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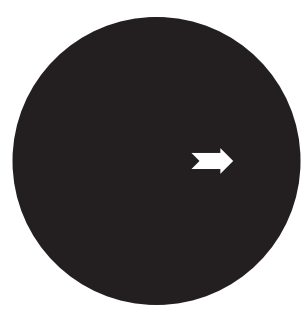
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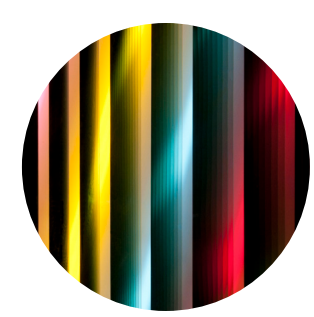




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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

2012 has been a benchmark of a year. Most years go by with a slow, molasses-like crawl yet this year has been a dizzying blur. So many batshit crazy things have happened this year, making it hard to keep up. But, perhaps, my most gratifying moment came when I put my 14-year-old son Lukas to work at FPSF. For him, all previous years of the festival were simply a four-month period where Dad was seldom around and stressed out when he was. And on the weekend of the event, he would get to make a brief stopover at the festival to see what had temporarily made him a single-parent child. But things were different for 2012. Lukas started working two weeks out from the event with the hard-nosed barbarians that make up the FPSF site operations crew. He cleared brush, set up tents, posted signage, and was a general workhorse from morning to night in the hot Texas sun. During the festival, he worked with confidence putting out every kind of fire you can think of. When initially tasked two weeks out, he seemed reluctant to get involved and didn't seem excited to be working on Memorial Day and the beginning of summer break. But once the event occurred, he had a sense of satisfaction that his work translated to something so big. Why this means so much to me, I am not sure but it makes me feel like my efforts have come full circle. Since then, he has grown taller than me, started high school, and can beat me at just about any video game. And ladies, he is single.

The Art of Everything

BY MICHAEL PENNYWARK

IF, LIKE MOST RATIONAL PEOPLE, you're choosing to spend these last few weeks before the apocalypse enjoying the holidays and blowing all your money on booze rather than stockpiling your underground bunker, then you're probably feeling a little nostalgic right now as December 21st creeps ever closer. Of course, if you're reading this after trying to set a record for how many holiday parties you can crash before the end of the world, you might also be struggling to remember all the awesome art openings and events you attended this year. Don't worry; I've got you covered. I took a look back at some of the events that have kept Houston's art community growing both locally and internationally, and checked in with a few of the people we talked to this year to find out what happened after we blacked out at their openings.

In a year that featured a lot of, well, "everything," DiverseWorks showed that Houston has truly become a major hub for exciting experimental artists as they hosted zoe|juniper's performance and installation, "A Crack in Everything"—an immersive experience that combined dance, video, photography, and installation. Arguably, the strength of Houston's art community lies in its support of local art and organizations such as DiverseWorks, Spacetaker, and Fresh Arts Coalition, which serve to foster local talent. In perhaps the most exciting news for emerging artists, Fresh Arts and Spacetaker announced their merger, a move that will no doubt strengthen bonds within the art community itself.

In the meantime, Spacetaker's Artist Resource Center provided us with some truly memorable exhibits this year such as Curtis Gannon's comic-book collages in "and everything in between," and Lisa Chow and Y. E. Torres' fanciful collaboration in "Once there was, once there wasn't." Chow and Torres hosted a somewhat magical tea party representing the mid-point in their exhibition. Catching up with Chow and Torres, I was told that everyone had a blast - there were unicorns and bunnies aplenty. And from what I understand, afterward, guests found confetti in places no confetti should ever be.

Collaborative works were the order of the year and showcased Houston's support for the arts as demonstrated by events such as Insight|Out which brought together film, dance, and music at some of Houston's unique historical landmarks. The Aurora Picture Show, DiverseWorks, and the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts hosted the event celebrating Houston and its culture.

Talking to Mary Headrick at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, I learned that quite a few of us dropped by to enjoy Chris Hedrick's witty wooden illusions in "Implied Utility," and that we can look forward to more cool exhibits next year (of course this will depend on any impending Armageddon, I'm sure).

When we talk of Houston, though, we also think of the world-class museums such as the Houston Museum of Natural Science and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Exhibitions focused on the Titanic, "Egyptomania," and "Scandinavian Design" certainly continue to draw us back, but perhaps the most significant events of the year were the wildly successful Houston Fine Art Fair and the Texas Contemporary Art Fair. Of course, I was happy just to get to talk to Cheech Marin about his collection of Chicano art at the HFAF. We can expect both of these fairs to grow in the coming years.

If this wasn't enough to establish Houston as the epicenter of the Texas art community, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston also graced us with the presence of Rob Pruitt's "Andy Monument" and the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts announced a residency for The Light Surgeons who performed their stunning live cinema piece, SuperEverything* at the Houston Cinema Arts Festival. If SuperEverything* got you as excited as me, then we should be in for a treat when they present their next show based on Houston.

One sign of how much our art community has grown is the number of shows that we are exporting these days. Nothing could be cooler than Aerosol Warfare taking its blow up dolls on the road to "Blow Up L.A." and various other parts of the country. I can't forget the artsanity of Free Press Houston's FPSF artstravaganza, though judging by the amount of beer that was consumed that weekend, I'd wager that many people might have a hard time.

So that's a reminder of the awesomeness that was Houston's art scene this year and a glimmer of what to expect next year, though there's no telling what our post-apocalyptic art scene may have in store for us. Oh, and if right now it's the 22nd and you banked on the Mayans being right about the end of the world and didn't bother to buy any presents before yesterday, you can always check out Asher Gallery, the gift shop at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft—they have some very unique gifts, jewelry, and home décor - all made by national craft artists. **FPH**



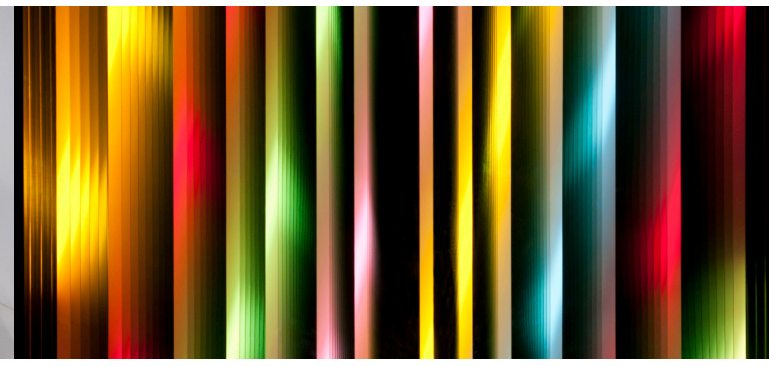
Margaret Garcia



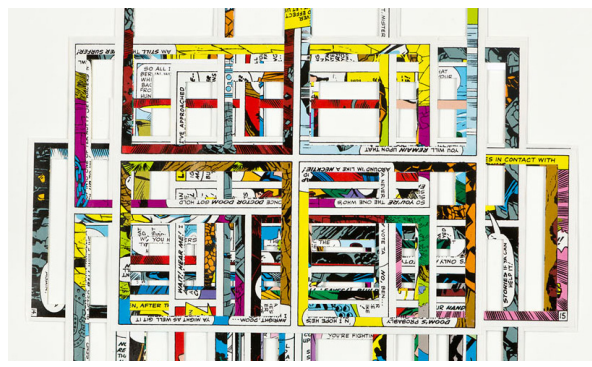
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Executing Elements

BY MEGHAN HENDLEY

A BRIEF LOOK AT FOUR YOUNG LOCAL ARTISTS WHO LOOK BEYOND ARTISTIC LIMITS AND HAVE LEFT THEIR MARK ON THE HOUSTON ART SCENE OVER THE PAST YEAR

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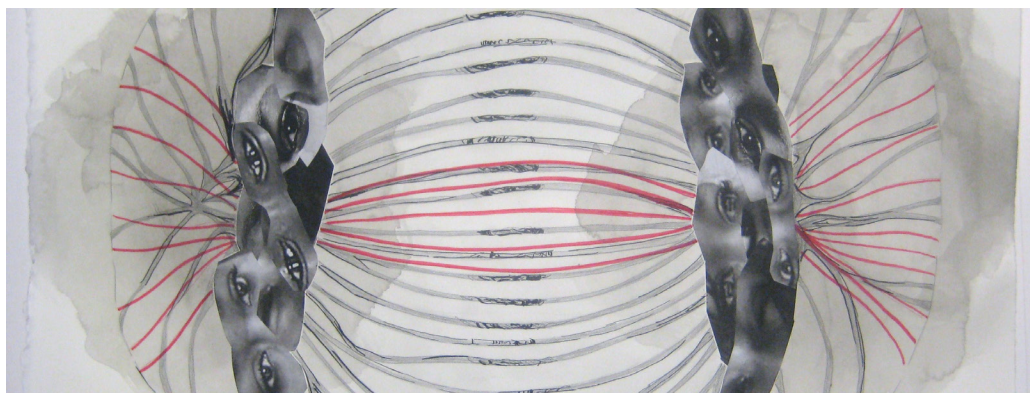
AS A WRITER, ARTIST, AND LOVER OF THE ARTS, I often find inspiration within our local arts community. Houston is an underappreciated haven for talented creators and there are four artists in particular who have truly stood out to me in 2012. They have left an indelible impression on my visual journey across Houston and beyond. These artists are not your run-of-the-mill canvas painters. They study, they educate, they produce, they play with techniques, they don't settle, and they advocate for the importance of the arts in our community. They push back on their medium and transform the materials they use to go beyond their perceived conventions. Most of all, they are souls of gold who engage others with a sense of duty and camaraderie using their gift as a binding agent that glues us all together. As an added note, these artists make things happen with their own talent - unrepresented and ever moving in their contemporary language.



