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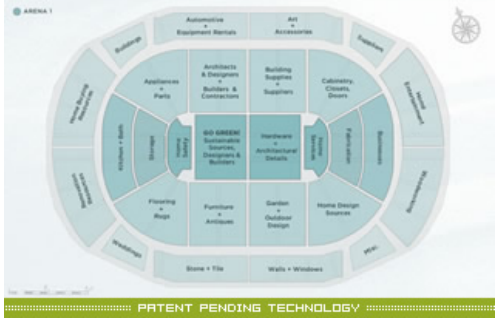


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The Illuminated Landscape: Green art at the Voodoo Music Experience

Written by: Simonette Berry

Art is among the highest forms of social expression in any culture; it is a language everyone understands, cutting through viewers' individual differences to express an elemental, unifying truth. In the fast-growing music festival scene, artists have found an opportunity to express their messages to massive crowds who might not otherwise be exposed to them. They also have the opportunity to create large-scale installations that integrate their environment and often the people at the festival.

At New Orleans' 12th annual 2010 Voodoo Experience in City Park, festival curator and co-producer Stefan Beese brought together a team of celebrated national and international artists to entertain festival-goers while sending an important message of environmental and social awareness: Recycle, Reduce, Re-use. The exhibition provided another layer to the multi-sensory experience of the festival, celebrating experimentation with technology, electronic media, and the unconventional use of recycled, re-used, and sustainable materials. "Each artist was required to add a layer of light to their installation. The festival was like a temporary city, and the art had a function along with everything else," says Beese.

Beese met Stephen Rehage, founder of Voodoo Music Experience, when they worked together on the Pink House Project in the

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Lower 9th Ward with the Make It Right Foundation. The two men joined forces to create a successful entertainment design company with offices in New York, Los Angeles, and New Orleans that puts on festivals and charity events across the nation. They now produce two of New Orleans' three major music events, Essence Festival and the Voodoo Music Experience. They also produced this summer's Gulf Aid Benefit concert.

"Since Katrina, we've had to change the site of Voodoo four times in six years. Each time, that change has taken colossal effort. In 2005, 2006, and 2007, we weren't in a position to worry about getting generators that were environmentally friendly. Most people were lucky to have power. We were leading parallel lives with everyone else in the city, just trying to survive," says Rehage. "Now we're finally in the same spot for three years in a row and are able to get creative with the art as well as the production, to think about solar trucks and low-energy lighting."

The festival producers went beyond the art with their efforts at sustainability by using SaddleSpan stage canopies that require less energy to erect than the old canopies, by building much of the infrastructure out of recycled pallets, and by re-using the large metal "Voodoo" sign and the 2009 VIP platforms made from large metal shipping containers.

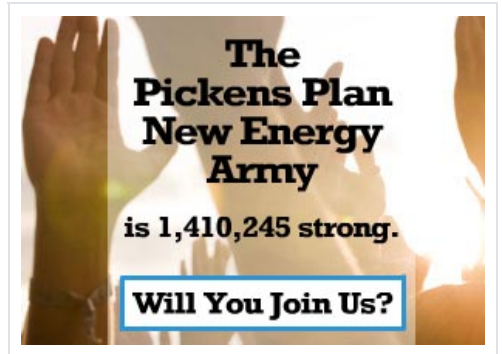
"We used to ship in grandstands every year. These big metal containers create a neat visual effect, with the name of the festival cut out of the side, and we can store things inside of them during the year. We're making them a permanent installation," Beese says.

"Our focus now is sustainability," he explains. "We've re-used elements from past years and tried to minimize the transportation of the art installations, which lowers the cost and the carbon footprint. We look for pieces that are locally available, and if it does come from out of town, we're not shipping it in from overseas."

"One of the first artists I contacted was Pete Silve," Beese says. Silve and the Photonic Bliss team from Colorado created a glowing 12-foot-wide pyramid that used the movement of festival-goers dancing inside of it to create corresponding sound and light effects. As participants stepped beneath the apex of the pyramid, they created torrents of light and sound that pulsed with each motion of their bodies. A kind of surreal jungle gym, the Galactic Station encouraged people to engage with the art in a pure, childlike way. All lights used were low-energy LED bulbs.

