



## ARTS

# Mourning for Landscape, Ritual for Shelter

Jen Frost Smith's installation explored notions of home as the artist prepares to move

REVIEWED BY RACHEL KOPER, FRI., JUNE 26, 2009



## 'Mourning for Landscape, Ritual for Shelter'

Co-Lab

June 20

Co-Lab is an arts space on the Eastside that features a new visual art show each week, so it rotates exhibits just as quickly as this paper gets printed. Perhaps this frenetic scheduling is

an inspiration to the energetic artists who make work there. Jen Frost Smith spent six days creating a huge mixed-media installation that would be on view only one night. She made a tent and some curtained-off areas with blankets and pillows in the space. There were videos, sound loops, and black lights.

Some of the DayGlo handmade shelter elements remind me of Lizzy Wetzel's black-light dome in "The Medicine Show," currently up at Women & Their Work (where I am now working), and of the quirky handmade shelters made by some of the participants in Arthouse's "New American Talent" exhibition. Frost Smith told me lately she's been thinking about what it means to be American and what traditions or rituals we share, be they religious or consumer-oriented. One stand-alone consumer item is a Furby doll that is modified with red and white paint to look like a Santa Claus. This is just plain amusing with a confused toy-character-meets-consumer-Christmas overlay.

Frost Smith decided to design several activity zones within the gallery, each of which feels cluttered with her personality. A couple of shelves form a studio-type work space, a spot where art gets made. Above the utilitarian jars and shelves are a couple of paintings made directly on the wall. These works are tied most directly to Frost Smith's imminent move to Baltimore, where she will continue to study art. One image is of unlabeled hash marks, denoting a countdown or the passage of time. Next to it, the stenciled number 3115 represents a street address, a home. Then she portrays a distant city skyline. It's clean and elegant and feels hopeful, expansive, and optimistic. It's interesting to hear directly from the artist, and knowing that she is about to move certainly clarified the use of some particular images in the installation.

Frost Smith creates cozy nooks for reading, places to hang with friends and watch videos, places to draw and paint in. It's not that she re-created her house; it's that she envisioned future environments that contain certain comforting elements. Additionally, she creates odd totems, like an orange-stuffed triangle flag on top of a pole, for safety purposes and for parades. Frost Smith addresses her notions of "home" and "Indian sweat lodge" simultaneously here, as this art space is not air-conditioned. As we all glistened and listened to the ambient soundtrack, I was happy to be present. People sat outside at picnic tables while one guy watered the tomatoes out back. Co-Lab is a spirited gathering place. I say just go on over there even if you can't keep track of what



show is up.

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