

ALARM

Gallery Spotlight: Vox Populi

06.07.2010 by Katie Fanuko



Installation view, *Dead Flowers*, curated by Lia Gangitano, March 5 - May 2, 2010. Works (left to right) by Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Paul Thek, and Alvin Baltrop. Photo by Andrew Suggs.

When it comes to cities known for experimental art scenes, Philadelphia might not be the first to come to mind. Yet over the past few years, the city's tight-knit art community and DIY ethos have been attracting more and more artists to consider relocating.

Since 1988, artist collective **Vox Populi** has been a notable player within Philadelphia's homegrown art scene. "I would say that Philadelphia is a little bit unique in that there is not an especially strong commercial culture here," Andrew Suggs, Vox Populi's director, says. "So it makes for a little bit of an easier community for us. We're not competing with commercial galleries on the same level that New York is, for instance, so it's a good environment in which to do what we do."

For the past two decades, Vox Populi has provided a haven for under-the-radar artists whose work might not be considered commercially viable — by giving them a space to create and show engaging work and by fostering a sense of community among the area’s artists via workshops and panel discussions.

“Part of our mission is to really serve as an educational resource for the community of emerging and under-represented artists,” Suggs says, “and also to promote other art forms to the community and make them aware of people who are using alternative practices or media and why that is important.”

One of the aspects that makes the Vox Populi collective unique is that all curatorial decisions are made by a rotating roster of 25 artist members that meet once a month. Suggs was a member before he took on the role as the art collective’s director four years ago.

One of the main goals among members is to feature art that engages the community and is often subversive and thought provoking in subject matter. “It’s a non-profit, and we are able to provide support to artists who are working in unusual media,” Suggs says. “And I think that there is also some preference for work that tends to be challenging. That may mean that the work is political in content or that the material or the execution is really unusual and really challenges the notion of what art can be.”

Vox Populi’s current exhibition is a collection of work that deals with subjects including post-colonialism, race, class, and gender roles as well as the emotional response to art. Some of the artists featured include **Ludwig Fischer, James Johnson, Jacque Liu, Kirk Loubier, Dustin Sparks, Meredith Nickie, Moira Tierney, and Joan Jonas**. The collective also is holding an open call for its annual emerging-artist exhibition, which is coming up in July.

An upcoming renovation and expansion is the works, courtesy of a grant from the city. The collective plans to double the size of its current space, build additional artist work spaces, and create a performance stage. “It would be the first performance venue in Philadelphia that’s really focused on performance by visual artists,” Suggs says.

As Philadelphia’s art community continues to develop, Vox Populi continues to support up-and-coming artists however possible.

“The building that we are in has really become a destination; it’s almost hard to keep count because there are new spaces opening all the time, but there are probably seven or eight spaces in our building now,” Suggs says. “The building has really transformed into this locus of experimental work, so it’s really exciting. I think that the energy here is just on the up and up.”