

not ~~that~~ but this

arts and culture webzine



REVIEWS

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Imitating the Aesthetics of Gentrification- Part One

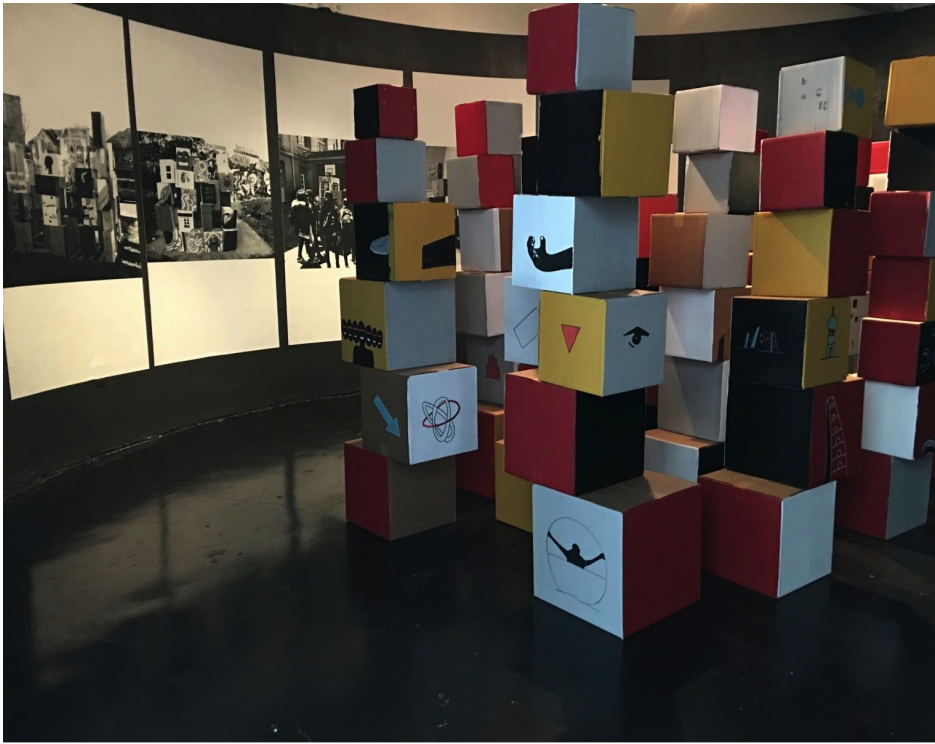
By NTBT · On March 18, 2016

Artist Robert Hodge has witnessed the forces of gentrification around him throughout his life. Third Ward, Houston, where Hodge grew up, is the home of some of the most important institutions in Houston's African-American community, including Texas Southern University, Riverside Hospital, and dozens of prominent churches. However, neighborhood wages and income have been outpaced by the rest of the city, and the number of African Americans in Third Ward have shrunk by ten percent while the white population has doubled. The Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC) has dedicated its three downstairs galleries to visualizing the forces of gentrification in Third Ward and beyond

