

From the Editor

by Claire Ruud



Sarah Stevens, *The Staypuft Harbinger*, 2008

Courtesy the artist and Co-Lab

A number of new art venues have sprouted up around Austin over the last six months. Most notably, [Domy Books](#), of Houston fame, opened a branch in Austin this spring. The bookstore not only carries an eclectic mix of art books, comics and periodicals, but also showcases work by a variety of artists (see [... might be good recommends](#) to find out what's coming up at Domy). On a recent visit, I saw catalogues from lora reynolds gallery on the shelves, as well as books that seemed to respond to Texas art happenings, such as Fritz Haeg's *Edible Estates* recently at Arthouse and Kara Walker's retrospective currently at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. In addition, I noticed quite a selection of books on environmental concerns and sustainable living. And finally, if you're interested in street art, skateboards or anime, it's my impression that Domy has good coverage of all three.

On the subject of skateboards and spray paint, these two objects seem also to be favorites of [The United States Art Authority](#), the newest project of the Spiderhouse clan. In February, their exhibition *Art on Deck* introduced Austin to the skateboard art collection of Austin-transplant Warren McKinney, and the

current show of work by Federico Archuleta promises to be “Tex-Mex-Sexy,” (so says the press release). However, so far, The USAA’s focus has been weighted heavily towards events such as sketch comedy revues, cult film screenings, mixers and music shows.

I’d also include the artist-run [MASS Gallery](#) in this rundown of new spaces, even though it’s been around since 2006. MASS received new leadership this summer, and now appears to be spearheaded by artists Jesse Butcher, Ivan Lozano, Anthony Romero and Xochi Solis. And finally, a few weeks ago, [Co-Lab](#), another (mostly) artist-run gallery, opened its doors. Co-Lab hopes to present a new show or project to the public almost every week, a breakneck pace which may be difficult to sustain.

The arrival of this last space, Co-Lab, left me pondering the endless creation and dissolution of alternative art venues in Austin. When it turned out that Austin’s Co-Lab didn’t know about their namesake, New York’s CoLab of the late 70s and early 80s, I wondered whether start-up spaces in Austin have an historical framework within which to position their projects. Perhaps, just as artists benefit from art historical memory, art spaces could benefit from a little institutional memory. A knowledge of the history of alternative institutions might offer productive models for functioning in the present and, perhaps, contribute to their sustainability.

But following this line of reasoning, I began questioning my own demand for sustainability. In many cases, experimental spaces with long term success only become part of the system they once defied—witness P.S.1’s relatively recent incorporation into MoMA. Perhaps a one-to-three-year run is a healthy life span for many of Austin’s art spaces. Rather than try to mimic larger urban centers, we can see Austin’s smaller, ever changing arts community as an opportunity to create a more flexible system. The constant flux in Austin provides space for young artists to experiment productively and to create their own spaces and scenes.

These ruminations are part of an ongoing conversation in the Austin art community and Ivan Lozano recently offered a condensation of the blogosphere exchange on the subject in a [post on his glasstire.com blog, Captial A](#). Ultimately, Ivan seems pessimistic about the vitality of Austin’s art scene; he suggests that Austin’s lack of infrastructure causes burn-out. But nonetheless, Ivan continues to invest in Austin’s community (for example, his new leadership role at MASS) and, when he’s feeling optimistic, believes in the “do-it-yourself” model. In short, it’s an open question: in what ways can we productively develop the experimental, mutable nature of Austin’s art scene? What would we sacrifice in the process of transforming Austin into a more established art center and what would we gain?

This issue of *...might be good* is chalk full of reviews from Dallas, Texas, to Paris, France. And if you’re looking for ways to fill you’re hot summer days,

check out [...might be good recommends](#) for some worthwhile suggestions.

Look forward to our August issue the 22nd, which will include coverage of SITE Santa Fe and Sharon Engelstein's current show at Sunday L.E.S. and an interview with Joyce Goss, the director of the Goss Michael Foundation. Then, in September, we'll be moving back to our bi-weekly schedule for the 2008-2009 season.

Claire Ruud is Managing Editor of ...might be good.

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