

Arts R Us: TL is city's hottest art venue

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE Tenderloin's arts scene is shaping up as hot, hot, hot this fall. EXIT Theatre's annual two-week Fringe Festival opens Sept. 9. The city's "Arts in Storefronts" is recruiting artists to fill 13 vacant storefronts with their works for a five-month run also starting next month. Two more murals are on tap, at 101 Hyde and 191 Golden Gate, courtesy of the Tenderloin Community Benefit District and Clean City.

And now there's Wonderland, the monthlong, CBD-sponsored arts show with at least 40 artists creating 10 or more multimedia installations or events all over the neighborhood.

"With Taylor Street being revitalized as an arts corridor and Gray Area Foundation for the Arts officially opening in October [at 55 Taylor], it feels like we're reaching a tipping point for the arts in the Tenderloin," Grants for the Arts Director Kary Schulman told The Extra.

Wonderland is a nice fit with everything else that's going on. It started as an abstract concept, not even visualized for a particular San Francisco neighborhood, said curator Lance Fung, but it's quickly drawing in the community, artists and residents alike.

At a July 9 outreach meeting, one of the first questions was, What's behind the name?

Fung said last year he was guest-teaching a graduate seminar at the S.F. Art Institute and had assigned the students to create three site-specific installations. They chose the Tenderloin. The name Wonderland came up during a brainstorming session. It worked right away, Fung said.

"It wasn't artspeak, it evokes a visceral response, it's showy and a little seedy."

The class assignment has evolved into a full-fledged show. Fifteen of the artists are recent MFAs from the Art Institute, California College of the Arts and the Academy of Art University, the rest established and emerging professionals from San Francisco and beyond.

The kickoff will be a party Oct. 17 in Boeddeker Park, with the free exhibitions, some stationary, some moving around the hood, through Nov. 14.

Wonderland is an eclectic show, hard to define. But Fung — a Bay Area native who moved East and founded Fung Collaboratives in Manhattan's trendy SoHo — tried to generalize: "The projects, most of them ephemeral, will range from performance to sound to light to conceptual pieces to visual arts."

Fung believes the key to Wonderland's success will be its scale. He calls the neighborhood "a big place with a long and rich history and an uncertain future. It's an intellectually fascinating blank canvas, truly authentic, gritty and wonderful."

Wonderlandshow.org, has descriptions and photos of all the projects. A sampling:

- Sound artist Ranu Mukherjee, who teaches at California College of the Arts, is recruiting residents



"Offstage," proposed animatronic sleeping bags on Golden Gate Theatre balconies, melds street life and theater arts.

for "Tender Transmissions," to sing and record songs, a cappella, that express their cultures, languages, experiences, interests.

The songs and other audio pieces will be broadcast daily via a one-watt radio transmitter for reception within a one-mile radius around the Luggage Store Annex's Tenderloin National Forest at 509 Ellis, the audio project's operational base. Listeners can pick up the Tenderloin Play List on cell phones, tune to a specific radio frequency or hear the broadcast at 509 Ellis and "listening stations." EXIT Theatre's Eddy Street lobby and the 222 Hyde club are two possibilities, Mukherjee said.

The first three residents were recorded July 10: Rachelle Brookes sang Sam Cooke's "Change Is Gonna Come," Molly Rosenberg sang "To Teberith," a song she wrote while living in Asmara, Ethiopia, and Jawanza Bomani Saunders sang "Be Not Grieved," a tribute to Michael Jackson. Other "Tender Transmissions" artists plan to record the sounds at neighborhood intersections, a play based on interviews with strippers, and Glide youth reading their poetry.

- "Home Away from Home" artists have asked kids at the Boys & Girls Club on Jones Street and TNDC's after-school program to draw their ideas for "a house that moves." The artists will build one portable composite of the fantasy abodes, moving it twice a week to various indoors or outdoors locations. Audiences will view the model, pick up postcards illustrated with the children's drawings, pen a note on the flip side of and mail the postcards to friends, extending the project beyond the Tenderloin.

"One house that's already been drawn is an ice cream cone on wheels," said Wonderland Director John Melvin, who is on this project team. "I'm not sure how we'd build it."

- An installation called "Offstage," dramatically lit, animatronic, cocoon-like sleeping bags mounted on the five Golden Gate Theatre balconies, which look real in the artists' rendering, is still in the talking stage, according to Anne Abrams, who handles PR for SHN (Shorenstein, Hays, Nederlander), owner of the Curran, Golden Gate and Orpheum theaters.

The Website calls the sleeping bags "the iconic object of [transients'] difficult existence" — artspeak for homelessness — and the installation a representation of the "theatricality" of street life.

- "Down the Rabbit Hole" is to be a room in an SRO, as yet unidentified, that will be furnished to replicate where a young female sex slave might live. A clip from Disney's "Alice in Wonderland" will play on a TV in the room, and on the ceiling a video loop will project film shot by the artists — a 12-year-old girl "playing in the park projected into a crib symbolizing a stolen childhood," says the Web description.

Fung is still inviting more artists to participate, though he doesn't want Wonderland to get too unwieldy, he says, especially because it's a "100% volunteer effort of artists and organizers." He says he's more accustomed to curating multimillion-dollar exhibitions such as "The Snow Show" for the

2006 Winter Olympics in Italy and "Lucky Number Seven" for Santa Fe's 2008 Biennial.

Many organization have signed on to help with the show. Hospitality House is involved in three ways, says Director Jackie Jenks: Its Community Arts Program will host a workshop led by one of the show's artists, its two storefront windows will display Wonderland installations, and Hospitality House will train docents.

"The idea is that people who live in the community — in housing units, on the streets, in shelters —



Oscar Lopez, 11, drew this cool mobile home at the TL Boys & Girls Clubhouse for the "Home Away from Home" installation.

sign up to be docents for art installed in an area where they hang out or live," Jenks said. "We'll put out a call for docents and train those who sign up about the particular art they're representing."

The CBD has put up \$7,500 to cover some promotion costs, said Manager Elaine Zamora — \$5,000 of it is from a Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development grant. The CBD has tossed another \$2,500 into the pot for promotion and has arranged for Wonderland admin to be housed in

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PHOTO BY RANU MUKHERJEE

Rachelle Brookes records her Sam Cooke song for the audio project "Tender Transmissions."