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VISUAL ART

SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2012

Public art project positively depicts Occupy protesters



ANDREW KUO/STAFF

BY **KANWALROOP SINGH** | STAFF

LAST UPDATED MAR. 3, 2012

Twentyfourth Street was barren. Two 25-foot photographs pasted on the side of the New Parkway Theater in Oakland were torn asunder. Their faces incomplete, half-formed, had been disfigured by the rain, the tattered remnants swung idly to and fro,

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like paper pendulums signaling the apocalyptic end of an uproarious revolutionary moment.

One of the photographs depicted a bearded man, with alien sunglasses, noodle-like hair and a rumpled American flag bandanna, looming casually over the sidewalk. He was a protective pillar of grace, a god occupying the streets. The other was of a young woman with an infectious grin.

The photographs had been posted two nights ago by a motley crew of men and women. With a rickety scaffolding and buckets of wheat paste, some squeegees, brushes and rollers, they labored through the dead of night, turning a brick wall into an exhibition of humanity.

The rain came and went and the photographs were patched up. They wait, half hidden in a side street for an unsuspecting side-long glance and the thrill of discovery.

The photographs are part of a project called “Inside Out | Occupy Oakland” taking its name from the “Inside Out” project, which was created by the elusive Paris street artist and recipient of the 2011 TED Prize, JR. The project is an exhibition of black and white portrait photography, which uses the world as its gallery. It is the global invasion of privacy in public space.

These photographs were taken on Jan. 28, Occupy Oakland’s move-in day, by Celsa Dockstader. The day has become known for burned flags, broken glass and 400 arrests, not, as these photographs show, for the

VIDEO
Video: Inside Out Occupy Oakland art project

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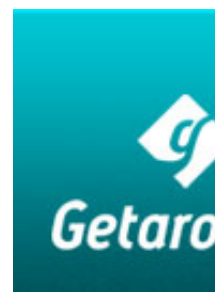
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babies, children, mothers, grandmothers, priests, NASA employees, students and homeless that attended a largely peaceful march. Each photograph was taken after asking the occupiers to tell their stories, to show on their faces how Occupy Oakland made them feel, to share the deeply intimate. One occupier remarked, “It was like having sex.” The photographs display an array of ages, races, genders and facial expressions, defying those who believe that Occupy Oakland is about one emotion only: anger.

With her signature fedora, Celsa Dockstader is formidable. She graduated from UC Berkeley in Spring of 2011 summa cum laude, an architecture major and global poverty and practice minor. She was bright-eyed, dispersing resumes and expecting a job, when there was none to be found. The promise of UC Berkeley had popped — floated too high and hit a snag, as over-hyped, over-inflated balloons tend to do. Now there was a reason to occupy.

So Dockstader found herself at Occupy Oakland’s general strike last November climbing a large steel structure with a former professor of hers, amazed at the diversity she saw, but disappointed that the media was blind to it. “The media sees a handful of people and that is what they show the world. The world doesn’t see what we experience,” Dockstader said. “It’s only one percent of the 99 percent that are breaking things. We want you to see past the smoke, past the news, we want you to see the people.”

Dockstader insists on obtaining the permission of property owners before pasting the photographs. She spent weeks biking around Oakland, setting up meetings with them, presenting them with photographs and mock-ups of buildings. She often came up against a wall of silence because they are generally loath to breach the subject of occupy, for it has become the dreaded, the uncontainable, like a hovering cloud of tear gas. This is all the more reason for her to continue with the project, to legally commence the occupation of buildings.

Dockstader hopes in the future to be able to post photographs in publicly owned spaces, like parks or plazas. But spaces owned by the public are also owned by the city and, ironically, they are the

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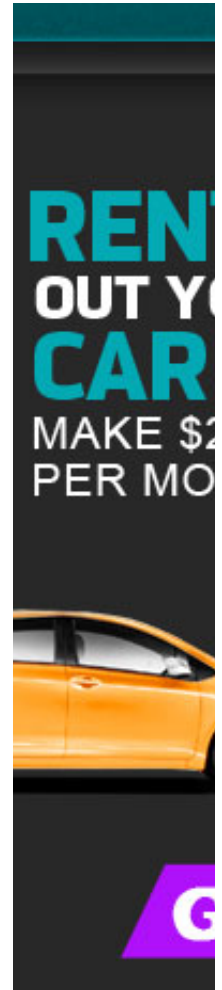


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hardest to receive permission from, protected by the long iron chain of bureaucracy.

Currently, Dockstader is hustling to get out from under the gloomy specter of financial servitude. Looking Glass Photo, a photography shop in Berkeley, sponsored her with free equipment for a weekend to shoot the portraits. But each portrait costs over \$200 to print. She has begun a fundraising campaign on the website Kickstarter.com and must raise \$8000 by March 12, or she will not be able to keep what she has raised thus far. She is currently paying for expenses out of her pocket, working at a coffee shop and sometimes eating cheerios for dinner.

There is something about giant faces on buildings that arrests the casual city dweller, disarms them momentarily, forces them to consider for a moment the intricacies, the idiosyncrasies and the intrigue of the human face, which is an unfathomable, phantasmal phenomenon – one to which the closer you get, the farther away you seem.

The photographs are, in actuality, more than simply photographs. The closer and closer you get, you slowly see, like an emerging optical illusion, that each photograph is composed of an infinite array of minuscule dots in varying shades of gray, placed closely together, like people at a protest. And each portrait in the collection is itself like one of these dots, unifying to form one collective image of Occupy Oakland and turning it inside out.



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3 comments



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Tony M • 4 months ago

Wow. I have been an avid reader of the Daily Californian for a wh I was skeptical once again of the fundamental differences in philc society with Occupy clearly being the feelers. The exquisite writir me rethink my entire views on Occupy. I think Celsa Dockstader she is able to transform the Occupy movement from its negative and beautiful portrayal.

I really appreciate this article Kanwalroop.

I look forward to starting this new chapter in my life in solidarity v world.

We are the 99%!

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Tony M • 4 months ago • parent

Nice try, troll. Anyone can click on your avatar and tell it's this crap the time of day didn't give them the first hint...

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Haaaaaa • 4 months ago

I hope a bunch of Occupy Black Bloc guys don't come and tras art made by children in the Oakland City Hall.

Thugs hate art.

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