



THE MAD HOUSERS

534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318 (new address) • 404.806.6233 • www.madhousers.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec 5, Sunday, 10am

Hut Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Dec 15, Wednesday, 7pm

Panel Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Dec 16, Thursday, 7pm

General Meeting

Jake's Ice Cream (676 Highland Ave)

Dec 19, Sunday, 10am

Hut Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

January 29 – March 5, 2005
"Gas/Food/Lodging" exhibit

Eyedrum Gallery

(see page 6)

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ATLANTA ASD: THE GOLD BIKE PROJECT

By Cathy Byrd

Mad Housers Inc. has been dedicated to providing shelter to qualified clients since 1987, but who would have imagined that this September 12, our volunteers would be lucky enough to load up their trucks with gold bikes for Danny, Tom, James, Will and Smiley at Bankhead, and a dozen more for clients at Law, Stewart and Bridge camps?

These treasures came to Mad Housers through an unusual connection—an international art exhibition that I organized for the gallery I direct at Georgia State University. Three projects involving African artist Meschac Gaba, combined with the work of four other international artists, made up the exhibition Strange Planet that was on view this fall at our School of Art & Design Gallery and Saltworks Gallery in Atlanta.

Born in Benin and residing in Amsterdam, Meschac Gaba has won critical acclaim for a single, on-going project that manifested in a wide range of work, all relating to the idea of a Museum of Contemporary African Art. An encounter with his work feels like fun because there's always something for the viewer to do inside the spaces he creates. Atlanta ASD (Art au Service du Développement) (Art in Service to Development), often called The Gold Bike Project, was no exception.

Atlanta ASD was inspired by an interactive project that Meschac had created for Documenta 11 in 2002. In Kassel, Germany, he'd received generous funding to produce and staff a bike rental boutique with a hundred new bicycles. The bikes were rented out for a month to collect money that was sent to a nongovernmental organization in Africa.



Jim puts the final touches on a Gold Bike.

When I heard about his European work with bicycles, I began to imagine how we could produce this great project in Atlanta. Limited gallery funds would provide no budget to buy new bikes, much less to construct a rental space, and we would have to get a permit and volunteers for the public art project, but what an incredible concept! I figured we would inspire people to make donations, ride bikes, think about art and the economy of postcolonial societies, and prepare a fleet of bikes for Mad Housers clients, all at the same time! We would secure donated bicycles, fix them up, paint them gold and rent them for two weekends in Freedom Park.

Though the Mad Housers' ultimate mission is to find housing solutions for the homeless population, we're all aware that there are many obstacles that the homeless face in their daily lives, including lack of transportation. When I contacted Jim Devlin to find out if Mad Housers would be interested in the bikes from our project, he canvassed core volunteers, who, he says, "saw the Gold Bikes donation as an opportunity to improve our clients' lives by giving them an additional tool."



So we took off with our project. Vanessa Grubbs, an intrepid summer intern, coordinated the entire process. Through networking, we made contact with key community resources. Georgia Tech housing officials who each spring collect and donate all the abandoned or stolen bikes on campus donated most of our fleet of bikes. Decatur Yellow Bikes became the site of our bicycle rejuvenation workshop and the source of technical expertise and training for our repair crew. Eddie Granderson and Ken Gillette at the Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs facilitated our park permits. Mad Housers Jim Devlin and Lewis Ingram joined other community volunteers to help us rehab the bikes.

Vanessa found the project challenging, but rewarding: "Atlanta ASD was a wonderful project to be involved in because of the impact that it had on the community. Working with volunteers from Mad Housers, Georgia State University, Yellow Bikes and the Atlanta Bicycle Campaign gave greater meaning and impact to the project by connecting groups that would normally not work together. By collaborating, these groups were able to increase public awareness about both our project and their organizations."

By late August, we were ready! We had Meschac Gaba's ASD logo and a pile of stickers, terrific advance PR in local newspapers and on the radio, a respectable fleet of 25 bikes ready to ride and a truck to tow them in, plenty of new bike helmets and five days-worth of volunteers to man our kiosk in the park. Unfortunately, the anticipated two weekends full of energetic and interested Atlantans riding gold bikes in Freedom Park never materialized. Low participation meant we didn't raise enough funds to even pay for the rental truck. But the experience had unexpectedly great rewards—the new relationships we developed with our community and the excitement of Mad Housers clients when our volunteers drove up with wheels... and new possibilities. ◆



ABOUT DECATUR YELLOW BIKES

Decatur Yellow Bikes, Inc., (DYB) was launched on July 4, 2001, when volunteers rode 50 donated yellow bikes in Decatur's Independence Day parade. Ken Roskopf, who works and lives in Decatur, started the nonprofit project that has since been responsible for the rehab of over 500 bicycles.

