

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Glasgow Artists Flock to Detroit for a Creative Exchange

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*Francis Mckee, of objects destroyed in the fire at the Glasgow School of Art (image courtesy Francis Mckee)*

DETROIT — How do you start a relationship between two cities? Like most relationships, you're going to need to introduce the participants. In one respect, [Over Over Over](#), which brought five Glasgow-based artists to Detroit, could be seen as that first introduction. In reality, the show, guest curated by artist Cedric Tai at the Simone DeSousa Gallery, was just a part of a conversation that has been ongoing for a while. It's really more like the first time these cities, after talking for a while, met for coffee. The real matchmaker in this budding relationship might actually be Cezanne Charles, whose spouse and co-director at [rootoftwo](#), is from just south of Glasgow and attended Glasgow School of Art. During their time together in Scotland, Charles was the executive director of [New Media Scotland](#), and partnered with writer and Director of the Center for Contemporary Art Glasgow, Francis Mckee, on a number of exhibitions, events, and talks around art, science, and technology, including the early partnership around the NMS creative lab. In Detroit, Charles, through [Creative Many](#), has worked with Kresge Arts in Detroit to invite guest lecturers from various professions to speak to Kresge Fellows; in 2010, Tai was

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one of those fellows. Tai acknowledges that Charles was personally influential in his decision to pursue graduate studies in Glasgow, where he formed the relationships that led, in turn, to this new part of the exchange.



*Some of Sinclair's "Real Life Top Ten" lists, in postcard form (all images courtesy Simone DeSousa Gallery unless otherwise noted)*

*Over Over Over* featured five artists: Tessa Lynch, Francis Mckee, Rosie O'Grady, John Nicol, and Ross Sinclair. Some of the work presented in the show related directly to Detroit, such as O'Grady's site-specific data collection. Tai, acting as O'Grady's proxy, gave pedometers to the staff at Avalon Bakery — a business that has been at the heart of the gallery's Cass Corridor neighborhood for decades — who wore them for the run of the show, documenting how many steps they took a day. This effort served not

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only as a data collection mechanism for O’Grady, who will use this to inform future works, but as a means of extending the space of the gallery beyond its physical space. “These people next door to us are connected to this exhibit somehow, so it immediately expands the idea of the restricted space into a much larger space,” said gallery owner Simone DeSousa.

[Ross Sinclair](#) also compiled data for his project, soliciting “Real Life Top Ten” lists from random Detroiters. For example, his “Real Life Hamtramck Top 10: Food” list features a peculiar culinary array — including pizza, hamburgers, pierogi, biryani, and aseed — that cannot help but make one wonder ... Who wrote this list? The work is part of his ongoing effort to use branding and marketing to combat the authoritarian nature of “Top Ten” lists in media outlets and lifestyle magazines. The work makes you wonder who benefits from these lists, and what impact hierarchical rankings and rebranding can have on places like Detroit, which are struggling to find the line between rebirth and erasure of a strong cultural history.



*One of Tessa Lynch's two-dimensional drawings*

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Lynch's contribution was more abstract. Unable to make the trip to Detroit, she instead provided a series of scenarios and drawings of what it would be like to live in Detroit and have her studio here, based on conversations she'd had with Tai and others and her own projected ideas. Laser cut into vinyl, and sculpted into dimensional glyphs hanging on the wall, it's uncertain what these objects truly are — sculpture, drawings, or maybe just captured ideas, still trying to find their ultimate form.

Nicol also showed work that is tied to Detroit more conceptually than literally, with a series of watches that explored the value of manufactured objects, art, and time. These were knock-off watches that he bought online — not valuable brand-name watches — but that Nicol then painted over their faces, assigning the watches a new, art-based value. They were presented on thick, twisting display stands, atop glossy-looking plinths that on closer examination had ripped bases that revealed them to be built from simple packing boxes. As people gain renewed interest in coming to Detroit, these questions about commercial value — and particularly the power of art to assign it — seem increasingly central.

Both Nicol and Mckee were able to make the trip from Glasgow for the beginning of an exchange program that Tai continues to work feverishly to fund. Nicol spent his time doing a short residency at [Popp's Packing](#), which houses one of Detroit's most active international [residency programs](#). Mckee, whose works expressed feelings of loss embodied within ruins — including a photographic series dealing with a fire that burned down the Glasgow School of Art last year — parlayed his visit into a robust exchange by offering potential residency space to interested Detroiters at the Center for Contemporary Art campus in Glasgow. "John [Nicol] and I both felt that Detroit was very similar to Glasgow in many ways," says Mckee, "The community spirit, the way people approached making work, even the kind of work — very familiar to us both." He is hopeful that both Simone DeSousa and writer Lynn Crawford will make visits to Glasgow in the future.



*John Nicol's watch display*

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Anyone who has navigated the early stages of dating knows that every relationship is forged through a degree of uncertainty. As Tai discussed with me over coffee, following the show's closing, he views his role as curator of this project as "an ongoing process" — an unusual perspective, and one reflective of his investment in building a lasting connection between Detroit and Glasgow. "All curatorial projects should be an experiment in making an exhibition," Tai says—and yet, for everyone touched by this experiment, the interest seems to be not just with the work that has been shown, but in the conversation that is to continue. It seems this is a story of two cities with much yet to say to each other.

[Over Over Over](#) ran at the SimoneDeSousa Gallery (444 W. Willis, #112, Detroit) through August 8.