Theresa Escobedo - Edificio con Pilastri Dorici & Marmo
From the series, "Facsimiles of Time and Beauty"



Felipe Lopez - If It Ain't Broke...
Mono-Printed Roofing paper, 2012



Regina Agu - "Night Doctors No. 1"
Collage, ink, graphite on paper

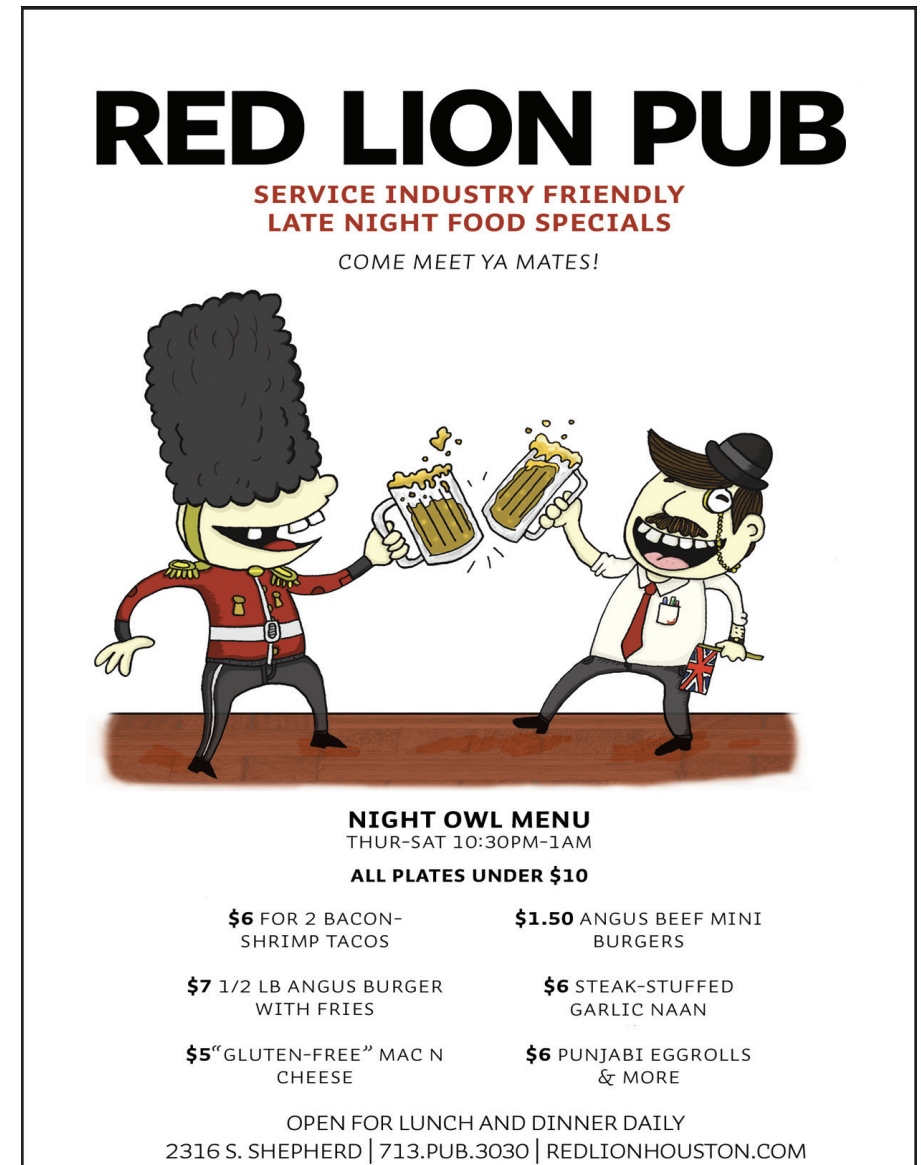
THERESA ESCOBEDO/THERESAESCOBEDO.COM
Theresa Escobedo is the newly-appointed Lead Workshop Instructor at the Houston Center for Photography. Her desire to capture both the ancient and modern combined with her love of places, particularly the Lone Star State, makes for work that summons history. She shoots using both analog and digital and has recently incorporated instant photography into her repertoire. She uses a Polaroid SX-70 with Polaroid and Impossible Project films, as well as snapping digital pics thanks to her trusty iPhone. The various vignettes of cities, crumbling structures, people, and absent spaces draw us into their living loneliness. The various processes she uses to develop help cast a particular visual mood. Sepia tones and blue hues infuse objects in the picture with a sense of nostalgia and memory. In her new role at HCP, Theresa has created new courses that accommodate everyone from Instagram users to advanced photographers. Sign up for a class and be on the lookout for a chance to see her photos over the coming months.

MICHAEL K. TAYLOR/MKTARTIST.COM
Michael Kahlil Taylor is a performer and multimedia artist. His work has included object and video installations at Project Row Houses and his unique wall relief sculptures at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. His early work in photography made for a unique view of lines and structures, leading into sculptural pieces including the use of wood with carvings that swirl and move within the piece. An arts educator and writer, Michael focuses on issues facing global communities, adding food for thought beyond the status quo. One reason this artist's work is worth noting this year is due to his summer residency at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture located in Maine. A nine-week intensive program, Skowhegan has served as the launch pad for some of the most prolific artists of our generation, allowing them to fully dedicate themselves to new ideas and site-specific works. Michael was the only artist selected from Texas for this prized program. We look forward to seeing what ideas incubated during his residency.

FELIPE LOPEZ/PELCONTEMPARTS.COM
Earlier this year, Free Press Houston featured Felipe Lopez and since then he has gone on to create some of the largest original work to date. Extracting his concept from neuroscience and psychology, Felipe artistically shows what goes on in our brains including everything from synapses to memory recognition. Taking his pieces beyond paper and canvas, Felipe uses a combination of painting and printing onto sturdy black roofing paper that is cut into strips and then woven together. He has had featured openings this fall at Winter Street Studios and War'Hous Visual Studios. Noted as the largest mono-printed sculptures being created, these pieces occupy wall space with each turn and twist, making a bold statement that hints back to the ornamentation of the baroque. The sculptures carry the idea that we choose the placement where different synapses, neurons, and receptors overlap and collide to create different thoughts through a subconscious language. These pieces are being pushed beyond normal conventions and are growing in size as his concept deepens. Placement in our local urban landscape and exhibitions on grander scales are planned for next year.

REGINA AGU/REGINAAGU.COM
Though born in Houston, Regina Agu has traveled far and wide her entire life including trips throughout Europe and Africa. Harkening back to the ritualistic and forgotten histories of cultures, Regina recounts and morphs tales along with myths throughout her various mediums. A recent show "Visible Unseen" (part of the ARC Exhibition Series by Fresh Arts) featured drawings and collage work that included the incorporation of biology and anatomy texts - morphing these artifacts into new work. These elements collided with Regina's own handmade meditations on the body, hidden histories, and a collection of memories. These pieces, although rooted in the past, take on a new, futuristic mood thrusting them into a science fiction realm. A recipient of the 2012 Houston Arts Alliance individual artist grant, Regina used this year as a chance to push herself as an artist and the coming years should bring even more travels through her futuristic work. FPH


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2012 Recap

BY MICHAEL BERGERON

WHEN I WAS A SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL (100 years ago), they showed Citizen Kane in 16mm to the students. There were two viewing groups divided by the first letter of the last name. I was in the first group and when the second group began watching, I was in drama class -which was located right behind the auditorium stage where the film was playing. So a friend and I climbed up onto the catwalk where you hang lights for the stage and waited until the end of the film. When Rosebud appeared, we took a rubber chicken on a rope and swung it down right in front of the screen so you had the shadow of the chicken swinging in front of the burning sled. I guess my point is that I became a film critic in order to atone for the sins of my youth.

Flash forward to 2012. When I was a kid this was the year that we were supposed to have already colonized the Moon and physically been to Mars. All the time I meet people who say they haven't seen Citizen Kane or A Clockwork Orange, ditto any of the films of Alfred Hitchcock. I am so envious of those people because, in a sense, they still have some of the greatest experiences of their lives ahead of them. (In addition to traveling to the Great Pyramids or the Grand Canyon or reading a good book.)

Every movie year has it peaks and valleys. Obviously the studios sandbag the end of the year with movies they expect to receive accolades (Les Miz, Django Unchained, Life of Pi, Silver Linings Playbook, et al.). But any self-aware movie maven knows there are excellent films that fall outside the realm of major studios and their advertising budgets each and every month of the year: Compliance, God Bless America, Damsels in Distress, Safety Not Guaranteed. Throw in foreign films, revivals, and the ever increasing do-it-yourself movement that manifests itself via streaming electronic downloads and you could spend your entire life watching nothing but movies. But yes, all play and no work makes Jack a dull boy.

Just as 2012 has acknowledged the triumphant return of great American directors like Steven Spielberg, Robert Zemeckis, Paul Thomas Anderson, and Quentin Tarantino, 2013 may be viewed a few months from now, as the year that foreign helmers from South Korea got their due. Jee-woon Kim (I Saw the Devil) helms the Schwarzenegger drug cartel actioner The Last Stand (out in January), and Oldboy director Park Chan-wook has his Hitchcock tribute Stoker scheduled for release in March from Fox Searchlight. Stoker is loosely based on Hitch's 1943 Shadow of a Doubt, wherein a young woman falls under the dubious influence of her Uncle Charlie. Also, there's a 2013 American remake of Oldboy on the docket that's directed by Spike Lee and stars Josh Brolin as the imprisoned man.

But if anything heralds a game change for 2012, it would be the introduction of advanced frame rate projection. It's beyond the scope of this article to elucidate the history of frame rate as it pertains to persistence of vision and movie projection. Suffice it to say that most current theatrical projection has seen the replacement of analog mechanical projectors with digital projection operating on the premise of 24 frames a second. Considering that there's a black horizontal line between each frame that's roughly 48 images a second that the eye beholds. (If you're interested in a pioneer in advanced frame rate filmmaking look up Douglas Trumbull and his experiments with the process Showscan).

Beginning with the release of The Hobbit (Warner Bros.), theaters will introduce screenings with a frame rate of 48fps. Director Peter Jackson shot The Hobbit using the Red Epic camera shooting at 48fps. On a side note, The Hobbit will be a trilogy prequel to Lord of the Rings with an installment rolling out every year for the next three years. The three films are titled An Unexpected Journey, The Desolation of Smaug, and There and Back Again.

As usual, Hollywood has labeled the advanced frame process with an acronym that also acts as a branding moniker. HFR3D, which stands for High Frame Rate 3D, will hopefully prove to be the same kind of advancement in watching cinema that sound was to silent. In this case, a refinement in the flicker rate that translates into a greater perception of objects in movement. Think action sequences and rapidly-edited fight scenes.

As always, the average bear will merely be confused when they see a film advertised as being in 2D, 3D, IMAX 3D, and HFR3D. Happy trails and just keep repeating - it's only a movie.
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Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow

2012 MUSIC REVIEW + DECEMBER MUSIC PREVIEW
BY WILL GUESS

AFTER MOVING BACK from California early this year, I have to say I was worried that my seeing-live-shows stock was going to drop considerably. Living in Los Angeles, I was able to find great shows to check out every single night and I wasn't sure I'd still get that luxury living here again. Well Houston, you completely outdid yourself in 2012. This past year has given music fans much to be thankful for including great local bands, major national acts that normally would have skipped over our great town, and a once-flailing music venue brought back to life. Local acts such as Black Congress, Robert Ellis, and Limb have rejuvenated the music scene in Houston over the past year, and we've had some killer shows that will stay with me for a long time. From the best comedian in the world right now, Louis CK, to Andrew WK bringing his tour party to the city to Converge completely obliterating Fitzgerald's. I am seriously impressed. To top it all off, our city is now host to one of the biggest music festivals in the United States - something every person in Houston should be extremely proud to boast.

Collectively, we have put this city back on the map as far as music is concerned. The locals here are absolutely killing it. This year alone, we've seen great albums released from across the musical spectrum - from Venomous Maximus to A Sea Es—two of my favorite albums that have come out recently. And Houston isn't done yet. With the end of the world looming, we're going out with a bang thanks to a handful of shows we have coming to round out the year—the best local rock band in Houston, a country legend, and the new face of hip-hop. Onto the shows.