The philosophy of DYB is to facilitate the use of bicycles as a healthy and practical alternative to using a large, polluting vehicle for short trips. Initially, DYB set up bike kiosks around Decatur where people could borrow and return bikes. Its present day operation focuses on reconditioning adult bikes and making them available for adoption. Most of the bicycles come from garages, attics and basements of individuals. Some are donated by bike shops, police departments, and nonprofit groups. Volunteers say Bike South and REI are especially strong supporters.

During a typical session, two to four volunteers work to prepare bicycles for adoption out of a small warehouse behind 130 New Street in Decatur. DYB's biggest customers are students from Georgia Tech and Emory University, but anyone with an interest and \$25 can adopt a bike. They're open for business Thursday evenings from 7 until 9 and Saturday mornings from 10 until noon.

Mark Gray, DYB's current president, says that donated bikes and new volunteers are always welcome. To find out more about Decatur Yellow Bikes, check out www.dybikes.org or write to info@dybikes.org.



CLIENT INTERVIEW: BARBARA QUARTERMAN

By Salma Abdulrahman and
Michael Ann Chastain

How long have you lived in Atlanta?

All my life. I was born here and I grew up here.

What was your family like? Do you keep in touch with them?

I keep in touch with them sometimes. My dad is dead. But I keep up with my mom. I have two sisters. They both live in Atlanta.

How much school did you get through when you were growing up?

I went through tenth grade. I went to Washington High, here in Atlanta.

And what was the first job you had?

My first job I had, I was working at Burger King. It was all right, I liked it. I started going to school for nursing, then I stopped going, then I started doing other jobs, working at hotels, stuff like that.

So you wanted to be a nurse?

Yes, I wanted to be one. But then I became homeless, so I couldn't pay the tuition. I had to stop. The work was hard since I didn't have a place to stay. I got through about three months.

Do you work now?

No I do not.

How did you become homeless?

I really don't have to be homeless, but I'm just out here, you know. I have family, I could go home, but I choose not to, because I like to be on my own and independent.

When did you start living on your own?

When I was fifteen. And later I had gotten married, but then my husband passed, and then I was really on my own. He took care of me all that time. He's been dead about six years.

How old are you now, if you don't mind me asking?

(laughs) I'm 37.

How did you find this place under the bridge?

I used to have a sofa here. Then Nick had come and built a hut for a friend of mine. So when he built that hut I told him, I said, "I want a hut."

So before that hut you were sleeping on a sofa?

Yes.

Where did you keep your things?

I kept them in baskets and stuff like that.

And if you had to go somewhere?

You had to take it with you if you don't want nobody to take it. I had a backpack.

Did you feel safe staying under the bridge?

I felt safe because they ain't gonna let nothing happen to me.

You mean you had friends down there to watch out for you?

Yes.

How did you build that trust with your fellow campmates?

It took time to build confidence with people, you know you gotta get through to a person to do that. It was hard in the beginning.



This year, do your holiday shopping at wellspent.org. This shopping website donates a portion of your purchase amount to a charitable group.

Just select "Mad Housers" as your charity before you start shopping.



When the Mad Housers came and built that Low Rider hut for you, how did it improve your situation?

It made it more better because I had a place to put my stuff and I had a place where I could lay my head and where I could feel more secure.

Under the bridge, do you have to worry about bad weather or rain?

Nope, I don't have to worry about rain because we're inside. See when there's a storm, when it rains, you can always get underneath the bridge where the rain won't hit you. That's a good thing. But it still ain't safe, you know what I'm saying, because the police they mess with us and stuff, and they be wantin to lock us up and stuff.

What is the cops' complaint?

They complain that we're on railroad property. But the people in my camp keep pretty quiet, we don't cause trouble.

Is your number one worry your safety?

