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ARTS

Using His Indoor Voice

As his outdoor tape sculptures cause a commotion, Mark Jenkins takes cover.



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Tale of the Tape: The fire department came to rescue Mark Jenkins' realistic sculpture.

Mark Jenkins is accustomed to having people stop and stare when they spot his sculptures. When they get scared, however, he gets concerned.

In August 2006, the Mount Pleasant artist installed one of his trademark tape figures on the corner of 14th and U Streets NW. The sculpture, two lifelike legs protruding from a garbage can, was meant to suggest the disposability of human life, he says, and it stopped passers-by in their tracks. From across the street, Jenkins watched people circle the garbage can, inspect its contents, and snap photographs with their cell phones. The piece attracted a lot of attention from the locals, he says. Then it attracted the cops. A police car, fire truck, and ambulance soon arrived on the scene, sirens blaring. The artist didn't stick around to see what happened next. (Mark Jenkins the sculptor is not the same MJ who reviews film for this paper.)

Jenkins, 36, has traveled around the world, depositing his tape sculptures on city streets. The tape babies in his Storker Project appear to suckle at the breasts of women in billboards, rappel off the sides of buildings, and climb up street signs. The clothed figures in his Embed series, meanwhile, sit cross-legged on sidewalks or lean against buildings. Jenkins says eliciting a response from the public is one of the reasons he does what he does. "The more people that stop to look at it, take pictures of it, it kind of grows the piece," he says.

But these days, Jenkins is considering whether it's safe to install his work outside. First there was the incident on U Street. Then, in August, he says, he installed a sculpture of a woman with blond hair, jeans, and a sweatshirt, on the roof of a building near the convention center. The woman, a character in a short film Jenkins was making about his work, was perched adjacent to the Warehouse arts complex. He wanted her to look contemplative, he says, gazing out over downtown D.C., and he wanted her to last. "I wanted to see how she would weather," he says.

He didn't have a chance. That afternoon, says Warehouse co-owner **Paul Ruppert**, "the fire department came with a hook and ladder," to rescue the sculpture, which they thought was a damsel in distress. "The fire department had gotten, I think, several calls about it," he says. Ruppert tried to explain the situation, but the firefighters decided to remove it anyway. They climbed the ladder, cut the woman free from her wires, and took her with them. "I think they were worried the artist was going to put it back up," Ruppert says.

Jenkins calls the Warehouse project a success, but it made him think that some of his sculptures might be a little too alarming for public space. “For me, making fake people, you have to walk a line not to scare people,” he says. Plus, “right now, my biggest challenge is putting something out on the street and not having the police come out and take it down right after….I’d rather the cops [were] out doing other things than being part of my installation.”

While Jenkins will continue depositing figures on city streets, he’s determined to make them look safe and healthy. “I’m taking care not to have people look too death-like or in a position of jeopardy or crisis [because] the installations grow out of control when firetrucks start rolling up,” he writes in an e-mail. He has also brought some of his work indoors, where his sculptures still manage to cause a commotion.

In July, the artist installed one of his trademark tape figures at a cultural center in São Paolo, Brazil. The figure had red hair, a baseball cap, and sat in a cafeteria, slumped facedown in her food. Like his other work, Jenkins’ “All You Can Eat” caused a stir. “A woman came up to me and said it was a horrible thing to have to eat food with her,” he remembers. “It wasn’t good for the digestive system.” Other diners were also startled. “People were going to the clinic to get a doctor to see if this girl was alright,” he says. Ultimately, officials at the center removed the figure from the cafeteria and placed her in the library, where she sat with her nose buried in a book instead of in her lunch.

Jenkins is currently preparing pieces for a February 2007 show at the Stricola gallery in New York. “Obviously, you’re not going to have the surprise element,” he says of gallery work, but maybe it’s better that way. “I really don’t want to come up against a charge that I’m inciting panic. It’s never been my intention to incite panic,” he says. In fact, he’s been reflecting on a piece of wisdom he received from Spider-Man. “‘With great power, comes great responsibility.’ As corny as it is, it rings true,” he says.

