

City

Posted on Tue, Jan. 15, 2008 10:15 PM

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A tow lot's refuse inspires a work of art

By ALAN GOFORTH

Special to The Star

An untitled photograph in "Tow Lot Vanitas."

Most city residents would prefer to have as little to do with the Kansas City tow lot as possible. But where others see hassles and hefty fines, Miki Baird sees art.

"The overall contents of the tow lot appears to be remarkably representative of the population of greater Kansas City," she said. "As individual objects, the vehicles are a trove of information, and in many ways they are telling about the owners, sometimes revealing to the point of pain."

Baird spent four months photographing cars at the lot on Stadium Drive last year. "Tow Lot Vanitas," an exhibition of those images, opens Friday with a reception at Paragraph, a gallery at 23 E. 12th St. in Kansas City. The exhibit is part of the Charlotte Street Foundation's Urban Art Project.

"We have had an ongoing relationship with Miki as an active artist in the community," said Kate Hackman, associate director of the foundation. "She approached us about whether we could be an outlet for her work, and we began working on this exhibition."

Baird has exhibited extensively in the region. Her work titled "Sidewalk Confetti" was featured as part of the 2006 Avenue of the Arts. The current exhibit grew out of a longtime fascination.

"I have always been interested in the investigative process," she said. "I started taking photos of myself and then other people, which led to documentation about rubbish and things that people leave behind."

The inspiration for the tow lot project came while Baird served on a One Percent for Art selection panel to choose an artist for the new tow services building now under construction. The panel made several visits to the city tow lot, where Baird began to see the possibilities.

“My interest is not in describing the tow lot as an entirety but in collecting information about the presence and movement of people from a continuing series of sites; in this case, the tow lot,” she said. “My challenge is to communicate through my art, in the best way I can, the information found in the bits and pieces of images retrieved from each vehicle.”

Baird will delve more deeply into this topic in a panel discussion on “Tow Lot Art and Architecture,” scheduled for 6 p.m. Feb. 6 at Paragraph. Joining her will be Dan Maginn, architect for the new building, and Matt Dehaemers, the artist selected by the panel. The event is free and open to the public.

Baird hopes the exhibition will encourage viewers to consider the narrative stories behind everyday things that often seem mundane on the surface.

“My intent is to recover visual clues that, when pieced together, reflect the presence, place, and social and cultural habits depicting the flow of activity that prevails in our everyday lives,” she said.

The details

“Tow Lot Vanitas”

Paragraph, 23 E. 12th St.

Kansas City, MO

•Opening reception: 6 to 9 p.m., Friday

•Exhibit hours: Noon to 5 p.m. Thursdays and Saturdays, through Feb. 9

•For more information:

www.urbancultureproject.org

www.mikibaird.com