Yes, it is. Your safety is your number one worry. You gotta watch your back and make sure everything's alright because you don't never know what a person is thinking. The hut gives you security, but still, you have to watch out for yourself.

As a woman, is there anything that makes being homeless very different than for a man?

No, it's still the same thing, because more men is homeless than women, but it ain't no different, it's the same kind of life.

Do you have any medical conditions that are difficult to live with being homeless?

No there's not, I'm very healthy.

How long have you lived in this camp?

I've lived here a year and four months. I've been in the Mad Houser's shelter since July, about 5 months.

What do you do every day?

I go to a day shelter. You go there and just sit around and relax, or you take a class. I

feel a little safer there. You have to leave at 4 o'clock in the evening. And it opens at 8 o'clock. Some days I just sit around here.

Do you like your new Gold Bike?

Yes, I love it. It's gonna make transportation easier. I used to walk to the shelter, but now I'll ride the bike there.

The hut gives you security, but still, you have to watch out for yourself.

Do you have plans for the future?

I plan on getting off the street, I plan on getting me a job, and trying to make something out of myself.

What kind of help would you need to get off the street?

Really what kind of help I would need is help leaving drugs alone.

And what kind of job would you look for?

I would like to become a nurse.

What is one thing you would like to tell people about homelessness?

I advise that anybody that can be something should become something so you won't have to become homeless. I advise you to get all the education you can get, because it gets hard... you don't want to be out here. And if you got a family, try to keep in touch with them, try to get along with them. Because being homeless ain't real nice, because when you're homeless you don't never know what's going to happen to you. You might think you won't have no worries, but you got a lot of worries, because you have to watch your back at all times. ♦

MAD HOUSERS ROLL OUT THE LOW RIDERS

By Jim Devlin

Over the years, Mad Housers' huts have provided for the basic housing needs of the homeless population. Although popular with our clients, they do have a serious drawback: the shelters stand ten feet tall from the floor to the roof's peak, making them difficult to conceal.

In the past, the huts were easily hidden in the urban forests of Atlanta's neglected industrial zones. However, as Atlanta gentrifies, those industrial zones have become prime targets for new development, reducing the potential sites where the Mad Housers can erect huts.

Unfortunately, there has not been a similar decline in the city's homeless population. This has resulted in an increasing number of clients who need shelter, but are unable to find sites that can support the current hut design.

At this point the Mad Housers had two options. The first option was to continue building the hut shelters for a shrinking number of clients, ignoring a significant portion of the homeless population. The other option was to diversify our operations by developing a second shelter design that more closely met the needs of a growing list of clients. Since the Mad Housers believe in finding solutions, not excuses, we began planning a new shelter design.

Our goal was to create a shelter that could be placed almost anywhere, and would provide the basic criteria of a shelter: privacy, security and protection from the elements. In addition, the shelter needed to be affordable and easy to assemble. We concluded that a low-lying structure would be the most discreet approach. The solution was the new 'low-rider' shelter design, which consists of three parts: a sleeping unit, a storage unit and a porch.

The sleeping unit's floor plan dimensions are that of a single 48" x 96" (4 foot by 8 foot) sheet of plywood. The front wall is 48" high and the back wall is 40" high, creating a simple sloped roof. These dimensions provide enough space inside for sitting and sleeping, but not standing.

Since the sleeping unit is too small for a wood-burning stove, we insulate all of the exterior surfaces. The combination of insulation and the occupant's body heat provides sufficient warmth during the winter season. The floor and roof are constructed with 1/2" rigid insulation sandwiched between 5/8" and 3/8" plywood. The walls consist of 1/2" rigid insulation sandwiched between two sheets of 3/8" plywood. Wood 2x4 framing supports the floor and walls.

Asphalt roll roofing is applied over the roof to assuring a water-resistant interior. Discarded solid core doors are cut in half to create two smaller doors: one for the sleeping unit and another for the storage unit. Directly above the door we install a transom. The transom is screened in the summer for improved ventilation and replaced with Plexiglas during the winter.

Due to the sleeping unit's limited space, a separate lockable storage unit is provided. The storage unit's construction is similar to the sleeping unit except that the floor



... to a campsite

plan is 48" x 48" and the storage units are built from single layers of plywood with no insulation.

