



Neither Here Nor There: Perspectives on Homelessness

Curated by Sage Rogers and Sunaura Taylor

January 21st—March 5th, 2006

Participating Artists:

Michelle Bolding (Atlanta, GA), Brian Buchanan (Athens, GA), Donna L. Clovis (Princeton Jct., NJ), Barrie Collins (Athens, GA), Larry Winston Collins (Oxford, OH), Jaokima Hillyard (Philadelphia, PA), Darrel Jones (Atlanta, GA), Alan London (Atlanta, GA), Mad Housers (Atlanta, GA), Cat Norman (Athens, GA), John Osario-Buck (Boston, MA), Our Voices (Atlanta, GA), Jose Sierra (Pella, IA), Rita Unger (Los Angeles, CA), Susan Vaclavik (Athens, GA), Jacob Wenzka (Athens, GA), Louis Wheeler (Austin, TX), Jim Wiggins (Atlanta, GA), The Wino (Athens, GA)

According to the Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, "On any given day in the state of Georgia, there are thousands of our citizens struggling to meet their basic human needs. Of that number, more than 55% are estimated to be single parent families with children. And conservative estimates are that on any given night in Georgia more than 18,000 people have no place to call home and are residing in homeless shelters and other temporary places they call home." (Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, <http://www.gahomeless.org/> Accessed Nov 23, 2005). The huge impact of homelessness on Georgia's citizens is reflected by that conservative estimate of 18,000 individuals without permanent shelter on any given night. Here in Athens Clarke County there are hundreds of people without homes. Despite the stereotype of the homeless person being a "down and out" middle-aged male, homeless people often are women and children who have been victims of domestic violence. The general population overlooks such root causes of homelessness, blaming individual instead. In reality, economics, poor job markets, sexism, disability, illness, drugs, and politics all deeply affect homeless people's situations.

Other overlooked reasons are lifestyle choice and protest. *Neither Here Nor There: Perspectives on Homelessness* explores the perspectives of those who choose homelessness in protest against American consumer society, as well as the perspectives of those who have had homelessness forced upon them. This exhibit will also bring together many of Northeast GA's and Athens' homeless support groups in events designed to shed light on their efforts. For example, the Atlanta based group the **Mad Housers** (www.madhousers.org) built a shelter in the gallery for viewing during the exhibit; it will subsequently be donated to an homeless individual in Athens. The 8' x 6' x 10' hut took one day and many volunteers to build. The Mad Housers are a volunteer group who build small shelters for homeless people to call home. Their mission is to provide shelter to homeless and low-income individuals. Thus far they have built over four hundred shelters in and around Atlanta; they currently build approximately two a month! The Mad Housers "believe that if a person has a secure space from which to operate, they are much more capable of finding the resources to help themselves." Although the Mad Housers do not necessarily consider what they do art, it seems that the art world does: this is their second art exhibit, they participated in the well-received *Shelter* exhibition at Atlanta's Eyedrum gallery in February 2005.

The original impetus for the exhibit was the Atlanta-based **Our Voices** project (www.our-voices.com), which exists through their partnership with the **Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless**

(MATHF), a shelter that promotes creativity and self-supportive skills (www.homelesstaskforce.org). Initiated by the heralded photographer Bobby Abrahamson, Our Voices is currently led by Maria Watts. The Project Directors "teach traditional black & white photography to people without homes, and those in transition, as a means of artistic empowerment, to improve their self-esteem, and to foster a greater sense of community. The project provides a photography instructor, a darkroom, cameras, film, photographic paper, framing materials, and exhibition opportunities to its participants to enable them to discover their own voices as artists and media makers." (Abrahamson, who lived in and around the Athens and Atlanta area for many years currently resides in Portland, Oregon, where he is working on starting an Our Voices branch for teens.) The Atlanta group is currently directed by Maria Watts, a recent student at the Atlanta College of Art. In Watts' words: "We want people to work together as equals, to break down social stigmas. What we all have in common is our interest and dedication to the art of traditional B&W photographic process." Although the majority of the students are homeless, Our Voices is committed to being open to everyone—they currently serve non-homeless students as well homeless ones. The Our Voices photographers included in this exhibit all show a great dedication to their art. The photos are sincere, raw, and explorative.

