it and it would call attention to the area. Those are the things that artists can really offer.


A.G.: So you're having a panel and a

"Streetopia really brought a lot of the values and ideas together in one place. By making a book, we could send the seeds of that out into the world in as many directions as possible in a kind of time capsule way."

ERICK LYLE,
EDITOR OF 'STREETOPIA'

discussion about "Streetopia" on March 24 at the Independent Publishing Resource Center. What do you hope people take away from the event?

EL: One thing a lot of people said about Streetopia while it was happening and afterwards was, "Oh, wow. I kind of forgot how great it is here." There's been so much loss, but all of these people are still here. So when people come and check out the event on the 24th, I would like them to look around them and think about the people in the room that they don't know as potential allies. I understand the conditions in Portland are really difficult for housing right now, so I would hope that people would come and see the people around them and be encouraged by the DIY spirit and optimism of Streetopia to reach out to people that they may not even know yet and say, "Hey, how can we come together and start to work on these issues?" There's gotta be something we can do in some sense of the struggle.



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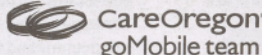

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