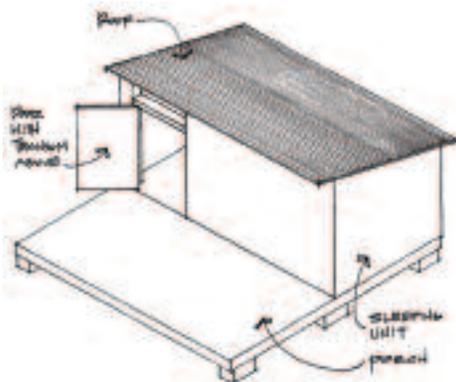
The third component is the porch, which is a 48" x 96" platform. The porch sits at the front of the sleeping unit providing a clean surface at the entry and an outdoor seating area. All three of the components sit on cinder blocks that raise them above any rainwater ponding. The arrangement of the three components varies depending on site conditions.

Constructing a low-rider has the same two steps as constructing a hut. First, the modular panels are assembled in the Mad Housers' warehouse. The panels are then transported to the site and assembled in the field.

The time required to fabricate the low-rider panels initially took about 6 hours. However, after some practice we have reduced that to 4 hours. The low-rider can be assembled in about 2 hours out in the field, which is an hour or two less than the time required to erect a hut.

As of Summer 2004, the Mad Housers have produced fifteen low-rider shelters. The first of these new shelters was deployed in the Spring of 2003. With over a year of experience under our belt, we can now look back and judge the results.

The low-rider shelters have certainly increased the number of people we can serve and our clients are happy with the design. One unforeseen advantage we found with the low-riders is that since



from the drawing board...

none of the lumber is supporting any significant structural load we can use mostly salvaged lumber to build the structure, which is both environmentally friendly and practically free. As a result, the cost of raw materials for a low rider has dropped from \$450 to about \$300 per unit, which is very important considering recent increases in lumber costs.

There were a few bugs in our initial design that we have since corrected. First, the original door design was made from a piece of rigid insulation sandwiched between two pieces of plywood. Besides being difficult to fabricate, the door was easily damaged by vandals. We now use salvaged solid core doors that provide greater security and are easier to install.

Also, the first few huts were built with 2x2 framing in an attempt to minimize the weight of the panels. Unfortunately, those panels lacked sufficient rigidity and were often damaged in transport. Therefore, we now build the panels with 2x4 framing, which is both sturdier and much more widely available.

The ultimate test for the low-rider design came when the first clients took occupancy. One of the early clients found that the air inside the shelter became stuffy in the summer, even with the door open. Adding the transom above the door with ventilation holes in the opposite wall provided cross ventilation. We also built small shelves inside both the sleeping unit and the storage unit to help the clients organ-

ize their belongings. The low-rider shelter design continues to evolve as we receive additional input from our clients. Even with these improvements, the Mad Housers realize that neither the low-rider nor the full-size hut is an ideal housing solution. But until that ideal solution is found, we will continue to provide the basics in shelter to the homeless population. ♦



**VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW:
MICHAEL ANN CHASTAIN**

By Salma Abdulrahman

How did you first hear about the Mad Housers?

Jim Devlin of course! I met him at a Kind Human Benefit for the homeless. I hadn't heard of anything like Mad Housers before, and I was curious.

What was your first volunteering opportunity?

I joined the email group and I watched it

for nearly five months. Finally, I came to a meeting at Jake's Ice Cream, then a Wednesday night panel build, and the Sunday hut build.

What did you think of that experience?

Honestly, I felt a bit awkward at first because I didn't have much knowledge of the hut's construction, and I don't think I had swung a hammer more than three times in my life! But, I felt welcomed; they pointed to a hammer and had diagrams on the wall. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed it. It had been a while since I had built something with my hands.

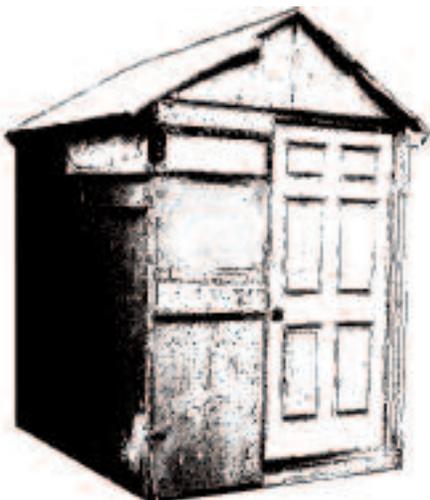
The hut build, where the panels are assembled on site, was great because I actually met the client. And there were quite a few new volunteers there, so I wasn't the only one who was green. In a matter of hours, the client had a roof over his head. I was impressed.