The MATHF is also dedicated to sharing art with anyone who wants to participate—they believe art should be available to everyone. 20 years ago artist Anita Beaty started the MATHF, with the gallery and studio spaces opening 15 years later. Beaty believed that when individuals become homeless they lose access to the time, space, and security it takes to make art. MATHF's mission is to allow individuals to express their creativity; it is their belief that the closer one is to Art, the closer one is to recovery. The MATHF has art studios, a dark room, a gallery space, and puts on theater productions, all in an effort to integrate the creative talents of Atlanta's homeless artists with the rest of the population. Two MATHF painters included in this exhibit are **Michelle Bolding** (Atlanta, GA), and **Darrel Jones** (Atlanta, GA). Both deal with issues of homelessness. Jones is an art student from L.A. who moved to Atlanta and began painting at the MATHF studios. *Sacred Ground* is a boldly painted image of a homeless individual in a coffin. Two large feet protrude from the edge of the coffin, which is draped by an American flag. A similar sentiment is reflected in Michelle Bolding's *Sad Flag*, as well as her other piece on wood. Amidst the stripes of an American flag are words discussing the invisibility of homeless individuals in America. Her flag is covered in round, yellow, little frowning-faced stickers, the

opposite of the yellow smiley face seen all over Wal-Mart commercials and generally in American consumer-culture. Bolding, a self-taught artist and teacher at a Montessori school, says of her work: "The three pieces of wood reflect a nation which strives for wholeness but in actuality is very divided. Class, race, education, economic status these are the divisions. These pieces of wood spoke to me in their raw natural state. This wood IS hurting. Nails hurt. From this pain I created this flag. A flag that cries for help. Help for her people. ALL OF HER PEOPLE."

America's "cry for help" is expressed on a personal level in **Rita Unger's** paintings. Unger is an L.A. artist who has experienced homelessness and the addiction and violence that too often accompany it. Her three paintings, *Cement Cross*, *Alcoholism*, and *Wartime Holidays* deal with these issues in an upfront and demanding way. Her battle with addiction is shown in *Alcoholism*, in which bottles and cigarettes float beneath a large red cross that resembles a city intersection. "This painting represents the disease I saw a lot of, and experienced myself, as I drank and smoked cigars to calm my nerves as a reaction to the silent violence of theft and having my space invaded." Unger continues: "Homeless areas were not without crime; I became a victim of an assault just walking past other homeless people. There is much distrust and friendship was impossible." Addiction and the fear and reality of violence are common concerns among homeless populations.

Although drug addiction and mental illness are often causes of homelessness, they are also often side effects of it. These issues make recovery much more difficult as they are often used as a scapegoat, allowing the non-homeless public to overlook the economic and political inequalities that are often at the root of homelessness. Blame is put on homeless individuals for being 'addicts,' 'crazy' or for being 'lazy,' when in reality mental illness and addiction are as political as they are personal. **Jacob Wenzka's** 16-image series of paintings, *The Unemployment Line*, addresses laziness as a cause for homelessness. In it he explores the effect of unemployment and a poor job market through the powerful approach of repetition, forcefully bringing home the extent of this problem. The same man—America's common man—waits with hundreds of others for a few available jobs. What will happen to those who do not get picked? In the book Wenzka's work is based on—Giacomo Patri's *White Collar*, a story told entirely in linocut prints—a "depression-era worker whose struggles include the loss of his job, his wife's pregnancy and subsequent abortion, struggles with debt and debt collectors, his attempts to find work, and eventually the loss of his home and the necessity of joining a group of traveling migrant workers." (Artist Statement, 2006). What Wenzka's and Patri's work conveys is the struggle of surviving in an economic market of few jobs, low pay, and financial inequality. Homelessness is for many people a bill away—despite America's current rhetoric of a strong economy and job market.

Worldwide homelessness is increasing, with women and children the fastest growing population of homeless individual. War, disease, discrimination, globalization, and economic inequality cause homelessness throughout the world. **Susan Vaclavik**, another Athens' artist, also deals with homelessness and economics, but does so globally. Concerning work while living in Cambodia she says: "Although the pieces are portraits of two of the many homeless people I met while living in Cambodia, they are also explorations into human character and the many aspects of living in poverty." *Seated Girl* (a homeless child), and *Arrhythmia* (a homeless man with AIDS), are not only powerful portraits of individuals, but testaments to the millions of people living without shelter worldwide. Also exploring global

homelessness is **Jose Sierra**, a Venezuelan born ceramist currently residing in Iowa. Atop his large porcelain pot, *Techo de Carton* (*Paper Roof*), a sculpted figure rests beneath a shelter perched on its lid. The artist states: "I am from Venezuela where many people lack shelter or live in very precarious and flimsy structures. From a very early age, I was aware of what it meant to have and not have, and how difficult it was for so many to attain the basic necessities."

