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LAVA HOUSE

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LAVA HOUSE



For six-and-a-half years, the Louisville Assembly of Vanguard Art lived in a warehouse on Shelby Parkway that burned to ashes last month. Here, a photo essay

What do you even say?

For a generation of young Louisville creators — artists, musicians, writers, filmmakers, punks, closet revolutionaries, wayward journeyfolks, innovators — the mothership has burned to the ground. The party's over. Quarter the fun hog.

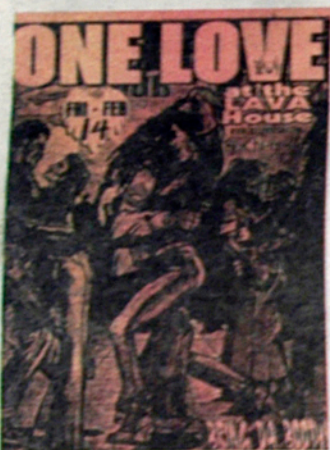
The six or so years that the LAVA House was around on Shelby Parkway, and the three when it fired on all cylinders, were foundational for a relatively small but affecting group of people, and equally meaningless for far more than that. How many people really knew what happened inside? Our only vantage point to this sort of culture-of-community phenomenon, and to the singular kind of creative process it conducts in its womb, is, was and will be standing inert at some gallery or airport hangar, glaring as some piece of art pulls at your energy without so much as twitching. You may briefly consider mimicry, standing inside the place during a rock show, surrounded by 500-some people, cardrums crackling and furious, but it's embarrassing to even ride out the notion.

Because really, how many people think a steely warehouse full of artists and all kinds of random, weird shit is worth the tinder? A fire the size of a city block brought it down, took its keeper Bill Christie with it, took the poor dog Helvis too. That got your attention.

As humans, we all understand in some deep place that soul isn't found in things, it's found in people. Most of the people who made the Louisville Assembly of Vanguard Art a viable institution of this city's superior underground culture are still around, and lucky for us, they still care. The ones who lived and worked at the LAVA House as of two weeks ago, their tools are gone. For a few, everything is gone, burned up, contributing to the pile of ash that still litters the warehouse's substantial footprint.

To me, when it comes down, the best art is confrontational, even aggressive; a reaction to its environment. I spent a decent chunk of time hanging around the LAVA House a few years ago, and it always struck me as a place of protection, where all the evil shit outside its walls was momentarily kept at bay, where the creative process could take over unencumbered. We all should hope for such a place.

What else can you even say? —Stephen George



About the cover —

Back (L to R): Thalon Hubbell, Amy Gardiner, Stuart Barr, Dave Fry, Willie Tash. Middle: Shannon Stelzer, Chad Hayes, Chasity Cisco, Bart Herre, Hannah Cameron, Aron Conaway, Chris Chappell, Kristin Shelor, Dave Caudill, Glen Herre. Front: Hallie Jones, Disco, Joe "Beef" Barlun, Seed, Iggy, Matt Cisco.

LAVA House: A timeline

The following is an abridged timeline of the LAVA House, maintained by LAVA co-founder Aron Conaway. Visit www.thelavahouse.org for more information.

2001

April: Aron Conaway drafts a manifesto of sorts to represent the ideals for which a new kind of organization could thrive. Originally intended to be a project in collaboration with artist Thomas Brown, it calls for a need for community, finding a new function for art in the new millennium, a deep exploration of art's purpose and documentation along the way.

Around the same time, Bart Herre moves

into a bedroom in a warehouse that his father bought while he was at Columbus College of Art and Design.

May 11: Aron is taken by friends Tyler Trotter and Brendan McGee to see a building that Bart Herre's father owned. Upon walking in the door of the building, it is immediately apparent that this is going to be a place where something big could happen.

June 6: Aron calls Bart to set up a meeting. Bart leaves for several days to return to Columbus to pack up his stuff for the move back to Louisville. Aron leaves a note on the front door of the warehouse asking Bart to call,

and also describes his vision of starting an artist community there.