American Fangs, December 14, Fitzgerald's

American Fangs are releasing their long-awaited and consistently delayed album in early 2013. After seeing them live this past month, I think it's appropriate to crown them the most precise band in Houston right now. It's obvious these dudes mean business. The set is seamless. Frontman Gabe Cavazos is the whole package. A stage presence that is unmatched by anyone in Houston, insightful and intelligent lyrics combined with hooks that stay stuck in your head for days, and let's be honest, the guy's got the looks to go with it. He's probably slept with your girlfriend at some point. In a time where radio rock is stale, Fangs bring something new to the table, the edge that has been missing since the early '90s. They have written the most radio friendly rock record that will never be played on the radio, and that's not a bad thing. Every one of the members has been a part of the Houston music scene for well over a decade, playing in some of the best rock bands to ever come out of this city. If there is one local band that's a must see in Houston, it's this one. Transsexuals welcome. Get the hell on.

Dwight Yoakam, December 21, Arena Theater

I know this one seems out of place, but seriously, who doesn't know the words to "Guitars & Cadillacs"? I have always thought Yoakam is the country artist for people who say, "I like everything except country." He's the hillbilly for hipsters. Plus, remember when he played that asshole boyfriend in Sling Blade? Awesome. When you see that signature strut and dance he does while performing, it's hard not to quiver with excitement. He has always stood out among other country artists and has remained relevant and releasing albums for almost three decades now. He is a real honky-tonk man—even Johnny Cash called him his favorite country singer. Yoakam makes country music sexy, which isn't an easy thing to do. If your girlfriend doesn't want to sleep with you after this show, I think it's time to question your relationship.

Kendrick Lamar, December 29, Warehouse Live

Kendrick Lamar has released the best hip-hop album of 2012, by far. With a new sound, fresh lyrics, and a new attitude, he's what I'd like to call a game changer. He is on a path to do what OutKast did over 15 years ago with ATLiens. At the moment, Lamar is probably the most sought after and looked-up-to rapper in the hip hop music world. With help from producer titans like Dr. Dre and Jay Rock, he has upped the ante and proved that he deserves the number one spot of every person's list for top MCs. This show was supposed to take place in October but was rescheduled for the end of the year because Lamar has promised something special for Houston. One can only guess what that means, but if this guy's past is any indication, I'm sure it won't disappoint. All hail the new hip hop king. **FPH**

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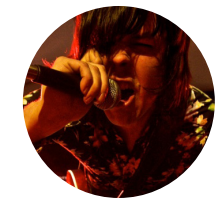
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FEBRUARY 23RD, 2013
POSTER BY BLAKE JONES

music

Listened to Music in 2012

BY KM ANDERSON

The most difficult thing about compiling a year-end list is the consideration of 'the year.' Life moves in moments due to the precedence of the present in current culture. August seems like a year ago. Within the occurrences of a day, from social network updates, work deadlines and dramas, relationship temperatures, and children things, it is hard to recall the year. The criteria that I follow are: If I put on this album/song right now, would I play it through or skip through it? If I skip through it, I remove it from the list. Granted, there are things on this list that have the sheen of newness, which may give them the advantage of proximity, but based on my idea of a cultured taste, I will trust my gut feeling. So here it is. I hope you have an opinion...





FPH
12.12
14







ALBUMS OF THE YEAR (NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

Fiona Apple: *The Idler Wheel Is Wiser Than the Driver of the Screw and Whipping Cords Will Serve You More Than Ropes Will Ever Do (Epic)*
Intimate. Big in emotion, sparse in production. Direct. The complex musings of someone at odds with their complexities within the sphere of a relationship. Marvelous.

Kendrick Lamar: *good kid, m.A.A.d. city (TDE/Aftermath/Interscope)*
A journey through the day of a kid in Compton. A proclamation of life in strife, struggle, and aspiration. The internal battle versus the outer world. Martin had a dream. Kendrick had a dream.

Dirty Projectors: *Swing Lo Magellan (Domino)*
Every time I hear this album, I love it more. It's sonically, lyrically, musically perfect. The beauty is in the restraint, the commitment to the song. Every note, every word accents accurately.

Killer Mike: *R.A.P. Music (Williams Street)*
At one time rap was angry, unapologetic, honest, and not as populist as its current incarnation. This is a return to a time when rappers were not funny. I enjoy anyone who says fuck the police, the Forbes list, the government, and the president (yes. the black one, too).

Twin Shadow: *Confess (4AD)*
Take everything you loved about the anthem songs of the '80s—the keyboard sounds, the drum sounds, the soaring chorus, the cocaine guitar, the magic, the feeling like this night is forever— THIS is the moment. Now add a dude singing detached love songs, and you have this album. Wonderful all year, every time.

Frank Ocean: *channel Orange (Def Jam)*
Think Prince Sign 'O' The Times. Think an album that defies all trivializations and hype. Think maybe one of the best albums ever. I think that.

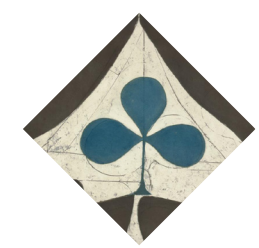
Grizzly Bear: *Shields (Warp)*
You look out the window and see a butterfly, you notice the beauty in its wing pattern. The picture widens, the sun illuminates the backyard, all the colors blossom, your chest swells with emotion... "endless abundance overflows."

Miguel: *Kaleidoscope Dreams (RCA)*
A sexy album about actual sexual feelings. Lust, confusion, insecurity, bravado, innocence. It's not just about getting it, it's about liking them too. But, mostly about getting it.

TNGHT: *TNGHT EP (Warp)*
This is an instrumental album of trap beats that are large. It is like Optimus Prime Crip Walking.

Chris Cohen: *Overgrown Path (Captured Tracks)*
Mellow but psychedelic. Barrett's Floyd more than Waters' Floyd. The album you play on a slow Sunday, a rainy day, a cool morning, a buzzed night - while making a sandwich or cleaning the house.







SONGS

Usher: *"Climax"*
Diplo crunked it up, Usher smoothed it out. The constant release and crescendo mirror the ebb and flow of the relationship. My first favorite of the year.

Solange: *"Losing You"*
A song I could listen to 10 times in a row and have. It is enough—one more anything would have thrown this song off. Its simplicity, its breezy sensibility, it's not "the one you should be making your enemy."

G.O.O.D. Music: *"Mercy"*
The music for this song is epic. The lyrics are epic. It is a moment every time a new verse begins, each dude bests his predecessor, from "roll my weed on it, that's an ass tray" to the coupe the color of "mannaise." It's evident why this song was a summer anthem.

2 Chainz: *"Dope Peddler"*
If one song could explain the genius of 2 Chainz, it is "Dope Peddler." The cartoonish chorus, the trap beat, the line, "I'm in the trap cause I work dere."

Thee Oh Sees: *"Will We Be Scared?"*
It is Buddy Holly underwater.

Divine Fits: *"Flaggin' A Ride"*
Grooves so hard. Britt Daniel is a bad, bad man.

(Looking forward to one album in 2013: Kanye West.) **FPH**





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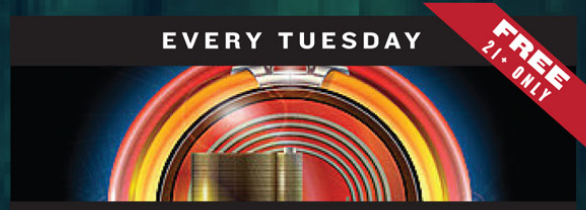
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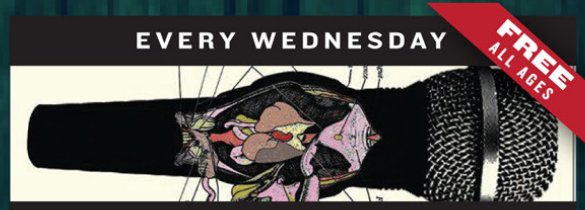
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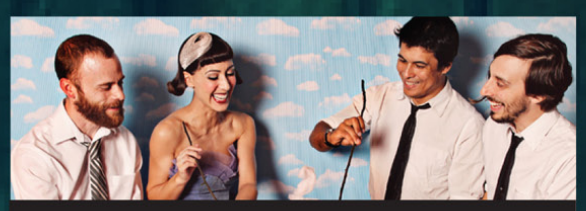
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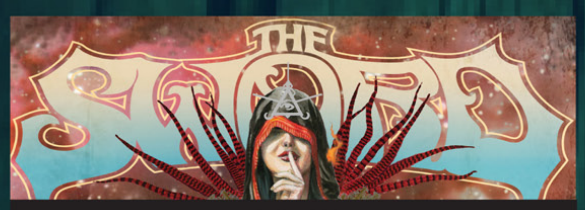
DEC 07 — THE BRIGHT LIGHT SOCIAL HOUR
WITH ISHI



DEC 09 — PAPER ROUTE
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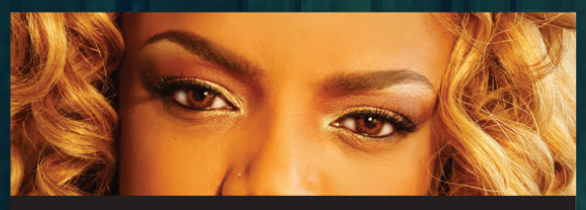
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THE END OF THE WORLD W/ PALLBEARER DEC. 21 | **THE BEANS** RECORD RELEASE DEC. 29



Houston Music Roundup

BY RAMON MEDINA | PHOTO BY NICOLE KIBERT

*

FPH asked folks in the music community for their highlights or thoughts on 2012. Here's what they told us:

music

B.E. Godfrey (listenlisten)
Houston in 2012 was paused, anxiously awaiting its impending doom. Like a nervous child awaiting the inevitable punishment from misdeeds, frantically still, imagining every possible scenario. In such a close proximity to the center of Mayan rule, our fate is sensed in the bones of every emotionally-tuned Houstonian. Deeply aware that we'll surely receive the first wave of apocalyptic destruction.

Bob Weber (Anarchitex)
There is a migration of bent genius into and through Super Happy Fun Land that no one can keep up with and for that I thank them. But the real climax of 2012 came late this year. I helped a bent old man on a cane as he walked down the sidewalk in the direction of Vinal Edge. A short time later, Doomsday crashed down and there was Jerry Anomie and Gwen in the store snarling through "Rather See You Dead," then Nicki Sicki with that crazy grin, and the next night at Walter's we watched AK-47 grind through Kiss My Machine. Eventually, the Descendants got up and burned holes in the air. Holy crap was that a blast! The Island lived once more!

Brandon Lemons (Treaty Oak Collective)
The rise and fall of the enforcement of the noise ordinance. I haven't heard of anyone being fined for months now and a lot of those venues and people that were had their charges dismissed. Huge win for the Houston scene.

Things seem to be moving in a positive direction on all fronts. Great new bands emerging; Showers, Hoofprints, Sleuth, Tiny Empires, Holder, etc. Walter's continues to get better and better shows and there's tons of parking now. Lots of awesome support from the press outlets. Lots of great records being put out; Weird Party, Indian Jewelry, Omotai, Wiggins, etc.

