

Art exhibit utilizes abandoned spaces and items

By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) - American-Statesman Staff



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Yes, Austin's creative community faces a shortage of affordable and suitable space for artists and arts groups.

But one small nonprofit visual arts organization is taking advantage of the changing landscape.

For the next year, [Co-Lab Projects will operate Demo Gallery at 721 Congress Ave.](#), a long-empty retail space next to the historic Paramount and State theaters.

After sitting vacant for nearly two decades — an eyesore on Austin's prominent avenue — the shell of a building is now slated to be a “car-free” apartment tower, designed by Austin architect Brad Nelsen.

While that project gets going, the developers have let Co-Lab have the rather raw, high-ceilinged space for a longish-term pop-up gallery.

Demo opened in May during the West Austin Studio Tour. The current exhibit — “Adam Crosson: Room With a View” — is the gallery’s second.

[Crosson, who just finished his master’s degree](#) at the University of Texas, leverages the enormous empty space to intriguing effect.

In fact, some of his artistic interventions are so subtle that they are hard to suss out from the existing roughed-up walls and discarded items.

But that serves Crosson’s concerns well. “I use my work as a tool to investigate the American ruin,” he writes in an exhibition statement.

Crosson fashions commercial lighted signs with, well, no signage, the exposed fluorescent tubing or giant bulbs left as the only attention-getter. It's a very literal interpretation of representing a sign devoid of meaning, but it works, a handful of them placed around the dimly lit empty space, either hanging from the ceiling or attached to the concrete walls and pillars.

Also intriguing are two enormous black-and-white photographs — billboard-like in scale and orientation — that depict landscape expanses where open water meets flat land in southern Louisiana. Shot with cameras Crosson makes himself, the resulting images are so dark and with detail so subtle that viewers must look closely, and then look closely again, to trace out the details.

But nowhere is the intrigue with ruin more clear than with the installation called "On Their Way Out" that Crosson set up in the building's basement.

Crosson created a couple of arrangements using found doors and leftover gypsum acoustic blocks, the blocks fashioned into an altar of sorts. The fluorescent lights were covered with color gels so that the windowless space was awash in an eerie pink hue that heightened the mystery — and the anxiety — of the forgotten commercial space.

American urban progress is largely based on erasure. Buildings and their signs disappear or become relics of their once-important stature.

And, unfortunately, the changing nature of 721 Congress means that the "On Their Way Out" basement installation could only remain up through last weekend, though the rest of the exhibit remains. Ah, the vagaries of progress.

Crosson's exhibit — and really the existence of Co-Lab's Demo Gallery itself — serves as a telling metaphor of 21st century urban change.

"Adam Crosson: Room With a View"

When: Noon to 6 p.m. Thursday-Saturday through Aug. 6

Where: Co-Lab Projects Demo Gallery, 721 Congress Ave.

Cost: Free

Info: co-labprojects.org
