

An Urban Time Capsule: Declarations from a Mission Neighborhood In Transition

Artist Rene Yung with StoryLab presents **<Whereas—A Declaration of Place>**, an installation at Southern Exposure Gallery that opens on March 11, 2011. **<Whereas>** takes a time-capsule sampling of the community in a 300-yard radius area centered around Southern Exposure (SoEx), to express a collective sense of place through the personal. Borrowing from the format of legal declarations, **<Whereas>** presents a set of composite textual and photographic statements about the area to reflect the multiple truths in a rapidly-changing neighborhood in San Francisco's Inner Mission District, which has seen major demographic, cultural, and property value shifts in recent years as part of the city's urban growth. 29 diverse individuals participated in the intergenerational project, ranging from long-time to recent residents.

<Whereas> transforms the installation space into a layered spatial narrative. Wall-sized Declaration posters form the core of the installation. They are threaded through by a single continuous line of photographs set on a simple wooden ledge, featuring Declarers' cupped hands holding an artifact symbolic of their experience in the neighborhood. A large map of the project zone is overlaid with Declarers' signatures, much as a yearbook might be signed by friends and family. A single large mark locates SoEx in the middle of this map, with the text "YOU ARE HERE," thus bringing both the gallery and the viewer into the conversation — the former as a contextual locus, and the latter as a voyeur — to raise questions of complicity in the gentrification process.

Viewers can interact with further layers of the local narrative by accessing page-sized cards slotted in a set of shelves. Peeking out from the raw plywood shelves as flashes of bright color, the cards present participants' memories of the neighborhood and maps tracing their habitual movements through the area, as well as other information. Visitors can also add their own neighborhood narrative and map in a Story Book. A subtle field of words floats across the wall at the entry to the installation, listing the smells, tastes, and colors participants associate with the neighborhood in a poetic infusion. The richly layered installation pulsates with Yung's signature juxtaposition of sparseness and density that delivers a powerful conceptual and aesthetic punch.

"**<Whereas>** maps the subtexts in human experience and history that are unique to the community," Yung states. "Against the grain of today's ubiquitous digital map, this "analogue" mapping links visceral, non-linear layers of information to trigger our embodied sense of place, because that is what makes a place real to us." With the premise that each site is the locus of a zone of interconnected belongings, **<Whereas—A Declaration of Place>** interrogates the relationships and reciprocities in a community amidst urban development. Breaching barriers between preconceived notions of "community art" and "gallery art," **<Whereas>** is an homage to the people in this vibrant, hyper-local 600 square yards in the Mission District.

<Whereas—A Declaration of Place> was conceived, designed, and directed by Rene Yung in collaboration with StoryLab, an experimental incubator developed by Yung for cross-disciplinary projects that explore innovative ways to engage story as a non-linear tool in place- and community-making. **<Whereas> StoryLab** includes: Joel Chaidez, Julie Conquest, Victoria Heilweil, Boramy Khloth, Chelsea Lee, and Claudia Wheeler-Rappe. StoryLab members conducted interviews and took and produced the project photographs. **Rene Yung** is an internationally exhibiting artist, designer, thinker, and writer. Combining the poetic and the incisive, her cross-disciplinary civic engagement works address social and cultural issues in the built environment by connecting people, history, and place to articulate the hidden and the overlooked. She most recently created "Our Oakland: Eastside Stories", an integrated public art project for the new East Oakland Community Library that includes architectural artwork, a web portal for East Oakland stories, and a community-building program through the portal OurOakland.org.

<Whereas—A Declaration of Place> is part of the exhibition "On the Ground" that runs from March 11 to April 23, 2011 at Southern Exposure Gallery, 3030 20th Street, San Francisco.