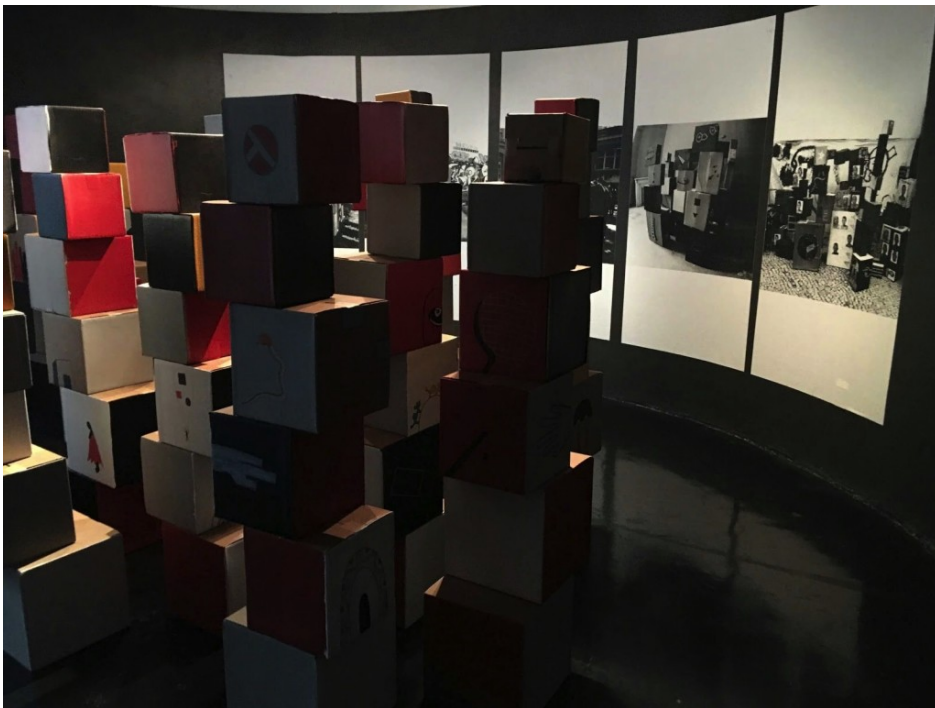


Robert Hodge-photo courtesy of Ashura Bayaan

Gentrification, the displacement of lower income families and businesses, is a common and controversial issue in Houston's urban neighborhoods. The curator at HMAAC, Dominic Clay, says they have been looking for ways to discuss the topic and establish a higher sense of community. "For the last two years, we have been wanting to do an exhibition on gentrification... The best way for us to do that was through our enclaves." HMAAC has a reputation and history of exhibiting work from multiple cultural viewpoints. This show is no different. *Gentrification* features work from Robert Hodge, an African-American multimedia artist from Houston, Danielle Dean, an African-American interdisciplinary artist born in Alabama and raised in London, and Rahul Mitra, an Indian artist and printmaker born in Hyderabad, India, now living in Houston.



Rahul Mitra- photo courtesy of Ashura Bayaan



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Many historical neighborhoods in Houston are now entrenched in development, three-story town homes and construction sites are common, in the face of this many of the residents feel essentially helpless. The installation *Gentrification* by Robert Hodge seeks to disrupt this phenomenon. Instead of a town home, he has built the frame of a shotgun house, a narrow rectangular cottage. The shotgun house design was a popular architectural design of African-American culture in the 18th 19th and 20th centuries, but today they are commonly viewed as a sign of blight and are slowly disappearing. Today, 74 percent of Housing in Third Ward is occupied by renters, and with the increased interest in the area's real-estate, the demographics continue to change. "It's something that is a very, very thought provoking topic. Trying to retain black dollars and make black dollars revolve around more heavily in the black community," Clay

says. "The best way of doing this is through retaining land, which has historically been one of the first steps to wealth."

Universal Police, a video from Danielle Dean shows a reenactment of three "gentrifiers" as they discover and consider moving into a new neighborhood. They wander the roads in Glassell Park, Los Angeles, California in 2013, a time when the artist saw houses in the area being flipped rapidly to middle class families. The work seeks to abstract the connections between real-estate advertising and political discourse on immigration. *Box City* by Rahul Mitra is an assemblage of painted cardboard boxes stacked atop each other, resembling the favela-style shantytowns of India. Addressing why they used non-native Houstonians, Clay explains, "We wanted to bring people in with an outside perspective, beyond the Houston black enclave. Danielle came to Houston, she saw the rapid development, the gentrification, the displacement, and it alarmed her! Also, where Rahul was raised, there are neighborhoods with massive slums, large complexes of displaced people. He wanted to be apart, just to say 'Hey, if you are not careful, this could be your future.'"



Robert Hodge – photo courtesy of Ashura Bayaan