Chris Wise (Buxton)
It seems like an important time in Houston music! The crucial aspect is for everyone to keep going. It seems as though the Houston Curse is for shit to get going and then stop. Everyone seems very supportive of one another and I'm really grateful for that. Featherface came out of nowhere and are already doing really great things. Hamamatsu Tom and Whatever The Fuck is one of the few things I'm genuinely surprised and inspired by. As long as everyone keeps having fun doing what they're doing, good things will happen.

Chuck Roast (Vinal Edge Records)
From a personal perspective, moving my shop after some 26+ years to 239 W. 19th Street was the biggest thing for me. We're trying very hard to create a musical, cultural hub in The Heights and we've had LOTS of live events and art displays already. We have a flyer exhibit of Island Club posters from back in the early Houston punk days that coincided with a Doomsday Massacre/Legionaire's Disease/Verbal Abuse/Mydolls jam live in the shop. Free Radicals, Bliss Blood, and Grandfather Child performed. I guess, we're going to be doing a lot of cool stuff with local and out-of-town musicians now that we have finally HIT TOWN!

David Ensminger (drummer, folklorist)
The Island reunion party at Walter's proved Houston's old school punk heritage was stunningly alive and fecund. Frail Jerry Anomie of Legionaire's Disease launched into "Rather See You Dead" and erupted like a butterfly with napalm wings. Awe-inspiring. The whole place felt Dionysian, feverish, and otherworldly, like time out of time!

Justice Tirapelli-Jamail (The Manichean)
The progression of Houston's scene has been pretty exciting. For starters, certain bands that have been hard at work have finally begun to garner national attention, i.e., Robert Ellis, Buxton, Wild Moccasins, and The Tontons. It is well-deserved attention and feels as if it's been a long time coming.

It's been sad to see Roky Moon and BOLT! and Female Demand call it quits, but among the fallen have risen new, refreshing acts. I've had some great times going to see bands like Featherface, Second Lovers, New York City Queens, and Bang Bangz. I can't wait to see where each of them take their sound next.

Mlee Marie (Hearts of Animals)
Defining moment: Playing drums for Daniel Johnston!
What comes to mind is enjoying performers who are brave, get up on the stage balls-out, and are like, "Fuck you. I'm just gonna sing blues into this microphone all by myself now and I may or may not invite you to sing along!" (Wiggins), or people who have been around forever and are still playing fucking loud, rocking shows in neighborhood bars (Indian Jewelry/Wiggins), or snarky ukulele one-woman acts like Lindsey Simard and Poopy Lungstuffing, or sweet kids doing awesome cover shows together (The Halloweening was brilliant, Joe Mathlete!). I'm sad that Art Institute broke up. I saw a show of theirs and it was pretty amazing and then they broke up. I would have gone to see them again. There are some really amazing musicians here in Houston. FPH

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Houston 2012

A LOOK BACK ON ONE HELL OF A YEAR THROUGH YOUR LENS

yearbook

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12.12
18



PHOTO BY
KHALIL ABU SHAREKH

"When I first moved to the U.S., I was a bit disappointed. I arrived in Houston and I thought to myself, "This is not the U.S. I've been seeing in the movies. Where are the trains, the subways, and where are the skyscrapers? The streets aren't full of people rushing around to get to work with coffee cups in hand."

Then after living here for a while, I began to discover the downtown. I saw the beauty of a vibrant urban landscape that people are still hesitant to explore. But this year I feel optimistic that the new rail expansion may soon help make our downtown community bustle with excited energy and purpose."

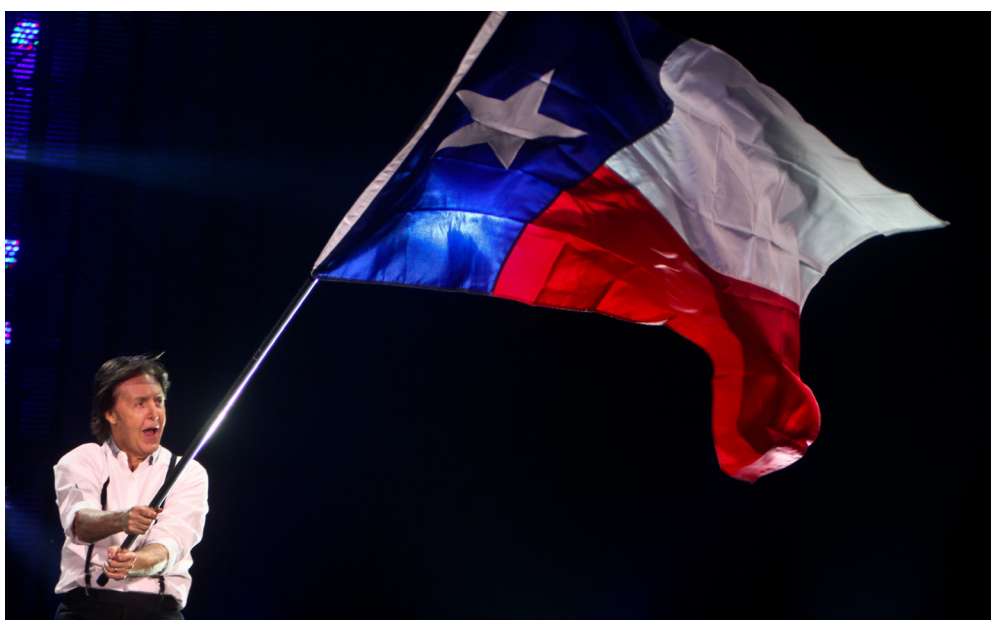


PHOTO BY
MARK AUSTIN

Not a huge Beatles fan until after this show. What an amazing performer? Now I get it. Completely.



PHOTO BY
TODD SPOTH

"A very important part of Houston's history can be found in our local hip hop and rap communities. It's ingrained in our past; it's an integral part of our present; and an undeniable piece of our city's future. The musicians, their families, the music they make - they are timeless. Photo subject: Lil Jared, Trae Tha Truth's son during a video shoot for Trae's "I'm From Texas." Photo taken on June 19, 2012 at MacGregor Park in Houston, Texas."



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PHOTO BY JULIAN BAJSEL

At times overlooked due to what some misguidedly write off as a weak music scene, Houston put a big dent in that misconception when thousands of fans turned out to see Pretty Lights a.k.a. Derek Vincent Smith on a Sunday night a mere 3 months after headlining FPSF. Fans in attendance were treated to Derek's unmistakable blend of electro, hip-hop and soul, along with the dazzling and intricate light show he's become known for.



PHOTO BY JULIAN BAJSEL

When it comes to live entertainment, FPSF is the undisputed heavyweight champ which music-loving Houstonians have been clamoring for since, well, the existence of music and Houston. Consistently surpassing expectations, the festival offers those willing to endure the blazing Texas heat an opportunity to see their favorite artists play exhilarating sets in the shadow of the downtown skyline. Pictured here is one of the hardest working people in the business, Diplo, who wasted no time in kicking the weekend-long party into overdrive.



PHOTO BY JOHN TRAN

After living in Houston for 31 years, you learn to "tolerate" certain things about it like an old wife you just have to live with. Most of the time, her temper is hot! She is always crying when you least expect it. But you ask yourself year after year, "What is it that keeps me here?" Somewhere between the bedazzled pretention of Dallas and the overly laid-back Austin, you find the warm and very realistic place you fell in love with. I still can't put a finger on exactly why I love Houston. I do know that the "people" are a huge part of what makes this city. If you have been to LA, then you probably know what I'm talking about. This photo of "We <3 Houston" really puts this year in perspective. The food, the museums, a great economy, a winning football team and a "futbol" stadium are things that make the city practical and "great." If distance makes the heart grow fonder, then moving back into the loop from the boring suburbs has really opened my eyes to exactly why Houston is no longer that "old wife." She is artsy but not snobby, edgy and still classy, and no matter how old she gets, she will still be hot!



PHOTO BY DAVID A BROWN

The Optical Chapel installation is an exploration into too much information. For the past several years, my practice has focused on perception, exploring the biological and cultural factors that help us individually construct a shared reality. My intent with the Optical Chapel was to make a contemplative space within the construct of too much information. I hope you enjoy the experience.

Made with 11,000 4 x 6 photographs
Took 135 hours to construct
Was installed March-April 2012 in mid-town Houston


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yearbook



PHOTO BY CARA PATTON

This photo is a nice recap of what can best be described as a tumultuous year of changes in my life. The most obvious of which - my bald head. Another big change - I moved back from LA and settled back down in the Montose to work full-time for FPH. Not because LA “ate me alive.” I went out and finger banged LA. I just missed Houston. LA is a great place, but Houston is greater. So now when you see me at the Menil, bald, and getting drunk with my dog Lucy, know we’re basking in the sunlight and humidity of this city with a bigger appreciation than we’ve ever had before.



PHOTO BY JEHNIFER HENDERSON

Regeneration: A Year of Growth and Death following the 2011 Drought
Some recognize Houston by its man-made skyline. For me, this city is a combination of all of the attributes that make it beautiful; its skyline, its people, its culture and its lush greenery. The drought of 2011 made us very aware of, not only the beauty, the purpose of Houston’s canopy. I spent 2012 mourning the loss of much of that canopy, while photographing and admiring the regeneration. With each image, I pay homage to the strength that shines through with every new bloom and I give thanks for the protection those blooms will bring.