Domestic violence is another serious cause of homelessness—a 1990 Ford Foundation study found that 50 percent of homeless women and children were fleeing abuse. Artist **Donna Clovis** (NJ) was one of these women. Clovis' photographs explore her journey from homelessness and abuse to independence. Her experience of domestic violence is expressed gently but powerfully, and the sensitivity with which she explores abuse is apparent in her double-exposed photographic images.

Regardless of why one is homeless, the issue of shelter becomes vital. In addition to the Mad Houser's shelter, this exhibit includes works by two other artists who explore the meaning and definition of home. **Jim Wiggins** (Atlanta) is himself homeless. He works through ideas surrounding shelter and the politics of homelessness in his models of various homeless shelters, built with found materials. Wiggins says his sculptures are models of, "shelter on a zero budget." He has built a variety of models—including his own shelter, an old van—to "illustrate some of the finer points of roofing on a shoe string. AKA this old hovel." He says they "point to the fact of the quality or lack of quality imbibed in some people's struggles to perceive a modicum of normality (normal people have homes, ya know?) in the daily struggle to maintain the illusion of not being or becoming homeless." Boston artist **John Osario-Buck** also deals with shelter—his works have included portable shelters, shelters on water, and shelters for those with little space and little time. Not homeless himself, Buck is never-the-less interested in finding solutions for people who are. The works included in this are similar to tents; they are collapsible intended to be portable and easily maneuvered.

Artists **Cat Norman** (Athens, GA), **Jaokima Hillyard** (Philadelphia, PA), and **Brian Buchanan** (Athens, GA), have an interest in homelessness that stems from lifestyle choice. Some individuals choose a life of homelessness to protest American consumer culture, thus their choice becomes a form of personal expression and as well as an issue of individual freedom. Norman's photographs were taken at the National Rainbow Family Gathering, "a gathering of an international community that meets yearly to pray for world peace." She explains, "Many of the members of this community are homeless and live on the road, traveling from town to town as opportunities arise. I spent ten days in the woods, living with this community, accepted them without question. I learned so much about the beauty of their lives... not focused on consumerism, materialism, or any other congestive -ism. Instead of accepting that as the 'American way' they choose instead to live outside of those thinkings." Hillyard is a traveling homeless photographer. She photographs her journeys and the various places she has squatted. Hillyard's photographs are of the everyday objects and places in a traveling homeless individual's life: old couches, dusty rooms, sunlit train tracks, and graffiti colored walls. Accompanying her photos are poignant and humorous titles, such as *No Insurance*, her image of a driven-over shopping cart. Itinerant artist Brian Buchanan, who is familiar to Athenians from his many stints here, has been homeless off and on for many years. For this exhibit Buchanan has created

a site-specific painted and graffitied mural. Graffiti on walls and side-car train tagging have become synonymous with homeless art. Although Buchanan's output is by no means limited to graffiti art, for this show he is using this appropriate medium to explore his views on this subject.

Artists **Barrie Collins** (Athens, GA), **Louis Wheeler** (Austin, TX), and **Larry Winston Collins** (Oxford, OH) approach homelessness as outsiders, that is from the point of view of someone who is not homeless. They all became interested in the lives of homeless individuals through interactions in their cities. For Barrie Collins, this interest started when he was studying to be a landscape architect and became interested in how cities affect inhabitants, especially disenfranchised ones. Collins' photographs express individuality, character and strength. His portraits are not taken of the homeless population, but of homeless individuals. Sculptor Larry Winston Collins became interested in homelessness during a period of time when his car broke down, and he began walking to destinations and taking public transportation. During such outings he became increasingly aware of a population of individuals he had never noticed before in his city: the homeless. Collins began sketching this invisible population, forming the basis for a series of sculptures called *Homeless Position*. *Tin Man*, *Homeless Position #7* is a sitting man begging with his arm outstretched holding a tin can. The fact that the man is made from sparkling clean cans makes his posture appear almost royal or holy. The immediate question it brings to mind—can you spare some change?—transforms a question people respond to with pity into a philosophical query about lifestyle and action. Videographer Louis Wheeler's project was also born out of his realization of an "invisible population" in his city. *Project 183* interviews homeless individuals living along the highway of Route 183 in Austin, TX. His subjects are often friendly, open, and glad to be sharing, although some of them are also fearful or embarrassed to discuss their situations. Wheeler took his camera on the highway and wandered until he came across homeless people. He asks why they are homeless, how they became homeless, and what they think about homelessness. The various answers he receives to all of those questions epitomize the broad nature of the subject of homelessness.