"I asked Pete Silve if he knew anyone in their area that would be willing to do a piece that we could ship with theirs. He suggested Butch Kanter," says Beese. "Once I saw that his piece was an art car that premiered at the Burning Man festival this year, I immediately saw it on grassy hills of City Park, near the running track. Kanter and Silve's team drove all their materials down together from Colorado to the festival."

Kanter's art car was a hit festival installation called "The Mushroom Patch." A sculpture made of several 15-foot-tall mushrooms, the piece was made of hundreds of finely welded metal rods and over 85 feet of full spectrum LED pixels that



changed from one vibrant color to the next. As the sun set each night, the glowing mycelium patch looked like something out of an enchanted wood as people lounged on the plush cushioned surface beneath the mushrooms, watching the music at the Voodoo and Sony stages.

“The Mushroom Patch” was one of a few pieces that ran completely from solar power, thanks to a solar truck that was donated. The solar truck also provided power for a wildly popular interactive piece that was brought back from last year, “Cone v2.” Created by German architects Manuel Kretner and Hans Sachs, “Cone v2” stands 27 feet high and is comprised of two tall cones of light made of a filigree lattice of 700 PVC pipes that house bright LED light bars. The inner cone remains in place, able to house 15 or 20 people as they dance to the music. They can also reach out to spin the large outer cone on its rail, creating the impression of being part of a giant machine.

Another enchanting installation was “The Vaudeville Theater,” a collaboration between Susie Kim, Project 12, and Beese. The Green Project, a local nonprofit organization, also donated time and resources. The theater environment was created as an homage to the era of silent cinema, projecting silent films while local musicians improvised at a piano to accompany the films.

“Hopefully this installation will raise awareness about the need for recycling in the city,” says Kim. The entire tent was made of old newspapers, which were recycled after the festival. Even the seating was made up of rolled up magazines donated by local media organizations. “When we made the newspaper walls, we used specific headlines that pertained to New Orleans issues: The music, the culture, the oil spill, the crime, and the Saints. It all has meaning. It’s the essence of what New Orleans has gone through in the past year,” he says. Painted over one newspapered wall was a brilliant white, red, and black Mardi Gras Indian that seemed to dance over the words, feathers flying.

Where Kim and her team used newspaper, Thomas Rush used water bottles to make a statement. Rush made a direct connection between the festival’s landscape and his piece made of hundreds of empty plastic water bottles suspended on a wire armature. The bottles represent a small fraction of the 2.5 million bottles that are disposed of every hour in the U.S. Titled “Swell Holding,” the piece looks like a large wave of bottles arching out of City Park’s lagoon and splashing onto the grass. “It was a great hang-out spot during the day, creating a canopy for patrons to hang out under,” says Beese. Lit up at night, the arch created an illuminated doorway to the Le PLUR stage. “The materials used to create the arch are meant to comment on the futility of shipping water to and fro, across continents and oceans in plastic containers, when the same water falls from the sky, delicious and free,” says Rush.

Beese also created his own installation, with the help of the Rebe design team. “Arachnid” was a colorful spider web made of purple and blue low-energy electroluminescent wires. The web created a series of ethereal, glowing patterns at night, suspended between the arms of two ancient oaks. “‘Arachnid’ was a great success at night, the lights pulsating and revealing the entrance to the main field,” Beese says. Among the other inspirational installations were “Sousaphorescense,” a silent

circle of tubas painted with chalkboard paint, lit from the inside, and drawn on all weekend by festival-goers; the Munz and D6 artistic team's "Hot Shot the Robot," a robot made from recycled parts that wheeled around, talking with festival patrons animatedly; and "Paper Airplane," a piece done by Dave Rhodes to commemorate John Bevin's Moisant, who designed, built, and flew the first metal aircraft in City Park in 1910.

The sculptor Henry Moore once said, "Between beauty of expression and power of expression there is a difference of function. The first aims at pleasing the senses, the second has a spiritual vitality which for me is more moving and goes deeper than the senses." The spiritual vitality Moore spoke of was present in the artwork at the Voodoo Music Experience this year. People were encouraged to interact with the art, spend time in its shade, and consider its function. The pieces were woven into the fabric of the landscape of City Park just as we are woven into our environment. Like the art, we should shine brightly and encourage others to be conscious of preserving the air, water, resources, and energy that we enjoy. ♦

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