PHOTO BY JULIAN BAJSEL

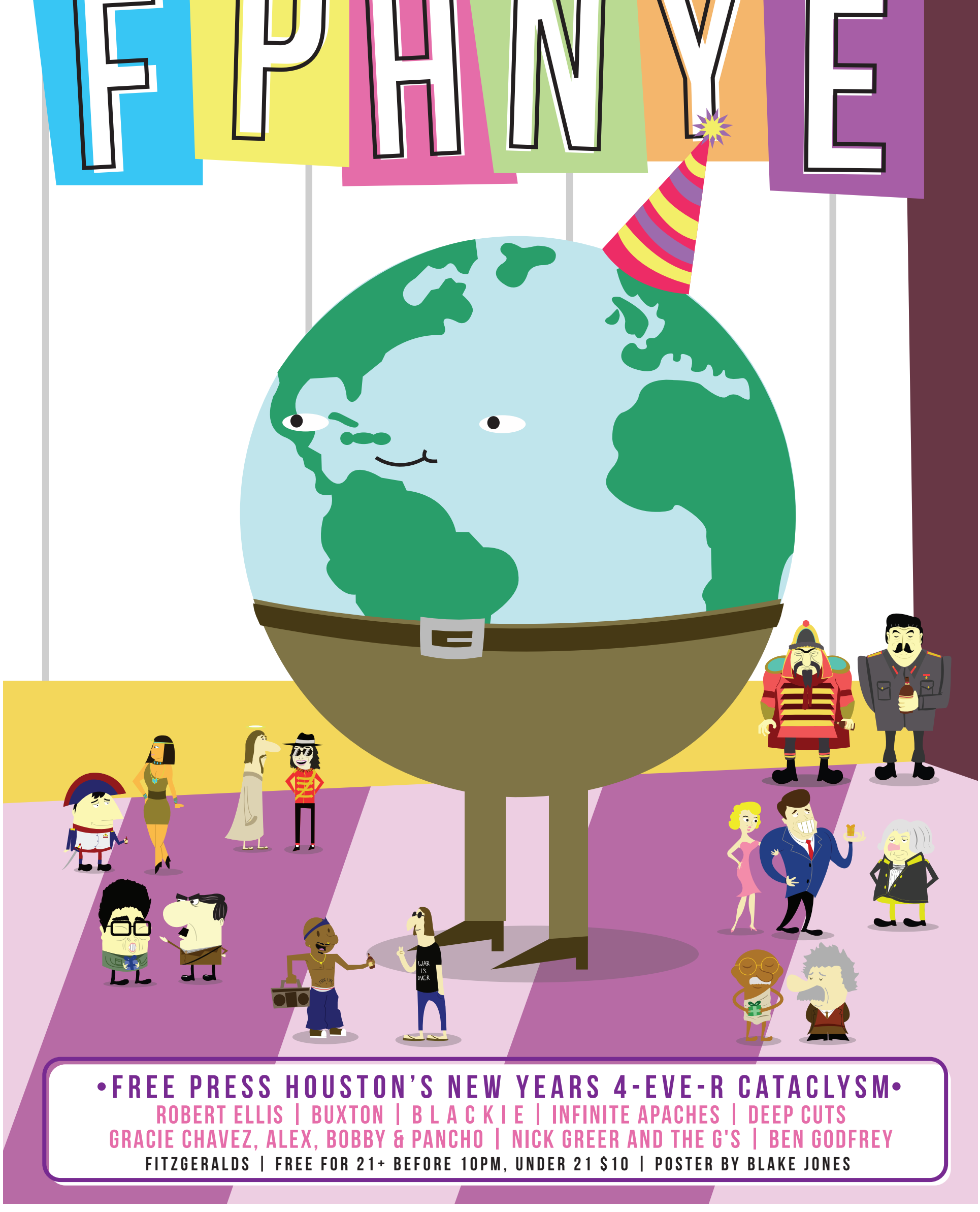
If you’re even slightly active in Houston’s flourishing nightlife scene, chances are you’ve had the pleasure of dancing to the masterfully selected beats put down by veteran DJs James Reed & Josh Dupont. This year, the duo has partnered up to host an exciting monthly series dubbed Kinda Super Disco, where resurgent nu-disco--a 21st century spin on disco-era style--is anything but dead. Don’t be surprised if you find yourself rubbing shoulders with respected producers from halfway around the globe as these gentlemen are known for regularly attracting the best guest talent the genre has to offer.



PHOTO BY ERIC HESTER

Houston is a huge, diverse and creative city. It also happens to have a shit reputation. I hear it everywhere I go, “Houston sucks, there’s nothing to do there, nothing good comes out of there, blah blah blah.” 2012 wasn’t the beginning of the revolution but we’ve got some attention now. These pictures were taken during the completion of a crazy project by a bunch of ambitious artists (mostly Houstonians) that dumbfounded people from all over the world, “Houston has more than oil and NASA?” Fuck yeah we do. Proud of it.

FPHNYE



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Houston Gaymers

BY ERIC KINKEAD | PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOUSTON GAYMERS AND KEVEN ALVARADO

BEING A GAMER can often be a very introverted and lonely hobby. With the Internet keeping everyone 'socially' connected, one would think that the online gaming community would turn into a utopia for all types of gamers, no matter their race, gender, or sexuality. Unfortunately, respect has often not shown up to play. With the mask of anonymity, countless racial, gender, and sexually-biased insults are constantly hurled at people randomly. The once playful chiding expected in competition has been transformed into a mix of an innocent schoolyard playground and a recreation room for Nazi concentration camp guards.

However, many gamers have carried gaming into their adult lives and like many adults they understand the importance of civility and acceptance. Most importantly they understand the point of a game is to have fun. Where is one to go in Houston that wants to engage in what games are all about? Where is the fun? Like much of the good in the world, it is sometimes hard to see the forest for the trees. Luckily for us, such a group not only exists but is growing, and growing strong.

Eric Hulsey is the president and an original founder of Houston Gaymers, a group that "strives to bring together the SGLBT gaming community through our online community and monthly meetups." Free Press Houston had a chance to ask Eric a few questions about his group and what they are all about.

HOW DID HOUSTON GAYMERS COME INTO BEING?

Houston Gaymers started as an idea discussed at dinner between five new friends. We all had videogame interests and asked ourselves why it was so hard to find others with the same interests. Our conclusion was that there just wasn't a group or event that would even bring them all together and so we discussed starting one. We started a (Facebook) group page and set our first meetup event with one of my friends, J.R. Cohen, at Coffee Groundz. We had no idea that the first meetup would do so well and have so many people show up—it was then that we realized this was needed in the community.

THE HOUSTON GAYMERS' WEBSITE SEEMS TO IMPLY AN IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING STRAIGHT PEOPLE INTO THE HOUSTON GAYMERS ORGANIZATION. WAS THIS THE GOAL FROM THE BEGINNING? CAN YOU EXPLAIN MORE ON THAT PURPOSE?

I would say that making our events and group open to everyone was always our goal with Gaymers. We started Gaymers in Midtown at a coffee shop/bar that was not located in Montrose because we wanted anyone attending to be able to come and play games comfortably without having to disclose or make a statement about their sexuality. Gamers in general are more introverted in their personalities and sometimes so is being gay. By picking neutral locations, everyone can feel more open to be who they want to be. There is also the goal and message that there are Gaymers who do play games and we are not few. When people use slanderous terms or comments over their chats in games, I like to hope that if anyone attends one of our events, they would see those that are hurt by them and help us shape a better gaming world.

WHAT SHOULD A STRAIGHT PERSON COME TO EXPECT WHEN ATTENDING A HOUSTON GAYMERS EVENT OR BEING INVOLVED WITH THE HOUSTON GAYMERS COMMUNITY?

One can expect plenty of welcoming Gaymers and games to play. We have projector Rock Band with hundreds of songs, a zone for Dance Central, several smaller stations of fighting games, drink specials and our monthly food truck guests. When someone new attends, we try to direct them to grab a name badge and go grab a controller to play. Over the past years we have found so many members that have bonded over a game and created a new friendship at our events—even some that went on to get married.

We also started a tournament event every quarter with our first one being very successful in September. Our next one is looking to be in December. We select whichever game we think will get the most action or which is requested the most and set it up. With prize sponsors and having it hosted at a video lounge, we think these will become very big in the coming year.

One more recent event, held on November 8th, was our very first Retro Movie Night with Houston Gaymers hosted at Domy. We showed the movie The Wizard and had retro consoles scattered throughout the event. We hope to have that continue to be a quarterly event as well.

HOW CAN ONE GET INVOLVED WITH HELPING OUT HOUSTON GAYMERS?

The best way to stay involved and up to date on events is by joining our Facebook group. We just recently broke 600 members and are very proud to be the largest local Gaymer group in the U.S.

As far as becoming an active volunteer with Houston Gaymers, it is always best to just approach me or email houstongaymers@gmail.com. We have several volunteer subcommittees that help Lee Longoria and I make these events run smoothly and efficiently. We also have people who help by bringing equipment to meetups. All of the equipment is volunteer equipment and has been from the beginning. FPH

For more information visit: www.houstongaymers.com







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TKNY, *Phantom Thought* (detail), white house paint on black wall, image courtesy of TKNY © TKNY. Photo by: Brandon Holley

MFAH
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

INTERVIEW

Lenwood Johnson

BY AMANDA HART
PHOTO BY PAUL HESTER

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING FREEDMEN'S TOWN has been explored over this past year by Free Press Houston in the form of investigative articles and a community-focused documentary that featured longtime resident, Lenwood Johnson. The following is a follow-up interview with Johnson to highlight the current state of affairs in one of Houston's oldest townships.

WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY OF FREEDMEN'S TOWN FACING RIGHT NOW?

Just like French novelist Alphonse Karr stated in about 1849, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That being said, that is what is facing the Freedmen's Town community today. Slavery ended, but it did not end. Starting with Jim Crow (the "separate but equal" doctrine), it just took a new form – economic slavery. The masters, just like during slavery, are deciding the fate of this community.

The decision was made starting in about the 1920's to remove all Blacks from Freedmen's Town. That removal is what's going on today. With only a few relics left, the powers that be (developers that control the city government) are still working to remove the indigenous population. Soon, you will never know that Freedmen's Town ever existed. You will never know that people came from bondage slavery on plantations and built a self-contained free civil society here.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE VICTOR STREET ROW HOUSES?

The 10 Victor Street row houses are the last remaining city block of shotguns that are left in Freedmen's Town. They are nearly a 100 years old. These are the typical type of tenements that made up Freedmen's Town. The City of Houston has done everything they could to remove the row houses as a place for the indigenous population to live. It is part of the continuing plot to get rid of the Blacks from this area.

Right now, there is a group of compromised church ministers agreeing to the city's idea of removal and relocation of four of the shotgun style houses to another site. Then they will demolish the rest for spare parts (that may be good for cars, but unheard of for buildings). The city has the money to save the building on-site in part due to Freedmen's Town being on the National Register of Historic Places. But they have chosen to destroy the last freed slave settlements in the country so that developers can make money.

ANY NEWS ON THE REPURPOSING PROJECT AT BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH?

Bethel Baptist Church was organized in 1891 by a former slave who was one of the founders of Freedmen's Town, Rev. Jack Yates. The current building was started in 1923 with several later additions.

There was a fire in the then-vacant three-story church in 2005. Although the city had a contractor waiting to bulldoze the church as soon as the fire was put out, residents literally stood in front of the bulldozer to stop the demolition.

Because of the historical significances of the building, the city finally decided to keep the property as a park. There was a request to have a doggie park put on the site that would be gated and only accessible with a gate card by the new homeowners in the area. The city found this to be untenable at the present time. However, as they remove more Black people that may still be in the plans. But, currently, the city is working to turn the site into a park. What kind - that is another question. There are no parks left in the community for bigger children except the small Wiley Park. And it appears that the plans in store for Bethel are not to enrich the lives of the original community but more so for the newly-developed townhome inhabitants.

IF PEOPLE WANTED TO GET INVOLVED IN THE FIGHT TO SAVE FREEDMEN'S TOWN HOW WOULD THEY GO ABOUT DOING THAT?