Live Nation Frustration

Bethesda-based **Seth Hurwitz** figures plenty Montgomery County residents will be excited about the new Fillmore Music Hall coming to Silver Spring. He isn’t one of them.

Hurwitz, owner of the 9:30 Club, says he feels cut out of the “sweetheart deal” brokered by Montgomery County and Live Nation, the music company that owns the Fillmore chain of concert venues. “They’re basically being handed this venue,” he says. “My gripe is they’ve been handed a free ride, paid for by the taxpayers.”

On Sept. 25, Montgomery County executive **Isiah Leggett** announced that Live Nation had signed a nonbinding letter of intent to develop the old J.C. Penney site on Colesville Road in Silver Spring. **Patrick Lacefield**, director of public information for Montgomery County, says negotiations with Live Nation moved

quickly after talks with Alexandria's Birchmere, which hoped to open a Silver Spring outpost, fell apart in July. "We got farther in eight weeks with Live Nation than we did in five years with Birchmere," he says. According to Lacefield, Live Nation will "kick in $2 million" for the space and will host a mix of rock, pop, folk, country, comedy, and children's programming. The state and county will contribute $4 million each to the project, he says.

That $8 million subsidy, Hurwitz says, is exactly the problem. "If they're going to hand out a venue to someone, I'll take it," he says. He doesn't understand why the county didn't reach out to him when it began negotiating with Live Nation. "I'm a taxpaying, lifelong Montgomery County resident. I'd like to think I do the best job of what I do. Why wouldn't they want to look at all the options?" he asks.

Of course, the deal is more than a shot to Hurwitz's pride. It threatens his bottom line as well. He says the Fillmore, with a planned capacity ranging from 500 to 2,000 depending on the seating arrangements, could woo loyal bands away from his 1,200-capacity club. "The same group of bands will play D.C. and will split the business up between the two," he says. With deeper pockets than 9:30, he says, the publicly traded corporation could "throw money at bands and entice them to play there." It has consequences for ticket buyers, too. "When people fight over bands, the ticket prices go up," he says.

Hurwitz has expressed similar worries before. Last year, when Live Nation was scouting a home near the convention center for one of its House of Blues concert halls, he told the *Washington Post* that the music giant's entry into downtown D.C. would amount to a 50 percent loss in revenues for the 9:30 Club. The House of Blues proposal isn't officially dead: Live Nation spokesperson **John Vlautin** says the company doesn't discuss specific deals but said, "We're always looking for new opportunities for House of Blues, and that still includes Washington, D.C." **Sean Madigan**, spokesperson for the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, says the District will soon initiate a "competitive process" for the site by sending out a request for proposals.

But **Gary Bongiovanni**, editor in chief of the music trade publication *Pollstar*, says Live Nation's new outpost might not spell disaster for the 9:30 Club. "The 9:30 certainly has the advantage of being one of the best-known clubs in the country," he says. And the most successful Fillmores have been the ones that replaced pre-existing clubs, he says, not brand-new venues. He points to the Fillmore Detroit, which replaced the State Theatre, and the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza, as examples of spaces that were "very active venues" before the Fillmore took over. He wonders whether the Fillmore can pull off the same level of success at a totally new site. "I'm not sure how magical the Fillmore name is. It may well be," he says.

That Live Nation magic has other clubowners worried. **Dante Ferrando**, owner of the Black Cat, says the new Silver Spring venue could have repercussions for his club, too. "The kind of music we do, there are already too many music venues in D.C.…The pie's getting pretty thin." He says if the Fillmore skimmed

business from the 9:30 Club, it might cause a ripple effect through D.C.'s live music scene. "9:30 might have to go down the food chain and start taking some of our shows. Then we might have to go after some of the Rock & Roll [Hotel] shows," he says.

But Rock & Roll Hotel owner **Joe Englert** isn't worried. He says opening another music space near D.C. could actually benefit local venues. "I think that one of the reasons that D.C. hasn't had a great reputation for live music in the past is that there hasn't been enough places to see shows. I am sure that 9:30 Club, Black Cat, and Rock & Roll will still be packing them in after Live Nation opens their venue," he writes in an e-mail.

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