What do your friends and family think about you volunteering with the Mad Housers?

Well, they think it's great. Both my family and friends support what I do, and they respect the Mad Housers and what they stand for.

What made you want to join the Mad Housers?

I respected what the Mad Housers were doing and how they were getting it done. Also, I liked the things they had to say - I read on the website that the Mad Housers believe that if a person has a secure space from which to operate, they are much more



Additional Comments:

As the weather gets colder, our work of building warm, secure shelters for the homeless is more important than ever.

But the Mad Housers needs your help!
Please donate generously this holiday season.

capable of finding the resources to help themselves. Once I started volunteering, I had a good time. So, I keep coming back.

How long have you been a volunteer?

I went to my first build right before Halloween 2003, so a little more than one year.

What kind of stuff have you done since working with the Mad Housers?

Well, most recently I've volunteered my time for client outreach. This is an important committee because, of course, our clients know more about the homeless than we do. They're out there living it. They can educate us on what we're doing right or wrong, and how we can improve... whether it's improvement of the hut structure itself or the location of potential clients in need. We have just distributed the first publication of the client outreach newsletter. It's written for and to our clients, and includes issues that surround their campsites, as well as resources that may help them where the Mad Housers can't. This is an all-volunteer organization, so we're not always available - we have self-addressed stamped post-cards to make getting in touch with us easier on the client. And if they have something they want to talk about in the next newsletter, they'll have that opportunity.

What else do you do with the Mad Housers?

I'm currently acting as secretary and trying to get a handle on the paperwork side of Mad Housers. All the things that go into the background of a non-profit organization are just as important as being out

there hammering - it keeps us going.

But you also took care of publication of our newsletter. You found us a printer who prints our newsletter for free. You arranged to get all the issues delivered to us and folded and mailed on time. You really take on a lot of things.

There's lots to do, and it couldn't be done without the volunteers. Everybody has a real value here, so, I've just been doing odd jobs, trying to lend them a hand.

In a matter of hours, the client had a roof over his head. I was impressed.

What surprised you the most about working with the Mad Housers? Is there one thing you realize now that never hit you before?

Nick said in an AJC article a few years back, "Once you give people a certain amount of hope, civilization begins there." I had never really digested it like that before. Giving hope can come in many ways, and I think the huts give a certain amount of security and consistency to the clients' lives. How would you expect someone to be productive in their community if they have no hope for tomorrow? When they have that hope, they can start thinking about what they can do to make their tomorrow better.

What was your experience like when you saw an actual camp?

My first experience was at Stewart, the largest camp. It's a lot to take in, if you've never been exposed to homeless living conditions like that before. Of course, there's a certain amount of uneasiness... you're walking into the campsite, which is their home. I felt like I was intruding somewhat. But, right away, I noticed a level of trust between the experienced volunteers and the clients. That made me more comfortable. We were welcome there.

People may say that what we're doing won't solve the problem of homelessness. But if you talk to the person we just built a hut for, it matters a lot to them.

Michael Ann grew up in Atlanta and attended Pace Academy high school. She graduated from Vanderbilt with a Civil Engineering degree. She's now a business consultant, who enjoys hiking, theatre, and live music.



EYEDRUM GALLERY EXHIBIT

The Mad Housers will be part of a group show at the Eyedrum Gallery in Atlanta, GA. The title of the show is GAS FOOD LODGING. The show opens January 29, 2005 and the Eyedrum exhibit will focus on lodging, especially temporary housing and refuges that emerge from transient lifestyles. Come out and see the Mad Housers exhibit, Building the Invisible City, which will include a full-sized and a Low Rider hut. More info is at: gasfoodandlodging.net.

FEEDBACK FORM

- I'd like to volunteer.
- I'd like to make a donation: \$ _____
- I have materials to donate.
- I know someone who needs shelter.
- I know a campsite.
- Please remove me from your mailing list.

You can use the back of this form for additional details.

Mad Housers, Inc. is incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization. All Donations are tax-deductible.

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