

CULTURE KLASH

PARKing Day

Artists transform downtown parking spots into places for people and art this week.

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Ever since Marcel Duchamp tried to exhibit a urinal at the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition, artists have been interrupting public spaces to ask what is art, and where can it or should it be seen?

Jackson Hole Public Art is the local entity leading the charge of much of the public art in the valley. Very often, it is public art that blends in with its environment, rather than interrupting or clashing with it. On Friday, that's about to change.

For one day only, Jackson Hole Public Art presents PARKing Day, when artists and creative teams will transform 10 lowly parking spots into spaces where people matter more than hunks of metal.

"I want to explore what our downtown could look like if we focused on humans more than vehicles," said project manager Shawn Meisl. "Parked cars make us want to leave an area, but a parking space that offers tables and chairs, some shade and plants, might make us linger instead."

Lingerers will be rewarded with a large-scale Scrabble game, a hexi-yurt art lounge, and perhaps a soapbox on top of which people can stand and deliver poems, opinions, songs, or jokes. The parking spaces will be at locales around town.

Participating artists and organizations include Lyndsay McCandless and the Center of Wonder, KJ Morris and shelter-Design, Jenny Wolfrom and Jackson Hole Land Trust, Pierson Land Works, Bland Hoke, Jr., and others.

Hoke didn't want to reveal details about his allotted parking space, but hinted that it may involve the now famous town square live webcam. As readers may know, the cam has been "interrupted" a few times — once quite spontaneously by deputy sheriff Kirt Drumheller, who dabbled for the camera. And more recently by a flash mob led by PJH columnist Andrew Munz (more on page 20).

Pierson Land Works' parking space will be a play on the perception of scale. "We intend to create a life-size, 'Table Zen Garden' with rakes, sand, rocks and all," explained Robert Infanger, Pierson landscape architect. "The idea is to provide an interactive piece that is a glimpse into the design of small, outdoor space. Visitors will be able to literally step into the sand



An image from Washington DC's 2015 Park(ing) Day event.

and rake out a six-foot by ten-foot design of their own."

According to McCandless, an important aspect of public art events is that viewers become part of the art. "I am a big fan of participating in art experiences, not just being an observer," she said.

This particular art experience doubles as civic engagement, noted Carrie Geraci Jackson Hole Public Art's director. "Sometimes civic duty means showing up at the town hall to make a public comment or attending a candidate forum, but in this case, community members get to be creative in how they express ideas for using public space," she said.

PARKing Day originated in San Francisco in 2005 when the design studio Rebar tried out their idea for re-imagining metered parking spaces in the city.

"Urban inhabitants worldwide recognize the need for new approaches to making cities," said Rebar principal Matthew Passmore. "The planning strategies that have led to traffic congestion, pollution and poor health in cities everywhere do not reflect contemporary values, nor are they sustainable. *PARK(ing) Day* raises these issues and demonstrates that even temporary projects can improve the character and quality of the city."

If this sounds a little revolutionary, it is. And people in cities across the world love it. In 2011, more than 900 mini "parks" popped up in parking spaces in 160 cities on six continents.

"PARK(ing) Day has been a mainstay of cities across the U.S. for many years now," Meisl said. "For JH Public Art, it is a natural extension of our exploration of how community input can create functional and beautiful installations that reflect the desired look and feel of our public spaces."

The event comes with its own manifesto, created by Rebar. The design studio

says its work is rooted in something they call tactical urbanism.

"Tactical urbanism is the use of modest or temporary revisions to urban space to seed structural environmental change," the manifesto proclaims.

"Our use of tactics is based on a belief that deep organizing structures (social, cultural, economic and otherwise) have a two-way relationship with the physical environment: they both produce the environment and are re-produced by it."

Citing French philosophers like Pierre Bourdieu and Guy Debord, Rebar has highbrow intentions behind its street level interventions. "When Rebar considers a parking space, the allocation of space to sidewalk or utilities, or the vocabulary of materials and symbols in the city, we think of these things as engaging in a dialogue," the manifesto states. The dialogue, they maintain, is with the status quo tools that humans use to explain how the world works.

In other words, by reimagining a parking space, we allow ourselves to take a look at our value systems. For instance, why is it so important to us to be able to park right outside our destination, more important, in fact, than our desire to stop and sit on a bench and enjoy the sky.

Meisl hopes PARKing Day will be a playful way for Jackson to ask itself some important questions. "These kinds of interactive events help us consider new ideas, and examine our community values," she said.

In addition to changing the function of a parking space, McCandless says there is value in the collective impact of creative thinkers.

"It is infectious and will hopefully inspire others to do things out of the norm," she said. **PJH**