The final artist in is someone we simply know as "**The Wino**." All that is known of The Wino was gleaned from Athens' own Pete McCommons, publisher of *Flagpole Magazine*. The Wino's works are small comic books, hand drawn and stapled together. It is believed that the Wino lived around Athens and would make these to try and sell them. It is known that the Wino was homeless and that he passed away some time ago. The Wino's books not only are hilarious, rude, and political, but they shed light on what at least one homeless individual saw as the funny side of their predicament and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the fact that we know so little about the Wino is not surprising. Sadly, it is all too common for the homeless to be forgotten along with their work—as invisible in death as they are in life.

As this exhibit reveals, the talents and creativity of those who are labeled 'homeless,' as well as of those who have been inspired by the homeless, is far too rich and important an area of creative discourse to let disappear from lack of shelter. By housing this unique group of moving and informative works, ATHICA brings these issues to Northeast Georgia's attention. The curators' aim was to create a space in which homeless people themselves can discuss their situations through their artworks, as well as simply be recognized for their artistic talents. ATHICA also hopes that after viewing these works, local citizens will be encouraged to

contemplate the cruel and callous nature of our country's economic priorities, as well as the overwhelming mainstream acquiescence to capitalist notions of personal 'success.' ATHICA is proud to support the curatorial efforts that have brought us *Neither Here Nor There: Perspectives on Homelessness*, a laudable and timely exhibition. We applaud the artists and groups who have gone to such great lengths to share their transformative visions.

Sunaura Taylor and Sage Rogers, Curators
with editorial assistance by Lizzie Zucker Saltz, ATHICA Director

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR VOICES

1991—Bobby Abrahamson, founder and first director of Our Voices, first met with Anita Beaty, executive director of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless (MATFH). At this time Abrahamson began a three year project to document homelessness in Atlanta.

December 2003—After many years of teaching, Abrahamson goes by the MATFH at Peachtree and Pine and sees that they have an artistic empowerment project in Our Studio/ Gallery. He contacts Beaty about setting up a photography program. Beaty loves the idea.

September 2004—Our Voices classes begin to meet for the first time. Abrahamson recruits his students from the clients and residents of the MATFH.

December 2004—The first benefit for Our Voices is organized. Through the generosity of many committed individuals the event raises \$1700. Articles appear in *Creative Loafing* regarding the benefit and the project. Through the generous donations of Our Voices supporters, Abrahamson and Beaty are able to set up a dark-room in the garage at the MATFH.

May 2005—Our Voices and Our Studio/ Gallery partner to present their *Atlanta Rich* show. This exhibit, which is held in Our Studio, the MATFH gallery, is featured as part of the Turner First Thursday's gallery walk.

June 2005—Our Voices becomes a partner organization with PhotoVoice.

August 2005—Maria Watts takes over as director of Our Voices as Abrahamson relocates to Oregon.

September 2005—A selection of Our Voices works is exhibited as *Shifting Perspectives* at GA MOCA during the Atlanta Celebrates Photography festival.

For more information please visit:

Our Voices: www.our-voices.com

Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless:
www.homelesstaskforce.org

Mad Housers: www.madhousers.org

Thank you to...

*Dave Kincaid, card design • Mad Housers • Elements Art Supply
Food Not Bombs • Trumps Catering • Film::Athens • The Georgian Press*

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*The ATHICA Board and
ATHICA 2005-2006 intern: Rachel McKnight (Cedar Shoals High School)*

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CHECKLIST FOR NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: PERSPECTIVES ON HOMELESSNESS

MICHELLE BOLDING

Odd Comfort (n/d)
Sad Flag (n/d)
paint on wood

BRIAN BUCHANAN

Hands (2006)
latex wall paint, mural on wall
Sunshine Through the Rain (2005)
Mixed-media on wood panel

DONNA CLOVIS

Broken Glass (2004)
Burden (2004)
Resurrection (2004)
selenium black and white photography

BARRIE COLLINS

A Kiss (2003)
Untitled (2003)
black and white photography

LARRY WINSTON COLLINS

Homeless Position #1 Tin Man (1993)
tin cans, wood, sculpture
Homeless Position #7 Sleeping Man (1995)
wood, paint, plaster, sculpture

