

Inside the Rubys: Graham Coreil-Allen

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Grantee: Graham Coreil-Allen

Grant Year: 2014

Grant Discipline: Media Arts

Graham Coreil-Allen is a Baltimore-based interventionist public artist who explores the constructs and contradictions of our everyday built environment through videos, maps, words and walking tours. Graham received a Rubys grant in 2014 to support *SiteLines*, a series of sharable videos that explores the invisible sites and overlooked features of our everyday urban environment, and which presents a compelling portrait of Baltimore and its civic space potential. The related exhibition is on view through May 15 at Current Gallery.

GBCA: How long have you lived in Baltimore and what brought you here?

Graham Coreil-Allen: When living in New York City, I was always seeing these killer Baltimore bands coming through town - Dan Deacon, Future Islands, Video Hippos and others. This got me interested. Every so often I would take a bus down to the "Land of Pleasant Living," and I was supremely impressed with how much space my friends were getting for not very much in rent. Up in NYC, I was working full-time plus some to barely afford a room that was a quarter of the size and twice the cost of what my friends in Baltimore had in their lofts. Artists in Baltimore also seemed more accepting of weirdness and less concerned with the type of competitive posturing I would often experience in NYC. When I decided I wanted to get an MFA, MICA was top on my list, largely in part due to it being also located in Baltimore. I was fortunate enough to get in with a scholarship, and in the summer of 2008, I officially move to Mirkwood - a collective art house in Waverly.

GBCA: Define what "public art" and being an "interventionist public artist" means to you?

Graham Coreil-Allen: Much of my work responds to how public space is constructed, programmed and controlled by private and/or undemocratic organizations. Traditional public art often has a sugarcoated role in the shaping of major urban public spaces. Beyond the predictability of commissioning big spectacles to be represented through viral photography (be it a love letter mural on an abandoned block or a massively cute, inflatable waterfowl), I am especially interested in how all forms of art (performance, design, poetry) can more critically engage overlapping audiences with the surrounding city. That said, I define public art as simply any art experience accessible to most people within a given community. Perhaps this definition is more effectively practiced as a question - "What is Public Art?" The question demands action (be it concrete or discursive), which is precisely what I hope to promote. My goal is to create situations that thoughtfully rupture otherwise passive experiences of a city so that we can see what is really going on. The possible effects of such installations and/or events includes both "art" and "improving public space".

GBCA: How has living in Baltimore shaped your art practice, if at all?

Graham Coreil-Allen: Living in Baltimore has only furthered my commitment to DIY culture and grassroots placemaking, all while staying honest with the most important social challenges of our time. In general, the art community members here are very supportive of one another's projects. People don't move to Baltimore to get famous to become yuppies, as those jobs don't really exist. Instead, artist move here because they genuinely care, want to be around other interesting people, and are ready to make it happen. That the common salutation between passing strangers in Baltimore is a warm, "How ya doin?," shows how genuine and honest people here truly are. Such trusting friendship is needed as our city faces major problems, such as the issues of widespread poverty and racial discrimination so poignantly brought into focus during the Freddie Gray uprising.

GBCA: What is next for you after the close of the *SiteLines* exhibition?

Graham Coreil-Allen: My first project after *SiteLines* will be an improvised tour, on June 6, for the exhibition "Putting the Pieces Together" at Baltimore Clayworks. I'm also going to be doing a bunch of research on some of the overlooked public sites of Rockville, where I will be opening my next big show at VisArts in early September. Late

summer, I will also start offering a regular schedule of New Public Sites tours of invisible public spaces around Baltimore. Anyone interested in staying up-to-date on future tours should sign up for my newsletter at newpublicsites.org.

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