

Contact: Wing Young Huie
612-817-2771
info@wingyounghuie.com

Christine Podas-Larson
Public Art Saint Paul
651-290-0921
cpl@publicartstpaul.org

John Reinan
Fast Horse
612-751-2335
johnr@fasthorseinc.com

PUBLIC ART PROJECT DOCUMENTS A CHANGING AMERICA

Public Art Saint Paul presents acclaimed artist Wing Young Huie's six-mile tapestry of life in a vibrantly transformational community: St. Paul's University Avenue corridor

St. Paul, Minn., Feb. 12, 2010 – Few cities in America are feeling the cultural changes of urban immigration as rapidly and intensely as Minnesota's capital of St. Paul.

Over the past 20 years, a dizzying diversity of new arrivals has transformed this formerly sleepy, predominantly Irish, German and Scandinavian city. New arrivals include Somalis, Mexicans, African-Americans and one of the largest contingents of urban Hmong in the United States.

The pulse of this change beats strongest along University Avenue, a six-mile thoroughfare that connects the University of Minnesota campus with the state Capitol complex.

Internationally acclaimed photographer Wing Young Huie spent three years chronicling the colliding and evolving American experience on University Avenue, a jammed stretch of storefronts, taverns, big-box retailers, blue-collar neighborhoods and condominium communities.

The result, "The University Avenue Project," will open May 1 as a gallery of 500 photographs exhibited in store windows and on buildings along the six miles of University Avenue between the Minneapolis border and the state Capitol. At the center of the project is a spectacular installation site where images will be projected nightly on billboard-size screens, accompanied by recorded soundtracks from local musicians and monthly live performances.

Blending documentary photography with revelatory statements by his subjects, Wing has created a tapestry of words and images raising complex issues of race, class, gender, sexual preference, immigration, religion and cultural disconnection.

Presented by Public Art Saint Paul, the exhibition will run through Oct. 31.

Wing's subjects responded to one of several questions, including:

- What are you?
- How do you think others see you?
- What advice would you give a stranger?
- How has race affected you?

Their answers, chalked on blackboards, reveal the hopes, dreams and fears of Americans new and old, all striving to make their way in a complex, vital urban community.

“This is not only a six-mile public art exhibition,” Wing said. “This is a six-mile classroom that explores the changing cultural landscape of urban life in St. Paul.”

Thousands of students from kindergarten through college will engage with the project. Working with a team of educational advisers, University Avenue Project organizers have developed a range of educational activities for use in schools and universities.

The entire project also will be published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press as an affordable, magazine-like book in two volumes during 2010. The first volume, available on May 1, gives an in-depth look at the exhibit itself. The second volume, available in August, will focus on the interaction of viewers with the exhibit during its run.

Unprecedented in its scope and ambition, the University Avenue Project and its subjects carry messages for every community in a rapidly changing America.

This project stands as a testament to the value of art that engages and inspires community connection and reflection. We invite you to share the messages of this exciting and important public art project with your audience.

For more information, visit www.theuniversityavenueproject.com

About the artist

Wing Young Huie creates societal mirrors of who and what we are becoming, seeking to reveal not only what is hidden, but also what is plainly visible yet seldom noticed.

Wing, a native of Duluth, Minn., has received international acclaim for his projects documenting his home state of Minnesota. Published collections of his work include *Frogtown: Photographs and Conversation in an Urban Neighborhood*; *Lake Street USA*; and *Looking for Asian America: An Ethnocentric Tour*.

About Public Art Saint Paul

Public Art Saint Paul is the prime mover in creating and caring for art in St. Paul’s civic realm. For more than 20 years, it has engaged artists in shaping the form and experience of the city as collaborators in the design of public places and creators of permanent artworks, temporary installations and public art events.

Education programs reach young people throughout the city as artists conduct residencies in schools, community centers and workshops from the organization's mobile art lab. New environmental initiatives pair artists with scientists to explore the city landscape, improve water quality and promote sustainable art-making.

Partners

The University Avenue Project is presented by Public Art St. Paul with support from a Joyce Award of the Joyce Foundation, facilitation of the City of Saint Paul and University Business Association, and major funding from The Saint Paul Foundation, Travelers Foundation, F.R. Bigelow Foundation, Huss Foundation, Hardenbergh Foundation, Mardag Foundation, the Katherine B. Andersen Fund and George Maris.

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