

## Patrick McDonough's Cover Art

Posted by Emma Fisher | June 1, 2011



We've been keeping tabs on Patrick McDonough, one of the DC-based artists we featured in issue three of the magazine. Patrick's every exhibition is a surprise, a new angle, a new project – from a full-scale, immersive rec room experience to the chance to be a post-mortem recipient of the artist's tattooed skin. Regardless of these seemingly radical differences, there are common themes to be found in Patrick's repertoire – most prominently, the existence of artwork that falls on a boundary, such as the meeting of high and low, the meeting of play and do-not-touch fine art, and, in this case, the meeting between interior and exterior, gentrification and its opposite, and more.

We met with Patrick to talk shop about *Awning Studies: Florida Ave NE*, his latest exhibition that is currently on view in four neighboring art spaces – Conner Contemporary Art, G Fine Art, Industry Gallery, and Open Studio DC – in the H Street NE corridor.

For an in-depth discussion between Patrick and fellow visual artist Kenny George, pick up issue three. Our interview starts below.

WORN: Whenever I hear you talk about your work or I pick up an artist essay or whatever theory is at hand to nibble on at your exhibitions, I find an immense amount – a gulf – of careful, deep – no tacky intended – thought. But when I look at your work, it is, at least from an aesthetic viewpoint, simple, minimal, edited, even sometimes bare. The pieces leave interpretation almost entirely up to the viewer. Is this an intentional decision? And, what, if anything, do you hope that the viewer takes away when they see Awning Studies: Florida Ave NE?

PATRICK: I hope that I am taking into account the various elements that, when coupled with someone's visual and physical experience viewing the work, guide that person in forming meaning. For example, the material choices, chosen artwork titles and exhibition installation strategies, and the use of typical gallery signage, checklists and other language-based materials all inform the meaning of the work. In terms of what I hope viewers of Awning Studies: Florida Ave NE get out of the project, I hope it makes them think about issues of free time, vulnerability, art in the public sphere, decorative traditions, and functionality.



WORN: One element that is common in your work is the choice to work with materials that are democratic in nature – items anyone can purchase at Michael's, Home Depot and other commercial supply stores. How does this decision inform your work? What materials did you work with for Awning Studies and why?

PATRICK: In the case of Awning Studies: Florida Ave NE, the awnings are all handmade, by me, from sealed wood frames, over which is stretched window screen material, which is then painted. These choices, I think, raise questions of resistance towards mass production and also custom culture, Baltimore screen painting traditions, and, of course, of the awning form in and of itself. To touch on your question about Michael's and Home Depot, I think that my utilization of materials from these retailers speaks to my interests in accessibility, the relationship between art-based and non-art-based behaviors (How completing a finish-your-own mug kit is like a studio practice or how standing under an awning is like walking into an art gallery...), class and functioning under a capitalist system.

WORN: Your work is installed on the facade of Conner Contemporary Art, G Fine Art, Industry Gallery, and Open Studio DC art spaces. This island of sites is now serving as a creative locus for H Street NE as well as a sign of the

economic revitalization of a neighborhood that has struggled to develop since the '68 riots that happened in response to Martin Luther King's assassination. These art spaces could be interpreted as a symbol of gentrification – a word that is at once a dirty no-no in DC, but also a fact of life. How does your work call attention to this idea and also attempt to mend it?

PATRICK: I am really pleased that you mentioned this contextual element of the project. My initial aim with locating the awnings over the four art spaces on Florida Avenue was to link them architecturally to the surrounding neighborhood, to ornament them in much the same way as the majority of the homes in the area in which they are already functioning. I was thinking that it was much more about the Trinidad neighborhood than H Street. But then I did realize that H street was a part of the project too, that the 1300 block of Florida was in a sense the symbolic awning of the neighborhood – this in between, a transition point where an inside space of some sort is meeting an outside space of some sort. I like to think of my practice in terms of these kinds of trickster positions – finding the points between categories, between contexts – and placing my work at that border to emphasize both sides involved. So I guess the project could be said to have a trickster relationship to gentrification, by putting up this artwork that is simultaneously (and temporarily, I might add) advocating for the historically important neighborhood and playing on the beautification and shingle-hanging strategies typical of gentrification efforts.

I would like to say though, that I think art spaces in general also operate in between gentrification – the welcoming of upwardly mobile people and their favorite shopping and hang out spots – and also the opposite of that. Galleries put on exhibitions that can be viewed free of charge to anyone who is interested. Of course there are economic forces at play, but in many ways I think galleries exist by exercising the support of the few for the benefit of many, which seems quite opposite to how gentrification tends to end up playing out.



Interview by Emma Fisher, Worn Magazine Copy Editor | Photos by Nicole Aguirre, Worn Magazine Editor in Chief (ask permission before using our images)