

Art Walk

A stroll along the Avenue of the Arts is an exercise to determine how much Kansas City cares.

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Sabrina Jones and Shellae Blackwell are walking along Central downtown. The Virginians are in Kansas City for the national convention of Neighborhoods, USA at Bartle Hall. As it turns out, their organization focuses on strengthening communities by doing things such as awarding beautification grants to neighborhoods.

. <http://www.pitch.com/photoGallery/index.php?id=151231&p=1>

o. Susan White's "Lyric Lascaux"

Subject(s): Avenue of the Arts

So Jones and Blackwell could not be more pleased to see Kansas City's **Avenue of the Arts**, where six site-specific works of art by regional artists recently went on display; they'll be up along Central between Ninth and 14th streets through the summer. Seven years ago, when the city first designated Central as the Avenue of the Arts, the choice seemed arbitrary. Now, however, it's obvious that the strategy was to place the art near the convention center.

"It's all about perception. If there is a building that has a broken window and it stays broken for months or years, that is a sign that the neighborhood does not care," Jones says. Conversely, public art shows that a community cares. It allows boundaries to be crossed between subcultures in diverse areas. "You can tell a lot about a city by its art," she adds.

The women seem most pleased with Miki Baird's "Sidewalk Confetti," and their enthusiasm is contagious. The meandering line of images — photographs the size of refrigerator magnets and bright colors — begs the eye to follow it down the sidewalk. Some images are recognizable Kansas City landmarks, such as the Town Topic sign; others are just snapshots of people. "Confetti" is playful and fun, but it also contains some social commentary. Most Kansas Citians don't walk along downtown streets very often, if ever. Baird seems to have chosen the sidewalk as a way of saying, "Hey, remember me? I used to be an important part of this city!"

Rolf and Margaret Brommelsick aren't commenting specifically on Kansas City in their work "Rabone 9." Instead, they've used what they call "universal symbols that take us beyond what is immediately known." Their houselike sculpture is placed on stilts; inside, it's decorated with highly pixilated and random photographs and scrawled with vague references evoking some universal feeling — "Do I need you or do you need me? No matter, we have come full circle" — that end up having about as much effect as the sentiments on a Starbucks wall. (The artists also have a hard time reconciling the proliferation of rabbits in their collage of images.)

Best exemplifying the idea of site-specific work is Susan White's "Lyric Lascaux." Her sand-colored canvas is stretched tautly across the side of the Lyric building, paying homage to its location by using distorted images of musical notes. White has explained that she wanted to draw attention to the metamorphosis occurring in downtown Kansas City, and she believed that she could do so by referencing the cave paintings

in Lascaux, France. And like haunting cave paintings that remind us we're not the first people to dwell on Earth, White's piece reminds us that we are not the first to dwell in this city. The restoration of the Hotel President, for example, shows that the handprints of the past are all over the rebirth of Kansas City's downtown.

Jorge Garcia is much more literal in his approach to this urban canvas. "Minor Chord" seems like a permanent installation. Garcia's red, white and blue materials eloquently follow the horizontal lines of a parking garage to form more abstract musical notes. Like White, Garcia is clearly aware of his work's proximity to the Lyric; the three separate pieces work with one another and the garage, much like a musical composition on a staff.

Farther down the street is "Sky Funnel" by Julia Cole and Leigh Rosser. This piece appears disjointed, maybe because it's mired in concept. It's a cool concept — collecting light patterns throughout the day and playing them back at night, taking an imprint of time and place — but it doesn't yield immediate satisfaction for passers-by and, as a result, is a bit exclusionary.

Achieving the opposite is Milton "Quint" Stevenson's "Balls on Bartle." Not only does the name provoke a bit of a laugh but also the work itself is amusing. It seems that Stevenson has simply chosen to have fun, and the brightly colored balls affixed to the east wall of Bartle Hall are pure eye candy.

For visitors to Kansas City and residents who spend time downtown, Avenue of the Arts shows that the city cares. Now the city ought to fund art projects beyond Central, out in the neighborhoods.