

Those with everything, still have everything

Programmed artists Mikiki (ON/NL), and JEFF&GORDON (CA) use their work to look at how culturally stagnant aspirations of individual success have led to personal exasperation and loss, and the large scale failure of community. In the face of the seeming impossibility of a richer fuller life for all, the dream of social mobility has been immobilized.

JEFF&GORDON's body of work *Play Against* seems innocently enough to begin as jest, taking the form of a knock-knock joke with a subtle deviation in its delivery. *How you Play the Game* sets the joke up with quotes from William Levitt, Walt Whitman, and John Steinbeck; figures who helped define the American Dream and shape the American national identity around it. These quotes will act as punchlines in the joke. Throughout *Temporarily Embarrassed* we await the reception of these out of context quick one liners but instead we receive near perfect stillness. From home to home regardless of how hard one knocks no one answers the door at these foreclosed properties; instead we see the artists frozen in stances of home maintenance. How is this joke received? If we take *The Wisdom of Crowds* as its reception, the joke is met with awkward silence as people shift backwards and forwards shuffling slowly apart. This is where the joke turns from harmless fun to scathing critique, a critique that seems to be ultimately empathetic to the subject.

Mikiki's project *Cloud Ascension* can be understood as a long overdue public relations intervention into an event that in many ways parallels a coming of age story gone awry. Coming of age stories are filled with protests of youth against the established powers; often small gestures fraught with unintended consequence. The protagonists in these stories often become icons filling the role of working class heroes whose life and struggles represent the broader issues we face as a society. For the fictional characters and their real world counter parts their fate is often bleak. This genre of story along with its characters when produced for cultural consumption resonate broadly with many audiences while paradoxically real people living similar experiences often get dismissed into obscurity under an unforgiving disinterested public lens. *Cloud Ascension* begins with the tragic loss of life of a young man killed in an explosion on the South Side Hills caused by his proximity to an oil drum while smoking and the character assassination he experienced posthumous along with the nearby community of Shea Heights. Utilizing his training in crisis intervention and harm reduction, and as a member of both communities Mikiki will take on the responsibility; where others could not, or did not desire to; of bringing together members of Shea Heights and St. John's to reframe this story. Part parade, part protest, part pilgrimage, part memorial Mikiki dressed as a hybrid cloud and Hermes-esque shepherd will take participants to the top of the South Side Hills to write, sing, and pay tribute to this young man.

Both bodies of work illustrate that authenticity may not bestow leverage but it is a form of ownership. Through these artists gentle tongue-in-cheek humor we should be reminded that by disassociating from our surroundings and the plights of our neighbors we are not avoiding risk but selling cheap our sense of community.

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