June 10: Bart returns from Columbus. Aron hooks up with Bart to discuss Aron's renting the carpeted office in the warehouse for a studio.

June 21: Aron meets with Glenn Herre, the landlord, and Bart about renting the office space. Glenn wanted \$400 a month for the entire living area. Initially Aron was not to live there because the building was not zoned as a residence. Within a month, Aron is living at the warehouse.

June 26: Aron meets with Glenn Herre to discuss use of the larger warehouse space

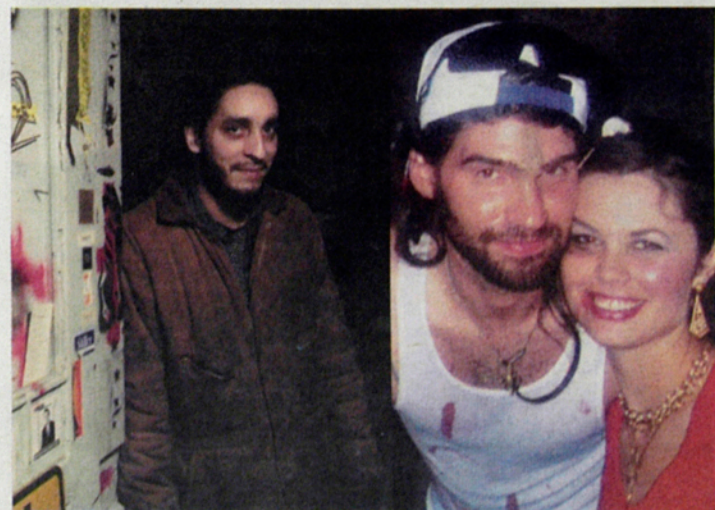
outside of the office he was initially renting. A price of \$1,450 is agreed upon for the entire half of the building — \$1,050 for the warehouse space and \$400 for the living quarters.

Aron and Bart scrap together a large sum of money to pay for the first month of rental at the new space. Aron, Bart and Thomas meet in Aron's room and, using the name The Louisville Association of Vanguard Artisans, work out preliminary ideas for a LAVA logo. Aron comes up with a stylized LAVA emblem that incorporates the fleur-de-lis into the letters. Bart does not like the word Artisan, so the name is changed to use the word Art instead. Aron doesn't like the word Association, so the name is changed to use the word Assembly.

FEATURE



Clockwise from top left: Chad Hayes; "Big Greg" Martin; Disco and Bill Christie; Willie Tash; Hannah Cameron and Bart Herre; Hallie Jones, Emily Ritter and Shannon Stelzer; Bart Herre; Aron Conaway and Hallie Jones; Scott Belcher; Seed and Helvis; Kristen Shelor; Chris Chappell and Elaine Fister-Hull; Aron Conaway; Stuart Barr (mohawk); Thalon Hubbell (red shirt); Joe "Beef" Barlund. (Thanks to all those who provided photos to LEO.)



FEATURE

LAVA HOUSE

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May: Hallie Jones joins the LAVA organization. She offers to do the LAVA House website in exchange for studio space for six months.

May 17: Dub Narcotic Sound System, Half Seas Over, Tara Jane O'Neil, Da Hawney Troof, Snowsuit.

July 4: LAVA House One Year Anniversary Party. Music: Electrolytes, Fluxtron, Sapat, Tim Conaway, Jon Cook, DJs Foursquare, Strangeloop, Logicide, Mint, Tig, Cosmic.

July 19: After-Party for Starkiller, Strike City, Halifax Pier, Contra Show at Headliners; Dub Band called Mr. Romance and the Polyphonic Force, later known as The Children.

July 27: "Cinemamonous" 16mm Films, 15 Filmmakers, Heartbreak Cowboy Traveling Roadshow, Your Heart Breaks.

