

ART CITY AS SOCIAL SCULPTURE

This summer's 'Studio without Walls' and 'BEAM'

Art students focus on becoming good at their craft and finding what they're interested in representing to the world. Then comes graduation, and the aspiring artists are left to figure the rest out on their own. In other words, they graduate knowing how to represent the world but not how to survive in it.

Charly Swing graduated from art school with a bachelor of fine art degree and felt the sting of being an artist post-school with no built-in support. When she attained her master's two years ago from the Academy of Art in New York, she felt it again. This time she returned home to Eugene and founded Art City, an organization that brings artists together and connects them to their community.

Art City's Studio Without Walls is an outdoor event on the third Fridays of July, August and September. And because it takes place out in the open it will be "completely accessible," Swing says.

The event invites the public to engage with artists as well as view their art. Visual artists, dancers, word artists, musicians and installation performers will participate. The sculpture collaborative Earthbound Moon will take part by creating a site-specific installation, the exact nature of which is still unknown.

Based in Oregon, Earthbound Moon does projects around the country. Its goals align closely with Art City's, though on an international level, as they "curate sites around the world ... creating new ties and strengthening existing relationships between disparate groups ..."

Art City will also present BEAM — the name is not an acronym — at the conclusion of the final Studio Without Walls in September. BEAM will showcase artwork that incorporates light.



CHARLY SWING

Going back to art school for a moment, students have to master techniques representing light. But the multidisciplinary artists presenting at BEAM will be freed from this age-old task. Rather than having to represent light accurately, these artists will employ it as a medium, using the nighttime as a natural backdrop for contrast.

Swing has a background working in museums, including the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. It was while working alongside Rick Lowe at the Museum of Fine Art in Houston that she was inspired to think about how art could help improve lives of disadvantaged women and children. Lowe went on to found Project Row Houses, a project that is equal parts social service, community revitalization and art (projectrowhouses.org).

Lowe has earned recognition from the MacArthur Foundation for his work, and Swing hopes to purchase real estate in Eugene with an eye towards a project that has similar goals: to assist both artists and disadvantaged populations by providing homes as well as opportunities to form relationships between them.

Swing, a sculptor, sees Art City as a work of art in itself. "It's a social sculpture," she says.

Viewing this organization as she does — or viewing the Row Houses as a work of art — reflects a trend in the contemporary art world, one in which traditional ideas about art are being challenged as they are linked more intrinsically to issues of social justice and concern. In a way, Swing includes the city of Eugene as part of this

artwork. We are all part of this social sculpture. ■

Art City's Studio Without Walls is 5:30 to 8 pm on the third Fridays of July, August and September on the Park Blocks at 8th Avenue and Oak Street. BEAM runs 8 to 11 pm on Sept. 21. FREE.



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