With the city using every governmental institution to target the people and places in Freedmen's Town, we need hands-on help from all professions. The Free Man's Neighborhood Association has been working since about 1983 to try to save the neighborhood. However, this low-income community lacks many of the skills that are needed to be effective. Further, the concerned residents are older and need additional hands and legs. **FPH**



▲ FREEDMEN'S TOWN ROW HOUSE CIRCA 1984

If anyone would like to get involved - please come by, call, or email our office at:

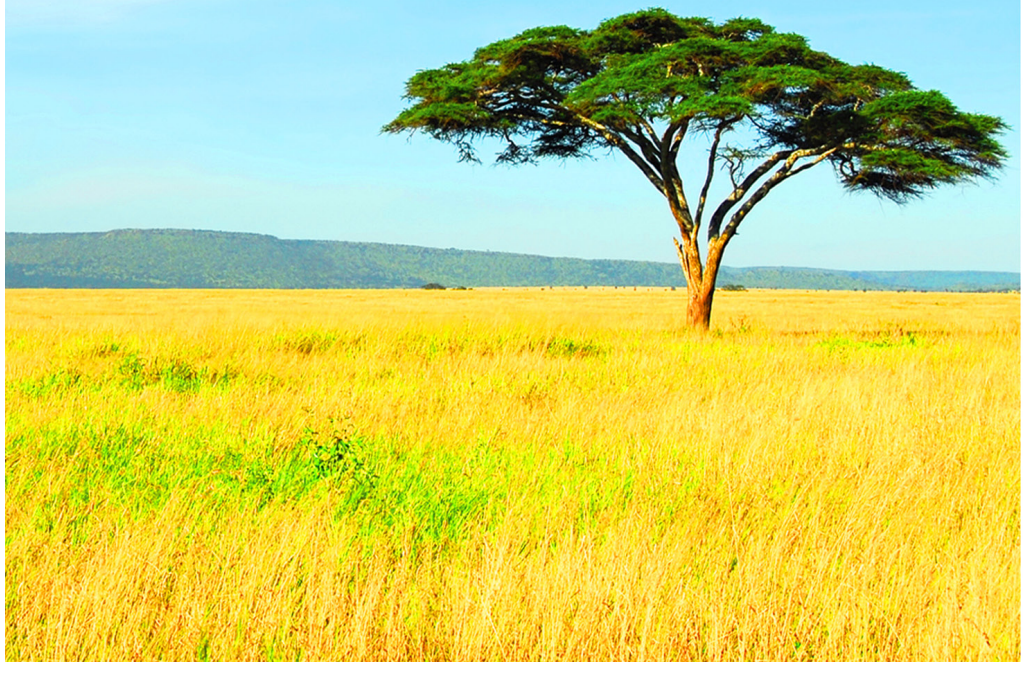
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Lenwood E. Johnson
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Working together, we can build the structures to preserve part of the American history that helped build this country. We can change this country by eventually getting rid of the corporate control of our electoral politics — as planned by some members of this community.



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Enlist to Fight the Northern Invasion

BY NICK COOPER | ILLUSTRATION BY BLAKE JONES

IN JANUARY 2012, due to public pressure, Obama kicked the Keystone XL pipeline plans back to committee. This bought much-needed time for vulnerable communities from Canada to Texas to organize, but that time is coming to an end.

Like deep-water drilling, tar sands are significantly more dangerous than regular oil wells. They are such a dirty energy source, from extraction to transport to combustion, that leading NASA climate scientist James Hansen called the Keystone XL "game over" for the climate. The pipeline would bring highly toxic Canadian petroleum products through many vulnerable ecosystems in the U.S. A partnership between TransCanada, ConocoPhillips, and Valero, the Keystone XL would probably feed into refineries in Houston's Manchester neighborhood, adding to the already toxic mix of chemicals in the air.

When Obama delayed one portion of the pipeline, due to concerns about risks to an aquifer in Nebraska, it opened him and the Democrats up to harsh criticisms from Republican challengers in the 2012 election. Negative publicity came from the oil industry, which is spending millions to paint the pipeline as a solution for energy independence and employment.

Obama doubled down on the southern portion, exposing Texans and Oklahomans to an immediate attack from highly funded multinational corporations. This pipeline would make TransCanada rich while encroaching on ranch lands, poisoning Texas's working class communities, and destroying the environment.

And the people know it. Despite the millions spent by the American Petroleum Institute in the election, most candidates that ran on an environmental platform won their races this year (including every single senator who opposed the pipeline), and in a recent poll by the National Wildlife Federation, independent voters said they would choose wind and solar over Keystone XL by a 4-1 margin.

After an election, Americans tend to want to take a break from politics. However, applying the continuous pressure needed to defend massive corporate undertakings like this takes much more than voting. All too often we fail to invest the time and energy to win the battles for clean energy policies. In such a corrupt economy as ours, we must force our "leaders" to make the right decisions. The other side in this struggle has significantly more resources to influence elected representatives, intimidate landowners and communities, and in the case of the Keystone XL, they have momentum on their side, as they have already started construction. On our side, we have the science and the people, if the people will only stand together.

The Manchester neighborhood near the Houston Ship Channel is a hub of the country's oil refining and petrochemical industries. Valero and other refineries loom over this neighborhood where lower-income families live. The University of Texas School of Public Health found in 2005 that the air in Manchester is dangerous to breathe. The concentrations of chemicals linked to cancer, kidney and liver damage, and other serious health effects were sometimes as much as 20 times the federal guidelines used for toxic waste dumps.

Valero has told its investors that it plans to use Foreign Trade Zone status so that its oil can be exported tax-free to international markets. This pattern of corporations profiting from the pollution of poor neighborhoods without paying anything back is common across the U.S. and is referred to as "environmental racism." Despite the name, Manchester is not an estate for British gentry. As is common with toxic petrochemical plants, communities of color bear the brunt of the toxicity.

Luckily, when it comes to taking on Keystone XL, we don't have to start from scratch. There's already a vibrant movement we can connect with in Houston, and in Winnsboro, Texas, about two hours east of Dallas. Activists with Tar Sands Blockade are organizing, rallying, speaking, holding barbecues, and some are risking arrest in a sustained nonviolent direct action campaign. In late September, police subjected Texas activists Benjamin Franklin and Shannon Bebe to stress positions, sustained chokeholds, violent arm-twisting, pepper spray, and repeated tasering to get them to abandon their blockade of the construction equipment. Actress Daryl Hannah and a 78-year-old great-grandmother, Eleanor Fairchild, were arrested in October for refusing to move from the path of heavy logging machinery.

But Daryl Hannah can't fix this for us. It's up to all of us. Though some are willing to go to jail for justice, there are many less 'arresty' ways in which concerned Texans can participate. Those interested can find more info at www.tarsandsblockade.org. As always, calling and writing to elected officials is crucial, but it seems that this battle will not be won without people amassing in large numbers to say no to tar sands and yes to a clean environment and all that flourishes within it. **FPH**



Leading NASA climate scientist James Hansen called the Keystone XL "game over" for the climate.



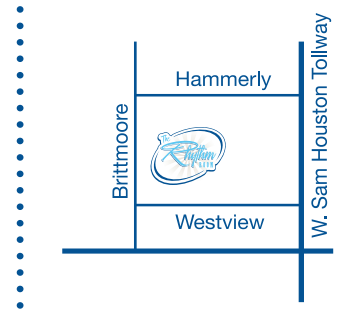
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"Walker" from Tar Sands Blockade

BY NICK COOPER | PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAR SANDS BLOCKADE

NICK COOPER INTERVIEWED "WALKER," a pseudonym used by one of a dozen activists who have come to Houston to be part of the campaign to stop the southern leg of the Keystone XL. Since Obama has been fast-tracking its construction, farmers are finding their land taken away with no further recourse through the legal system. In addition to the seizing of land and the risk of leaks (which are inevitable given enough time) of this highly toxic fuel, Houston is probably the end-point where the refining of tar sands will add to the already toxic air that disproportionately affects minority communities.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH TAR SANDS BLOCKADE?

After seeing an image online of friends at the blockade with a big banner reading "You Shall Not Pass" I decided to drop everything and come to Texas to stand in solidarity with my comrades fighting resource extraction, corporate ecocide, and ultimately the cruel, exploitative hand of capitalism which, of course, allows companies like TransCanada to thrive.

WHAT ACTIONS HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED IN?

I have been involved in multiple actions with the Tar Sands Blockade. Upon first arriving to Texas, I worked as part of the ground crew providing direct support for comrades occupying the tree village. This included providing food, water, emotional support, and physically protecting the tree sitters. Several times, large machinery called feller bunchers (think Fern Gully) came dangerously close to trees our friends were sitting-in, putting their lives in direct danger. It was up to us in the ground support crew to put our bodies in the line of machinery and turn TransCanada around. Eventually the ground support crew was forced out of Middle Earth (the given name for the woods where the tree village is located) by increased repression from the state and TransCanada, who may as well have been synonymous with each other. I worked on a mass action which included over 50 people defying TransCanada and police and charging the site of the tree village to provide food and water to friends and comrades in the trees who had been under the constant surveillance of both aforementioned parties and essentially held hostage with the threat of arrest and being added to a SLAPP suit (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation).

HOW HAVE THE COPS TREATED YOU?

The majority of interactions with law enforcement have been with the Wood County Sheriff in Northeastern Texas. These interactions ranged from mild harassment to full-on torture.

HOW DO YOU MAKE DECISIONS WITHIN THE GROUP?

When we hold meetings (which often take up multiple hours per day) we strive to incorporate as many voices as possible and work together to formulate decisions that will work for everyone in the group. If this sounds arduous that's because it is. However, as we work to fight against the destruction of our water, our air, and our land base, we find it imperative to also create a new community that will not repeat the same mistakes of the old.

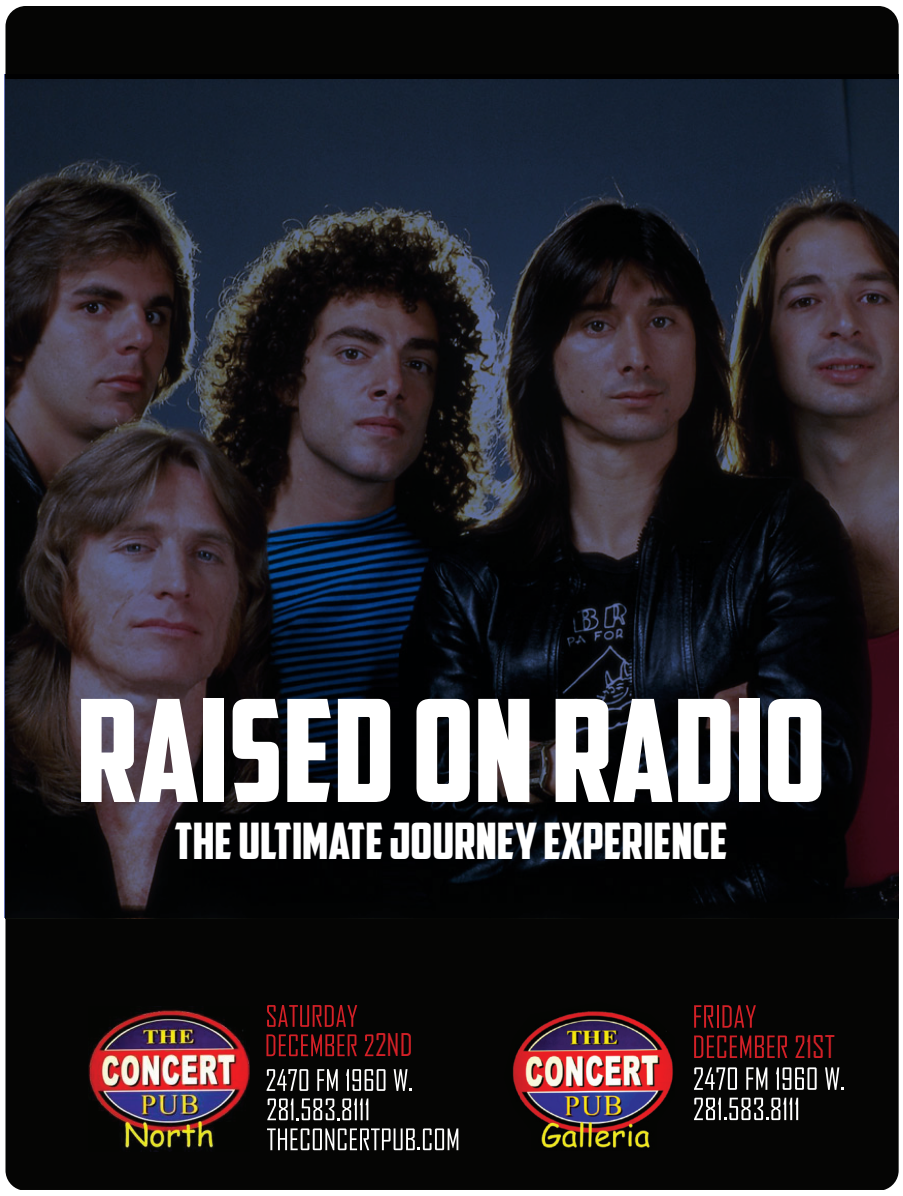
WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR INTERACTION WITH THE FARMERS/LANDOWNERS?

