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Features

DC's 5x5 public art festival: What to see and where to see it (MAP)

CAROLINE DOBUZINSKIS | TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2014



Jennifer Wen Ma will create a living "portraiture garden" of a DC resident, similar to this one

Public art by world-renowned artists will temporarily transform all eight wards of the city, with events and exhibits running from September through December.

5x5, a project of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (DCCA), will bring public art to all eight wards of the city – transforming, at least temporarily, neighborhoods and parks, street corners, and city blocks. Five curators from across the country have each hand-selected five artists of international caliber to create temporary exhibits that could stop you in your tracks.

The art tends towards statement-making pieces on global policy and urbanization issues. This year's 5x5 (the second since 2012) received attention for Canadian artist Mia Feuer's proposal to illustrate the pending effects of climate change by sinking a mock gas station in the Anacostia River. The plan was ultimately canceled when environmental and community groups protested due to possible contamination of continued water testing. Instead, Feuer will be leading "floating lectures," taking place in the river on a pontoon boat and in canoes, with climatologists, ecologists, and artists.

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Feuer is part of curator Stephanie Sherman's *Near Futures* exhibit in 5x5, which considers the outcomes of changes in technology and policy. "[*Near Futures*] was inspired about thinking about D.C. as the city where decisions get made that affect both the city itself, but also the world," says Sherman.

5x5's overarching goal is to stamp dynamic, innovative public art onto everyday life – something that can be seen on the way to work or to the grocery store – and highlight its role in civil society, says DCCA spokesperson Sarah Massey.

Many venues are unused spaces or those on the verge of being redeveloped, with the art serving as a way to temporarily activate an otherwise blank space. Two of the sites used for 5x5 in 2012 have taken on new uses: A former police evidence warehouse at 2235 Shannon Pl, SE, which in 2012 was the site of a Native American-inspired installation made of discarded [refuse](#), will soon house the D.C. Taxicab Commission, the D.C. Lottery, and the D.C. Department of Transportation's Business Opportunity and Workforce Development Center. Another former 5x5 site, the Lumber Shed in Capitol Riverfront, which in 2012 held a tiny functioning replica of a Japanese cable car, has been transformed into a mixed-use building.

This year, in a gesture emblematic of D.C.'s grand historical monuments and evolving present, curator Lance Fung will create a public green space at a vacant lot at 990 4th Street SW. *Nonuments* includes five temporary monuments to contemporary issues such as climate change, human trafficking, and immigration. "I thought it would be great to create temporary monuments that reflect current heroes and issues worth recognition," says Fung. *Nonuments* will include a "portraiture garden" in the likeness of a local resident, chosen by lottery from a pool of people nominated by locals. Artist Jennifer Wen Ma will create the large-scale portrait by dyeing living plants with black ink. The garden will change color over time as the live plants continue to grow.



For now, the *Nonuments* space isn't slated for development, but according to Chanda Washington, spokesperson for the DC Office of the Deputy Mayor of Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), the city will send out a request for bids by the end of the year.

