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DETROIT

In the midst of the seemingly endless rows of vacant lots and boarded up houses on Detroit's East Side, a single block on Heidelberg Street metamorphoses into a surreal artscape: thousands of shoes line the lawns of brightly colored abandoned houses, bicycles dangle from trees, and an abandoned bus and deserted boat overflow with stuffed animals. The motif of polka dots—imprinted on everything from front porches to car hoods to driveways—stands in stark contrast to the blighted surroundings.

This installation, known as the Heidelberg Project, is the work of 43-year-old artist Tyree Guyton. Guyton grew up in the neighborhood and has spent the past 13 years collecting discarded appliances, broken car parts and other junk to decorate his street. With the help of neighbors, he has filled vacant lots with stuffed animals, painted grinning rictuses on crack houses, and made a sculpture garden out of a dumping site. Guyton's neighborhood, once known only for its crime and poverty, has become the third-most-visited attraction in Detroit.

The project, he insists, was conceived accidentally. It all began one day when he was wiping his brushes on an abandoned house. As he continued to paint the house and cover it with found objects, he realized his purpose: He was protesting the abandonment of Detroit after the 1967 riots. He was combating the emptiness with plenitude and color.

Despite Heidelberg's popularity and acclaim—Guyton won the Spirit of Detroit Award and was named Governor's Artist of the Year—the Heidelberg Project has generated opposition from a few residents who resent the influx of tourism and complain that they are sick of living amongst "garbage." The Detroit City Council has rallied behind them and has threatened to destroy the project if Guyton does not dismantle it immediately. Janice Harvey, a neighbor and president of the community-based Gratiot-McDougall United Development Corporation, argues that Heidelberg is an eyesore and a health hazard that brings a constant stream of traffic through the neighborhood. "[Residents] feel like animals in a zoo," Harvey says. "People view the neighbors as part of the exhibit."

Heidelberg supporters counter that tourism has virtually eliminated the drug trade and prostitution in the immediate

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