Landowners and farmers here have been strong allies to Tar Sands Blockaders. They have welcomed me and many others with open arms. We have shared meals, beds, stories of hope, and stories of despair. We have fought side by side to defend farmland, cherished woods, and backyards from this dangerous and dirty pipeline that is destroying communities all along its murderous route — from the point of extraction in Alberta where first-nation, indigenous folks are being exploited and sickened, to the homes and farms of Texans and other Americans, the woods that are home to plants, trees, and animals — many already on the brink of extinction — and in Houston and Port Arthur where the pipeline will pump tar sands into refineries that will, in turn, pump (even more) toxins and carcinogens into the lungs of marginalized communities of color.



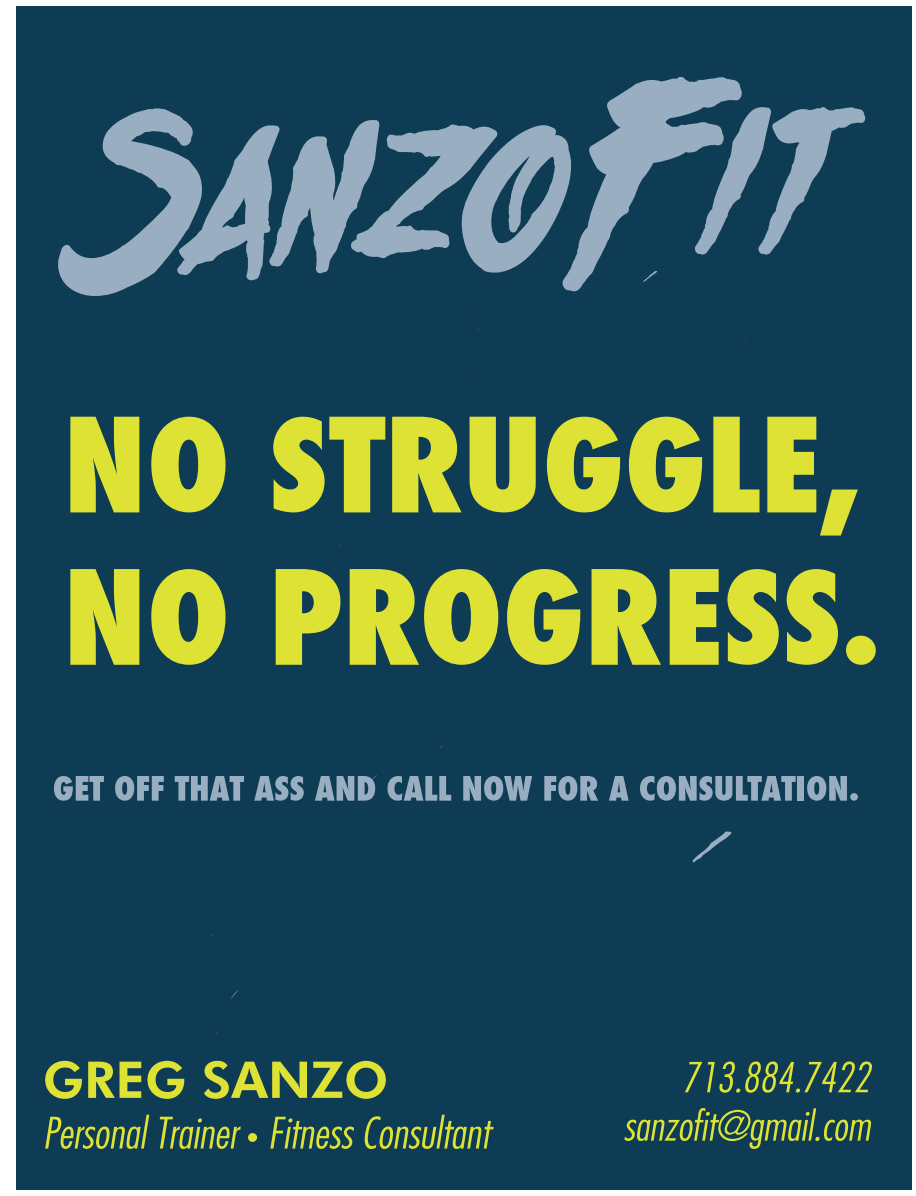


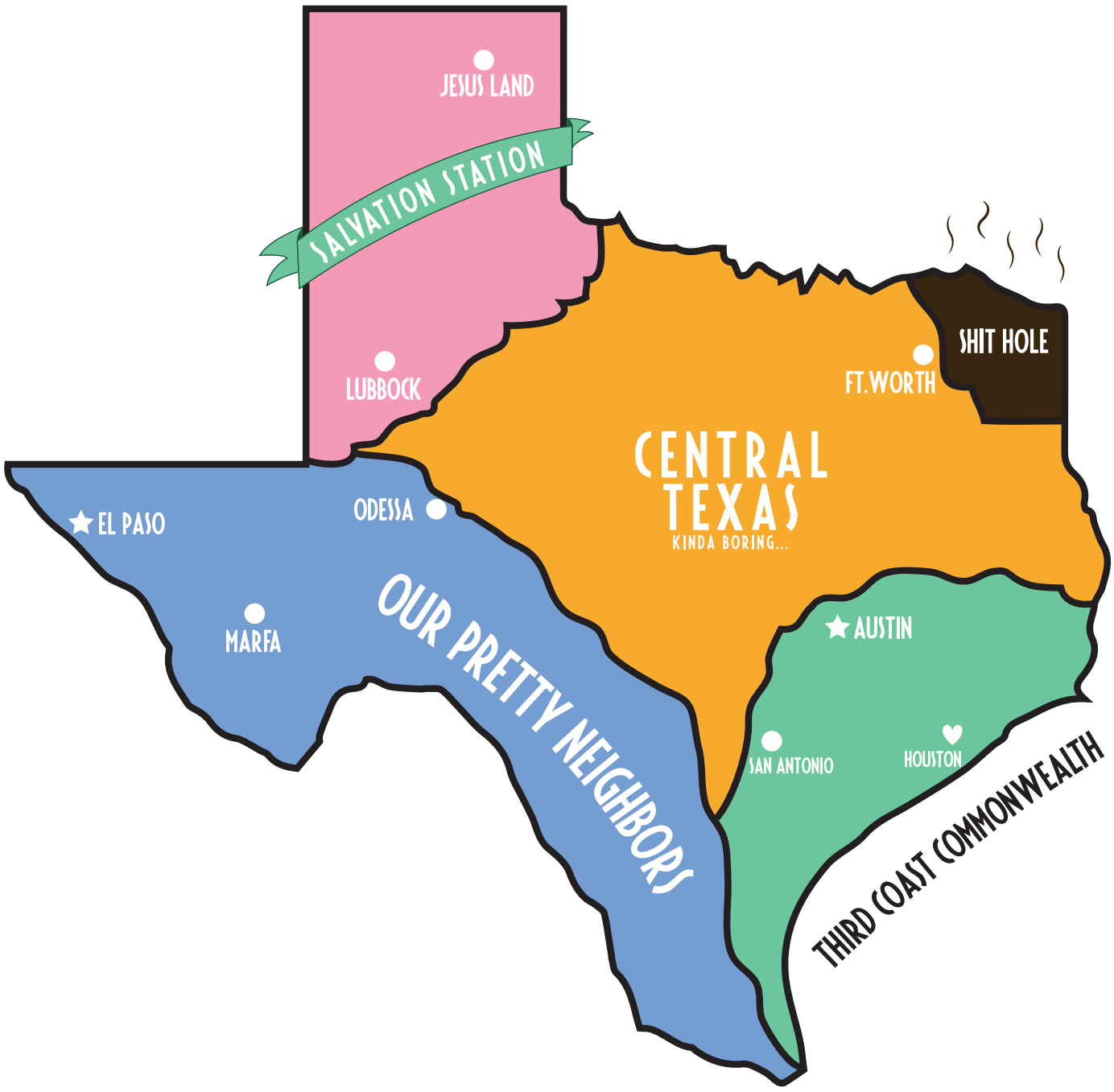



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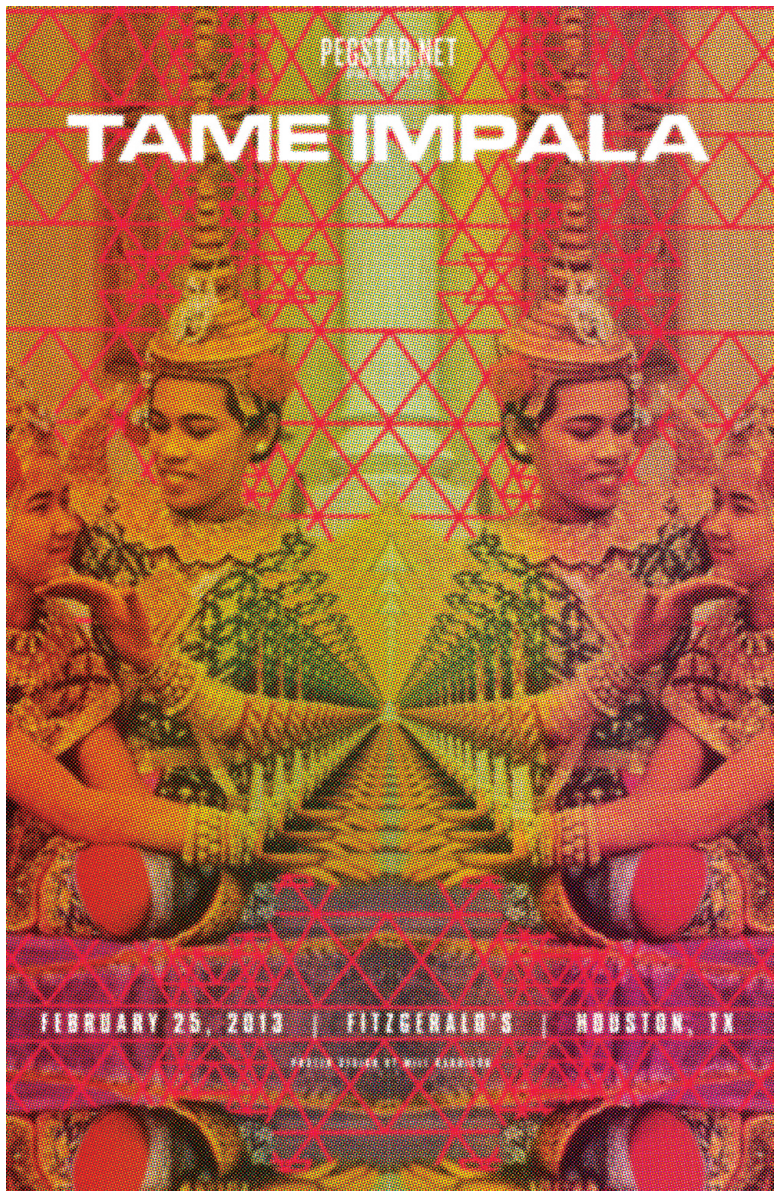
BY AMANDA HART
ILLUSTRATION BY BLAKE JONES

