

VULTURE

JAN. 2, 2015

Is Soho in the '70s Just a Two-Hour Flight Away? 9 Artists on Why They Live in Detroit

By Carl Swanson

After 19 years in Brooklyn, Galapagos Art Space is moving to Detroit, where you can still buy a romantically cast-off industrial building for cheap, just like you used to be able to do in the gritty old New York, before it turned into a polished bauble of global capitalism and everyone in the world decided they wanted to live here. Whether or not you'll miss Galapagos, cared much for its programming, or ever saw anything there in the first place, its executive director declared to the New York Times that its leaving town was symptomatic of how "a white-hot real estate market is burning through the affordable cultural habitat." In Detroit — which is just a two-hour flight away — Galapagos could afford to buy up an entire ruin-porn campus of nine buildings in Corktown, and is thinking of expanding its mission to start a Detroit Biennial in 2016.

And why not? The Detroit area might be home to two good art schools, the century-old Cranbrook Academy of Art and the College for Creative Studies, but the artists they produced often left town for opportunities and like-minded people in places like New York. And there weren't many reasons for people to move to Detroit. Sure, the Detroit Institute of Arts is a world-class museum, but like so much of what is so impressive there, it's a relic of an imperial industrial capital that no longer exists, and for a while there was a plan considered to sell its collection to pay off the city's debt.

But hey, things looked pretty bad here in New York in the '70s, too, when it was an "affordable cultural habitat." It had the mystique of a place where you could make something new happen, which Detroit is also starting to be known for. I recently spent a couple of days there, witnessing the intense little pockets of recognizable Brooklyn-ish-ness that have sprung up, where the just-so work of creating another twee urban utopia is being done. These are also places where the racial demographics of the city are noticeably reversed. (In the 2010 census, Detroit was made up of 83 percent black people.) The new shops and restaurants often feel alienating to many who didn't flee for the suburbs when things got rough, and who think of Detroit as theirs. That struggle continues, but these new urban migrants are good for the city's tax base.

I also got to meet some of the artists who live and work here: Elysia Borowy-Reeder, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Detroit, wrote up my itinerary, and introduced me to people. I started the day at the ReView Gallery, which is in an old building not far from the Detroit Institute of Arts, and run by Simone DeSousa, a Brazilian woman who lives in one of the perfect loft condos upstairs (many of which haven't yet been built out, since the market's not quite there yet) and who started the gallery because she felt that Detroit didn't have enough galleries to support the artists who live there.

Borowy-Reeder is married to Scott Reeder, a successful artist who shows all over the world. The pair live in a Mies van der Rohe-designed housing complex (Detroit is littered with what was once the cutting edge in urban planning) on the edge of downtown, and I visited Reeder in his studio in the mammoth Russell Industrial Center.

Terese Reyes
terese@reyesfinn.com
310 487 5436

Bridget Finn
bridget@reyesfinn.com
313 204 7814

1500 Trumbull Ave.
Detroit, MI 48216
www.reyesfinn.com

Gallery Hours
Tuesday–Saturday
12pm–6pm

Actually he has two — one with a closet-size space he’s turned into a tiny comedy-club-and-disco called “Club Nutz,” and another with a door that opens out into the open air many floors up. I drove around and met up with Greg Fadell, whose studio is on the top floor of an old schoolhouse, and James Collins, who lives in a sunny old arts-and-crafts house, and Adam Lee Miller and Nicola Kuperus, who also operate as the band Adult, and who live in a perfect old near-mansion in a neighborhood called New Center, which for years was the headquarters of General Motors. GM paid to have the area gussied up and preserved during the white-flight days of the 1960s, but the house was still cheap enough for a couple of bohemians to buy it.



Scott Reeder Photo: Courtesy of the artist

At the end of the day, a bunch of us convened at Antietam, a just-opened restaurant in an Art Deco storefront run by Gregory Holm, a Detroit native who lived in New York for nine years. The interior is a stridently tasteful concoction of retro-glamour elements, some of which Holm salvaged himself, Indiana Jones-style, from Detroit’s many grand old buildings gone to seed. There aren’t too many places like this here, at least not yet. Here’s why these nine artists live in Detroit. Scott Reeder



Greg Fadell Photo: Greg Fadell/Greg Fadell 2014

Been in Detroit: Two years

Why he came: “My wife is the new director of MO-CAD. We are both originally from Michigan so it was an easy transition.”

Why he stays: “I like being in a place that still has a lot of possibilities. Detroit has an amazing cultural history, but it’s also always changing,, especially recently, and it’s exciting to be part of that energy.”

What he does there: “I’m mostly known as a painter, but I also do performance, help run the worlds smallest comedy club, and just completed my first feature film Moon Dust.”

Greg Fadell

Been in Detroit: Lifer

Why he came: Birth

Why he stayed: “Detroit is like skateboarding in the early 1980s. The mainstream had already chewed it up and spat it out. Very few recognized skateboarding’s unrealized potential and those of us who did picked up the remains and ended up creating our own universe. Similarly, I’ve always seen Detroit as a throwaway city of unimagined possibilities.”

What he does there: “I’ve been painting mostly as of late, but I am a multidisciplinary artist. Painting, sculpture, video, installation — whatever my ideas call for.”

Christopher Schanck

Been in Detroit: Three years

Why he came: Graduate school at Cranbrook Academy of Art

Why he stays: “What Detroit lacks in quantity of artists and makers it makes up for in the quality and commitment of its creative class. The strength of the maker here is measured by their physicality and creation of a proof of concept, less in the theoretical inquiry of the comfortable cosmopolitan conceptualist. “

What he does there: Designs



Adam Lee Miller Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Adam Lee Miller

Been in Detroit: Since 1989

Why he came: “The art school, College for Creative Studies.”

Why he stays: “In 1993, I left Detroit for San Francisco. In less than a month I moved back. There is an honesty and an edge here that I feel particularly at home with. The early Detroit techno scene mirrors that and it was a big inspiration for me to stay and try to be a part of it. I started a record label, Ersatz Audio, in 1995 and one of the last remaining pressing plants, Archer Record Pressing Co., is ten minutes from my home. I used to love the Road Warrior quality of living here (it weeded out most insincere people), but I fear that is changing.

Nicola and I also travel a lot, between the visual arts and touring. I’m not sure if Detroit would drive us crazy if we were here 365 days a year? Our cost of living also keeps us here; our home is 4,000 square feet and our mortgage is \$445 a month.”

What he does there: Paints, and with his wife Nicola Kuperus, below, sculpture, installation, video, and the band Adult (since 1997). (Website, Facebook, Instagram)



Nicola Kuperus

Nicola Kuperus

Been in Detroit: Since 1994

Why she came: To attend art school at the College for Creative Studies

Why she stays: “Space. Cost of living. Isolation when you want it. Unpredictability. And most important, there’s a tremendous amount of heart and soul in this place. Once while taking a drive on Belle Isle [an island between Detroit and Canada], I passed by a guy playing a synth on the shore. It looked as if he were giving a performance to the city. Magical moments. That’s Detroit.”

What she does there: Photography and video