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Berlin's 'Paper Girl' brings art to the streets

By Leah Moss 6.28.11 |
Moss(/author/leah-moss/articles/)

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Starting on the East Side and working their way through down town, the gang mounted up and handed out random pieces of art to lucky strangers *Photo by Leah Moss*

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Austin has a long-established art scene and an ever-growing bike culture. In a stroke of genius, Melissa Murray(<http://www.artreview.com/profiles/blog/list?user=09i5wojehrafo>) decided to engage both of these communities in one fun event, Paper Girl Street Art Project.

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Artist Aisha Ronniger first began Paper Girl(<http://papergirl-berlin.de/>) in 2005 in Berlin, Germany. At a time when police were cracking down on wheatpasters and graffiti artists, she and fellow artists sought a new way to distribute art in public spaces.

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Together, they used the traditionally America paper-boy method to distribute rolled up collections of art to pedestrians, people in cars and other passersby.

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Austin's edition of Paper Girl was just one in a series of Paper Girl events that have taken place across the country, from Portland(<http://papergirlportland.wordpress.com/>) to Brooklyn(<http://www.brooklynbybike.com/art-bicycles-papergirl-submission-deadline-aug-15th/>). Here in Texas, (<http://papergirl-world.blogspot.com/2011/06/papergirl-austin-texas.html>) Paper Girl was the collaborative effort of dozens of local artists, headed by Murray and CoLab(<http://colabspace.org/>) owner Sean Gaulager.

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Their intention was to simply share art with those not typically engaged. In doing so, the group created a piece of performance art all their own. At the heart of the performance lay Paper Girl's vision that Murray reiterates, “this isn’t about corporate art(<http://corporate.art.com/default.html>), it is about sharing art with everyone. That’s why art is made, to be shared.”

For the past month works were submitted, mostly unsigned, to the Co Lab space. After an initial opening all the work was taken off the walls, rolled up and distributed to a group of cyclists from the Austin social ride (<http://www.atxbs.com/>)scene. The art posse mounted up on June 25th and made their way through East Austin. Working their way through downtown to the Capitol, they handed out original art works to unsuspecting by standers.

The recipients’ reactions ran the gamut from fear of being handed yet another party flier to real excitement. Sean Gaulager(<http://seangaulager.com/>) encapsulated the audience reactions best, “We approached each person saying ‘would you like some free local art.’ Some people shook their heads no in annoyance and moved

away from us, some people just took it with a general apathetic stare, but others looked at it like they had just received the most amazing gift.”

For a two-hour bike ride in the terrible Texas heat,
(<http://www.timeanddate.com/weather/usa/austin/hourly>)
those smiles of genuine joy made the performance worth the sweat.

Melissa looks back on their work with a refreshing sense of humor: "All in all it was a great adrenaline rush for us. I was glad to see a good variety of reactions. I mean if you don't want the art, fine, you don't have to have it! What I cherish about the project is the reactions of those like that of the family at the capital and all the other smiling faces. Who knows what happened to the art... some of it could be in the trash...some of it could be framed hanging on someones wall, but that is something we probably won't know. The important thing about Paper Girl is the action of the artists willing to donate their work and the action of the riders giving it away to the public. Saying hey we are here and life is good."

In this money-driven society, it is refreshing to see an event that celebrates art in its purist form, without ego but with a whole lot of joy.

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