Oct. 4: Bonnie "Prince" Billy and Faun Fables, broken up by the police and moved to Mia Fredrick's "Museum" on Washington Street.

Oct. 19: Art across the Line, UofL Student Show. Music: Lullatone, The Old Reliable Fashion.

Oct. 31: Halloween "covers" show featuring The Cars, Nirvana, Iggy and the Stooges.

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve Bash featuring Trans Am, Instant Camera, Irina + DJ Tease and Friends + Video by Spontaneously Decided Subversive Behavior. 500 in attendance.

2003

Jan. 17-20: LAVA travels to Washington, D.C. for Anti-War March organized by A.N.S.W.E.R.

Feb. 14: "Love and War: A Whole LAVA Love" Art Show featuring Sapat, Frequency Being, Fringe Medicine, The Children.

March 28: duPont Manual High School Photo Show.

April 18: Opening for "Destruction of Nature: Beauty vs. the Beast" LAVA group art show at Kentucky Theater.

June 27: "The Element of Surprise," Louisville Photo Biennial Show at LAVA House.

July 17: The LAVA House Art Project (new entity) and The Comedy Caravan Bootleg Music Series: Ron Whitehead & the Hillbilly Viking Apocalypse Revue, Chuck Roy and the New Family Comedy Experiment + Allo.

July 18: Spontaneously Decided Subversive Behavior SDBS (a side project of some LAVA artists) short film shown at Kentucky Theater.

Dec. 7: LAVA and MoveOn.org movie showing "Uncovered: The Truth about the Iraq War" at the Kentucky Theater.

2004

March 4: Aron and Bart meet at Republic Bank to set up Bank Account for LAVA Organization.

April 14: Gallopooza Horse Preview Party (Aron and Hallie one horse, Bart Herre two horses, Shannon and Greg w/ SAL two horses).

April 15: JCC Unity Arts Festival, "Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures." Hallie and Aron set up an installation and a booth for LAVA. Bart later comes and works the table for awhile.

April 18: LAVA Meeting to discuss people hanging around and distracting the creative process.

April 24: LAVA Spring Show "Art for Evolution." Music: a.m. Sunday.

May 14: "Art that Strikes You," U of L Student Art League, Brown School, KCD. Music: Manchuria.

July 4: Third Anniversary Party at the LAVA House.

July 17: Forecastle Arts/Music/Activism Festival, Tyler Park. Forecastle After-Party at the LAVA House.

July 18: MoveOn.org showing of "Outfoxed" at the LAVA House.

July 24: Tony Miller for Congress Benefit Show featuring the Children, the Gage Brothers, Siam Poetry, DJs — moved from LAVA House to Michael Murphy's Bar because of fire marshal involvement. This would basically mark the end of shows at the LAVA House.

Oct. 3: LAVA artists Aron, Hallie and Bart all have work in Round One Political Arts Show at Glassworks.

2005

July 17-Sept. 26: Several LAVA House members are looking to go in together and invest in a new building. This was the beginning of a venture dubbed LIFT.45. Surveys were sent out, investors and artists were scouted and an offer for a building on Preston and Hill streets was contingent on bank loan approval. The loan was not granted and the project came to a halt. Some artists moved on to start the Greenhouse Arts Project on Frankfort Avenue, another went to Pratt in Brooklyn, and others remained at the LAVA House.





Over the next three years, several artists come and go, including Greg Martin, Chris Chappell, K. Castleman S., Dave Caudill, Seed, and Hannah Cameron, among others. Meetings and the general organization come to a standstill as the LAVA artists focus on individual work and develop emerging careers as artists. Despite the burst of individualism, the community of artists, visitors and residents continues to be rich and fat with creative output.

On Saturday, Jan. 26, 2008, the LAVA House burns down in a massive, three-alarm fire. Bill Christie, 65, who lived in a trailer inside the main warehouse, is killed. Helvis, a resident pit bull, is also killed. For the moment, the future of LAVA is unclear. ■

