

# LAND MARK COMING SOON HISTORIC PREVENTION

a public art collaboration  
by Heather Layton and Julie Püttgen

## I. PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Artists Heather Layton (Rochester, NY) and Julie Püttgen (Sewanee, TN) met in the summer of 2007 and immediately exclaimed: Eureka! Both had independently been working on interactive community art projects for years, for example Layton's *(sub)Urban Homicide* (2006) and Püttgen's *Becoming the City that Planted Trees / Becoming Aware of a Paradox in Nurture* (2003-2004). *Land Mark / Coming Soon / Historic Prevention*, their first large-scale collaboration, invites communities to consider their past, present and future through a series of complementary interventions: *Land Mark* imagines traces of the past in the present-day landscape; *Coming Soon* suggests immediate future alternatives to current conditions; and *Historic Prevention* projects the future consequences of an uncorrected present.

## II. PROJECT INTERVENTIONS

### A. LAND MARK

*Land Mark* uses projections, reenactments, and historical markers to blur the distinctions between a city's present and its past. A plaque, installed in the ground above a system of abandoned tunnels reads, "If you put your ear to the ground, you can still hear the subway." Thirty brown, paper-bag lunches are left outside of an empty flour mill, a mailbox reminds us that "four houses were built on this site before this one," a video of a family dinner is projected over an existing home, and hoof prints are drawn down Main Street.

*Land Mark* recreates fantastic histories not otherwise remembered. While many of the referenced "facts" are accurate to the extent that our history can ever be, the specific memories are invented. Individually, the installed and performative interventions mark the present landscape with moments of its own history, ranging from glacier development through yesterday.

### B. COMING SOON

This intervention "grabs" empty buildings' shopfronts and signboards and, using the language of real estate development, declares utopic future building occupancies promoting social justice, ecological sustainability, community services, cultural diversity, workers' rights, and improved quality of life through fine arts and delicious food everywhere.

"Coming Soon: Profit Sharing for Employees"

"Coming Soon! Local Biodiesel"

"Coming Soon: Dance! Dance! Dance! Afropop Music Festival"

"Coming Soon: A Living Wage"

“Coming Soon: Food Co-op”

“Coming Soon: Green Public Transportation for All”

*Coming Soon*'s deadpan approach can be read in different ways: as a call to arms for civic improvement, as a wry reflection on bleak realities, or as a wide-eyed optimist's vision of things to come. Final choices for *Coming Soon* interventions will be made in collaboration with local community groups, who will suggest what sorts of goods, venues, and services *they* would like to see replace the blight of abandoned buildings.

### C. HISTORIC PREVENTION

The signs in *Historic Prevention* refer to existing sites in the past tense in order to remind viewers that they are part of a fragile, transient system, and to speculate on the possible consequences of uncorrected problems in the present day. They relate projected site changes to relevant topics of social concern. What might happen if public schools continued to pursue "No Child Left Behind"? What might happen if the US government failed to address global warming? How might our cities change if we failed to plan adequately for peak oil? These projected changes also acknowledge that even if ours were the most enlightened and well-organized civilization in the whole history of civilizations, it would still be peppered with endpoints unimaginable to us from where we stand in the midst of our todays.

For example, a marker at the University gates might read: "The University of Rochester, founded in 1850, was one of the nation's leading private universities and also one of the first American universities to admit women. With just over 4,500 undergraduates, the University of Rochester was one of the smallest and most collegiate in character among the top research universities. After the economic crash of 2013, the University was forced to close its doors when students could no longer afford the rising costs of higher education..."

### III. PROJECT PLANS

Layton and Püttgen have prepared preliminary digital maquettes for *Coming Soon* interventions close to home. Ultimately, these or similar texts will be installed as guerilla public art in the form of commercial vinyl lettering. It is the artists' intent that *Coming Soon*, like *Land Mark* and *Historic Prevention*, eventually function as shareware: free ideas easily reproduced by community activists anywhere. A project blog will invite participants to share images and stories about their own, local versions of these interventions.