JAOKIMA HILLYARD

All Ready For Big Screen (n/d)
Baltimore Or Bust (n/d)
Deep Thoughts By Homeless Drunk (n/d)
F.D.R Park Bus (n/d)
Forgot To Set Alarm Clock (n/d)
No Insurance (n/d)
Panhandlers Disclaimer (n/d)
Squatters RV (n/d)
Your Mom's House (n/d)
digital photography

DARREL JONES

Outcast City (2005)
Sacred Ground (2005)
paint on canvas

MAD HOUSERS

Mad Housers Building the Invisible City (1988-present)
compassion and direct action
(along with plywood, paint and nails), shelter

CAT NORMAN

Ahryn (2005)
Boy With Dog (2005)
Earth (2005)
Homeless Depot (2005)
Welcome Home (2005)
You Are Beautiful (2005)
You Are Wonderful (2005)
photography

JOHN OSORIO-BUCK

Utopia 6 Project (2004)
plastic tarps, pvc pipes, livable sculpture
Utopia 6 Project: Raft Project
WLTFFPCAPTOTL (Will the last fort point channel artist please turn out the lights) (2004)
digital video, with Mathew Ward

OUR VOICES

Our Voices Project (2004-present)
Participating Artists:
Constance Barton • Kenneth Jackson • Etienne Nguelitia • Marques Nunn • Brad Ottavi • Victor Roberts • Boubacar Sarr • Lincoln Simpson
Droop Da Planet Star • Eddie Travis • Phil White
Black and white photography

JOSE SIERRA

Techo de Carton (Paper Roof) (2001)
ceramic

RITA UNGER

Alcoholism (1995)
Cement Cross (2002)
Wartime Holidays (1994)
oil on canvas

SUSAN VACLAVIK

Arrhythmia (2005)
Seated Girl (2005)
oil on canvas

JACOB WENZKA

The Unemployment Line (2005-2006)
oil on canvas, 16 panel series

LOUIS WHEELER

Project 183: Arboretum Vagabonds (2005)
digital video

JIM WIGGENS

Beach Lean-To (n/d)
Corporate Sponsor With Inhabitant (2005)
Detail: Inhabitant Sleeping (n/d)
Rolling Hovel (n/d)
The Underground Hovel (n/d)
Tree Hovel (n/d)
Untitled (n/d) • Untitled (n/d) • Untitled (n/d)
metal, wood, paper, dirt, sand, foil and various other discards of the urban scene, sculpture

THE WINO

Untitled Series (n/d)
photocopied drawings, stapled asself-published mini-comic books

AFFILIATED EVENTS:

- **Friday, February 24th, 8:00-11:00 p.m.**
(doors open at 7:30)
Music Benefit for the Athens Area Homeless Shelter
featuring *Hope For A Golden Summer*, *Thimble Circus*, *Diet Rock Star*, and *Sock Monkey Wrench*.
Food provided by *Food Not Bombs*
Suggested Donation \$6.00 - \$12.00
- Date/Time TBA
Wal-Mart: High Cost of Low Prices
film screening with popcorn and refreshments
Suggested Donation \$3.00 - \$9.00
- Date/Time TBA
Pounding Nails in the Floor With My Forehead
FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY!
Piotr Stapor performs Eric Bogosian's award-winning, one-man, multi-character performance piece followed by an artist talk-back.
This portrait of American life presents a darkly humorous picture of our political conflicts and ethical dilemmas.
Suggested donation \$6.00 - \$9.00
- **Sunday, March 5th, 3:00-5:00 p.m.**
(doors open at 2:30 for last chance gallery viewing)
Closing Day Panel Discussion on Homelessness
The panel will include artists and representatives from the Athens Area Homeless Shelter, Project Safe, ACC Dept of Human and Economic Development, Our Voices (partner with the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless), Homeless Education Program, and the Mad Housers of Atlanta.
They will present cutting edge information and fresh facts on homelessness, as well as field questions.
Free!

GALLERY HOURS :
THURSDAY- 6:00 - 9:00 P.M.
FRIDAY- 3:00 - 9:00 P.M.
SATURDAY & SUNDAY- 1:00 - 6:00 P.M.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO GALLERY SIT?
PLS. EMAIL VOLUNTEER@ATHICA.ORG

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non-profit organization.

Your Contributions are much needed
and are federally tax-deductible.