WE'VE ALL HAD A ROUGH ELECTION CYCLE this year. Shit was intense. Not to mention that the relief many of us felt when they called the election in Obama's favor was short-lived. Especially since we all awoke to reports of crazy, in-denial white people doing things like stocking up on guns, demanding his impeachment, and starting petitions requesting the right to secede from the union. Which if you grew up in Texas, wasn't all that shocking. We have become accustomed to this very specific kind of Caucasian crazy. The difference now though is that they are taking the crazy out of the confines of our state lines. So now the world knows our dirty little secret. Many Texas whities are at the very least ignorant and in many cases intolerably racist.

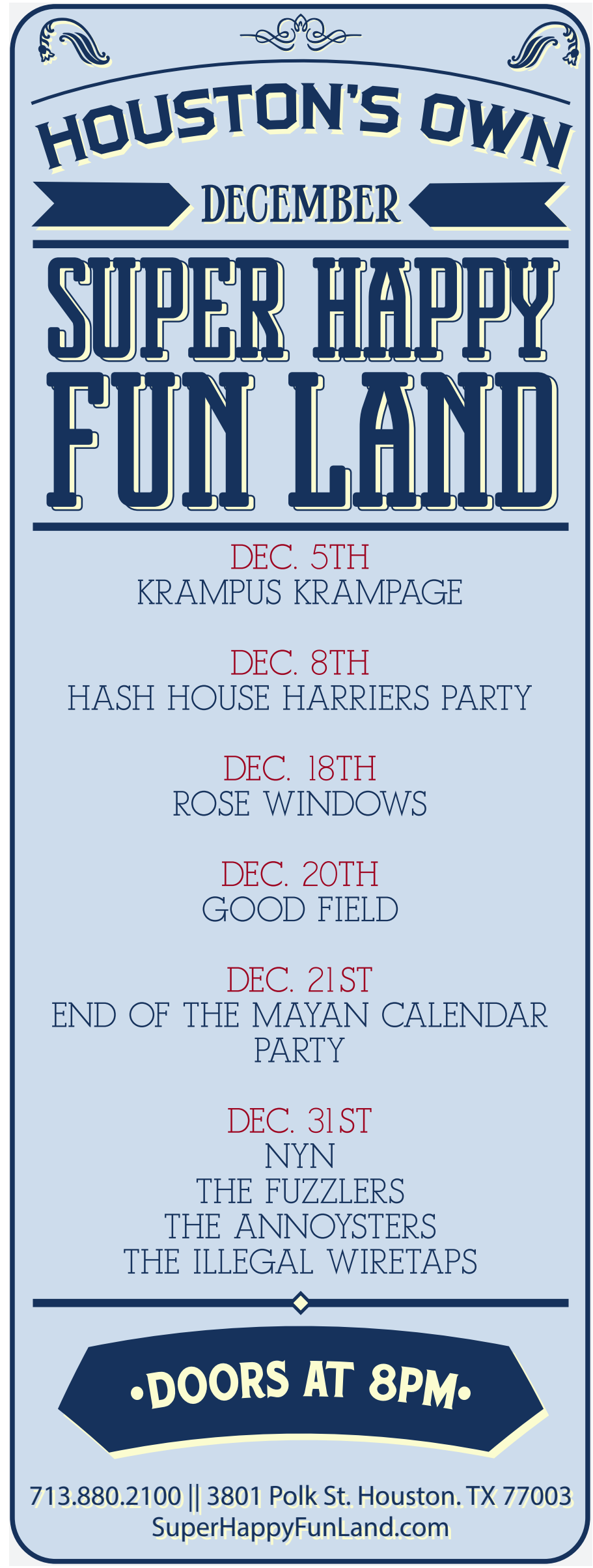
Perry made a statement after the signatures kept growing in favor of secession that Texas would not even entertain the idea of leaving our great union. Which is humorous when one recalls that a few years back that same man stated at a Tea Party rally that we would consider the idea if "Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people." We seem to forget the last time our state pulled that shit. You know, around the year 1861 when we did, in fact, secede from the union over the right to own human beings. It was around that same time when the North shut us the fuck down. But we, for some reason, seem to overlook that part of our shameful history and, in theory, seem doomed to repeat it.

With all the recent attention given to Texas over its demands to secede, we decided to examine this issue from a few prospective possibilities. If we are going to secede we need to be smart about it. The only way to do this is to secede from one another and not the entire U.S. Or we could aim a little higher as a community and not have a political climate that demands we address this unnerving topic in a serious manner.

In October of this year, I wrote an article entitled, "Perry said, 'Secede.' I Say, 'Agreed'" and posted it to the Free Press Houston blog. The article comes off as tongue-in-cheek and on some level was me being a sarcastic liberal with a pipe dream. However, now that the issue of secession has made its way back to the main stage, yet again, I feel it is necessary to explore this idea. In my original article, I made a case for why Houston should secede from Texas. Not only is this possi-


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ble but is an active part of our state constitution. When Texas entered the union in 1845, we did in fact request that our state constitution include the right to secede at any moment from the union (which is why you hear people claim this as an option so often). But logically (and thankfully) this was not granted by the union and instead we were given the right to divide ourselves into as many as five separate states. Just consider this a methadone clinic for the secessionist itch that so many Texans are dying to scratch.

Dividing Texas into five states would actually do wonders to balance the power in our massive sprawling state. Currently, Texas holds 38 electoral votes, 36 for our representatives and two for our senators. But in a five-state Texas our electoral vote would jump from 38 to 46. This is because our senators would increase from two to 10. This would not just be an improvement for Texans but for the entire country seeing as the last time Texas went blue during a presidential campaign was in 1976 with Jimmy Carter.

My original plan is as follows: The first state, which would include Houston, I affectionately labeled The Third Coast Commonwealth (TCC). Our boundaries would stretch from Brownsville up through San Antonio and Austin and over to Beaumont (minus Vidor because we would just set that racist place on fire and call it a day). Houston would be the new capital and ultimately would come to be known as the liberal haven of the five proposed states. Rick Perry and his cronies could either relocate to Dallas or make the move to state three, also known as Salvation Station as it has been labeled on the boundaries map. In our new commonwealth, racism, sexism, and homophobia would not be tolerated and would carry a strict punishment of being banished to Dallas. For the purposes of this proposal just think of Dallas as our Alcatraz. Sorry Dallas, try sucking just a little bit less and then we might not feel the need to exile assholes to your new state. I know, I know - the idea of you sucking less is laughable but I'm trying to be diplomatic during this transition. I debated just giving you to Arkansas, so consider yourself lucky. Also, I'm gifting you the whole mess of white people located to our North - or the Woodlands as they like to call it. You're welcome.

Salvation Station, which would be located in the Panhandle, is not only an ideal place to send all the Obama-fearing Christians because most of them live there already but strategically it is the furthest away from us. Well, technically El Paso would be the furthest distance but I have no beef with El Paso and their sector has Marfa and Big Bend which I would like to visit without the fear of being labeled a baby murderer for having a uterus or condemned to hell. So cheers El Paso, it appears we are going to fare quite nicely from this plan.

Our first plan of action here in the TCC would actually be to remove any border that separates Mexico from Texas and reposition it to the top half of our state. Central Texas will act as a buffer zone between the two of us. Central Texas really just does not have a lot going on but that was the case prior to any redistricting on my part. But hey, at least we got rid of Dallas for you.

Basically, we will be creating one gigantic Montrose here in the Third Coast Commonwealth. We can have community gardens and artist collectives on every street corner. Feeding the homeless won't be illegal and we can turn the Astrodome into one gigantic grow room. Together we can enact responsible public policies and create a future for next generations to be able to remain in Texas. Fuck it, let's create our own Texas. I mean, that's what the conservatives have been doing for the last two decades anyway.

The idea of turning Texas blue during a presidential election is still considered by many to be a distant but possible future. However, if we went ahead and separated our great state politically we would save ourselves and future politicians the trouble of making our lives a living hell by becoming a swing state. You think you loathe the political climate during election season now? Let us become the next Ohio and we would end up committing suicide by slitting our wrists with political yard signs. However, if we divide Texas up and naturally let people find their way to the part of Texas that fits their lifestyle, we would effectively avoid being harassed by politicians for their vote. Obama took every major city in Texas this past election season. Which means that if Texas was divided into normal sized state, three of those five states would go democratic for sure. Central Texas would be the only swing state and the Panhandle would just bleed nothing but red. So what are we waiting for? The state Democratic party should get on this.

While this all might seem a bit silly, we really should be concerned that if we keep making a ruckus about seceding that the federal government will, at some point, recognize that they have a lot more to gain by giving us the ax than we stand to gain from giving them the finger. The reality of it is that the United States does not need Texas. Unfortunately, not everyone seems to understand this or they would not be petitioning the government to remove us from the union. One would have to ask themselves if they enjoy things such as: roads, schools, infrastructure, Social Security, fire departments, NASA, FDIC insured banks, post offices, numerous social safety nets, and a million other things that we rely on the federal government to provide.

In fact, Texas receives nearly $300 billion annually from the federal government to keep it operating. Not to mention that the federal government would probably not allow us to become our own country without handing over some of the national debt in the process. And while Texas might be able to support itself, has anyone wondered who the hell would enter into a trade agreement with us post-secession? The U.S. would most definitely embargo the shit out of us. And a pretty safe bet would be that anyone that the U.S. has trade relations with would have absolutely nothing to do with us. And, although we might be heavily armed as a state, do we actually think that we could take on the U.S. or, better yet, Mexico's army? Pretty sure that if Texas decided to become its own nation, Mexico would be more than happy to try and reclaim what used to be their territory. Effectively changing the "Come and Take It" flag to simply "Took It" overnight. FPH


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