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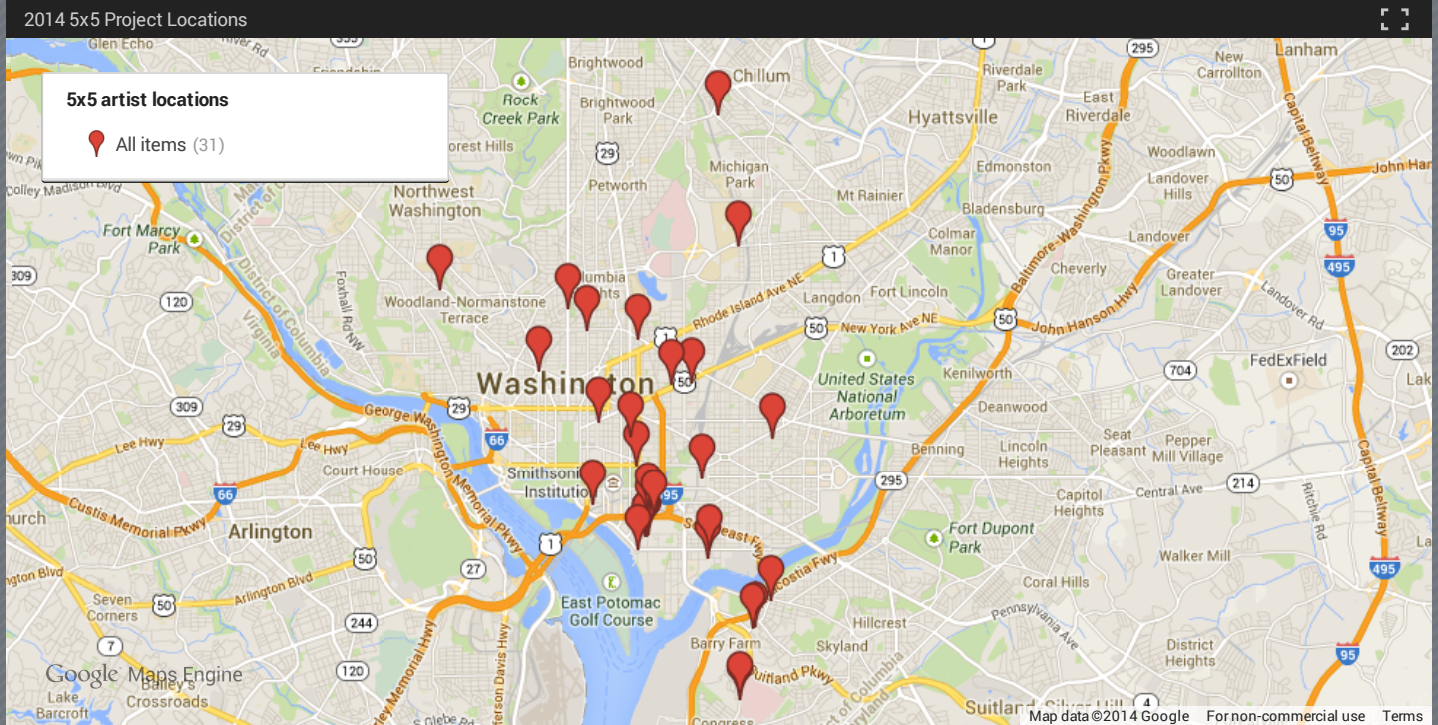
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Another site is a historic building at the Navy Yards at 200 Tingey Street, SE, which was the center of U.S. naval weapons production during the two world wars. Los Angeles-based artist Glenn Kaino will install a structure evocative of a small golden bridge or walkway suspended in the air. The piece will be made of replicas of Olympic gold medalist Tommie Smith's arm in "black power" salute. The space is now owned by The JBG Companies and is planned to be a retail pavilion.

There are also two projects that will be installed at St. Elizabeths East in southeast D.C., where D.C. has poured effort into creatively reusing the former mental hospital. St. Elizabeths East currently houses a brand-new innovation hub (the R.I.S.E. Demonstration Center), and a pavilion where people host events like a monthly pop-up Whole Foods market and Broccoli City, an environmentally conscious music festival. A handful of developers have made bids for retail and restaurant development here as well.

Since 5x5's art is landing squarely amid such growth, it's no surprise that some of the art is reflective of the city's rapid shifts. Locally based, Australian-born artist Marley Dawson links his work to the tearing down of some of the city's brick row houses and their replacement by wood-framed condos.

As part of curator Justine Topfer's *(home)land*, Dawson will be rebuilding at 635 T Street NW a replica of the family home he helped his father build back in Australia. The house will go up in a speed matching construction on condos in the surrounding neighborhood, and will disappear very shortly after 5x5 closes. "How will a speedily nailed construction age in the next 10, 20, 50 years?" asks Dawson. "Are buildings meant for perpetuity or do they have limited lifespans?"

Curator A.M. Weaver's *Ceremonies of Dark Men* focuses on the cultural effects of gentrification with billboard- and banner-sized photographic portraits of black men by black men. On the larger scale, Weaver sees the



exhibit as also reflective of recent federal policy initiatives to educate and inspire young black men. The images will be accompanied by poetry and installed on buildings across the city, from Brookland to U Street to Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive in Southeast. Viewers will be able to comment and share about the exhibit on social media through a smartphone app.

"When I was coming up, D.C. was known as Chocolate City," said Weaver. "Because of gentrification the black presence has been removed from certain quadrants of the city and I felt that this project was a way of reinserting that presence in areas where they used to be and to reevaluate the image of the black male and that presence ... in a new way."

5x5 opens to the public on September 6, 2014 and runs through December 6, 2014 with exhibits, events, and programming throughout the city. Check the [Elevation DC map](#) and the [5x5 website](#) for updates.



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