

[Park It!] like it's hot

Eight local artists use their talents to highlight an important social issue

By Jacqueline O'Reilly

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Forty years ago, Joni Mitchell released her album *Ladies of the Canyon*. On it was the song "Big Yellow Taxi." In the track, her iconic voice sings, "they paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

In 2005, Rebar, a San Francisco art and design collective, found a way to counteract Mitchell's lyric. In an effort to emphasize the importance of urban green space, the group transformed a single parking stall in downtown San Francisco into a temporary public park.



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From there, the project grew. Immensely. Only five years after the original demonstration, what is now known as (Park)ing Day has turned into an international event, with last year's celebration drawing participants from 21 countries on six different continents.

2010 will mark the first year Madison is taking part in (Park)ing Day. Seven local artists will work to turn eight parking spaces—each at 270 square feet—into remarkable art installations. The project is called [Park It!] and headed up by local artist and Project Lodge gallery manager Tyler Mackie.

After going through the grueling process of applying for grants and asking for donations, Mackie and her six counterparts will transform the 1900 block of Atwood Ave. into an outdoor gallery that stresses the importance of urban green space.

"I think it's fun for the artists to have a change of space and location," Mackie said, in describing what it's like to work outdoors.

"I think it's really fun for the viewers, too, because then they can conceptualize art as existing outside of the gallery ... It doesn't need to be contained within those walls for it to be art," she said.

Mackie's own 270 square feet showroom will consist of a picnic marathon and crochet station, an artform Mackie commonly uses in her work.

"People can bring a special item, some sort of memorabilia that commemorates some special moment in your life, and I'll crochet a cozy to protect it," Mackie said, explaining her concept. "I'm bringing the domestic out," she said.

Her fellow artists have equally impressive installations. Inspired by the purpose parks serve in Madison, each artist is channeling his or her own style and viewpoint into a creative space.

Among these installations is a screen-print booth, created by Lance Owens, program director of Artworking, a center offering career-oriented support for artists with cognitive disabilities, and John Hitchcock, an associate professor in the art department. Here, [Park It!] attendees can bring a T-shirt and have ready designs printed on it for \$2.

Other installations include a bike-powered, inflatable replica of the Olbrich Observatory by William Turnbull, a rocking chair by Angela Richardson, a commentary on the use of greenspace to combat childhood obesity by Kyle Pfister and a performance area and sweet shop by Christine Olson.

Patrick Breiner, a local jazz musician, calls his installation as a "miniature music festival."

"Every parking space is supposed to be turned into a park that's inspired in some way by a park in Madison, and every freaking park in Madison has a music festival in the summer, so I'm just kind of using that as my model," Breiner said.

Named "Surrounded By Reality Stumpfest" for the stumps that listeners will be able to sit on, various solo artists and duos—it's pretty difficult to fit a full band in a parking space—will perform throughout the day for whoever decides to stop by. Breiner is drawing from the plethora of talent Madison contains.

"I know of ton of great musicians in that field who don't get a lot of attention or playing time ... I really wanted to put on a festival that showed the solidarity of this scene and show everybody how much talent there is," Breiner said.

The overarching theme to Breiner's stall will be a project he's involved in, *Surrounded By Reality*, a musical cooperative aimed at building community among local musicians and fans as well as promoting regional musicians by providing more opportunities and spaces to play in.

In explaining his own connection to the mission of [Park It!], Breiner said, "Having lived in New York for six years, [I] tend not to notice when I'm living in a space like that, that I'm not seeing nature or green. And when I leave the city to go somewhere else, it hits me like a ton of bricks that I'm missing something really obvious and really important."

Now a resident of Madison, Breiner no longer experiences that feeling of shock when he leaves the city, but that doesn't mean preserving urban green space isn't important to him.

"There are so many beautiful things and to lose them would be a real tragedy," he said.

"Madison's (Park)ing Day is a lot more a celebration of the urban green space, but at the same time, there can always be more," Mackie said.

[Park It!] takes place tomorrow from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the 1900 block of Atwood Ave., in front of Ideal Bar, Green Owl, Yonda Photo Studio, Alchemy and Thorpes. A ribbon cutting/ground-breaking ceremony will kick off the event with Ald. Marsha Rummel, District 6; Madison Arts Commission's Arts Program Administrator, Karin Wolf and Sustainable Atwood's Twink Jan McMahon. All are welcome to attend.

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