

was still on stage, wracked with guilt from keeping the information about Gloria secret from Alton and worried about what would become of his sister-in-law. Finally appearing in the last act of the play, Gloria, played with a bubbly effervescence by Gus Birney, eventually kills herself due to the shame of Alton's desertion. Even Mavis, the conservative and, at times, bigoted older sister of Iris and Gloria, shows herself to be surprisingly inclusive. Director Anne Kauffman deserves praise for guiding her actors through these meaningful moments of discovery and revelation. The pain and communal suffering felt by the play's characters as well as the final, tender reconciliation between Sidney and Iris felt significant both for the world of 1964 Greenwich Village and for our own. Many of the complexities exposed in Hansberry's work still plague today's marriages, families, and communities.

Abbandandolo's costume design captured the period in exquisite ways: Mavis wore tailored dresses and impeccable coats; Iris lounged in dungaree pants and sneakers; and Gloria burst onto the scene in a tight minidress. These costumes helped to establish first impressions and snap judgements of characters that would soon be challenged. The set, which featured the Brustein apartment chock full of Bohemian accouterment, was elevated and framed in such a way that it resembled, at times, a wall-mounted painting. In Act Three, Kaufmann had Iris, Alton, and Mavis enter the playing space below the elevated frame and sit in folding chairs to watch Sidney spiraling as he reckoned with his new understanding of Wally and tried to comfort a distraught Gloria. These moments, so deftly handled by Isaac, revealed a character able to empathize and forgive and thus be worthy of such in return. Iris, Alton, and Mavis watching along with us only emphasized this crucial point.

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**HOBOLLYWOOD.** By Tinh Nguyen. Curated by Daniela Lieja Quintanar. LACE/Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles. February 11, 2023.

Roughly two decades ago, Grant Kester proposed the term "conversation pieces" to describe a type of ephemeral performance event centered around conversations between the artist and audience-participants. Kester's term identifies the substance of this para-theatrical genre as "dialogues." Similar performative phenomena, subsumed under other names,

had been presented all over the world since the 1970s. Kester recognized a number of these names, including "new genre public art," "littoral art," "engaged art," "community-based art," and "dialogical art." We may add "relational art," "social practice art," "street theatre," and "artivism" to this mélange. Differing in their conceptual emphases, these labels point to the same urgency in expanding theatrical events from their original time-based, stage-constructed, and live audience-witnessing quality to other "real-life" public spheres—an urgency we theatre professionals were especially challenged to meet during our months of pandemic-induced isolation. *Hobollywood*, enacted by the queer-identified, transgender Vietnamese American artist Tinh Nguyen, belonged to this expanded field of para/theatrical, interactive performance artworks.

*Hobollywood*, Nguyen's provocative title, highlights the piece's two compositional elements: a hobo drifting in Hollywood. The artist openly revealed their houseless status, which began in 2020 and coincided with the most severe phase of the pandemic; they also chose as their performance site tourist-saturated Hollywood Boulevard, on the sidewalk in front of LACE's temporarily closed storefront gallery. Because its exhibition space was closed for renovations, LACE offered Nguyen a six-month artistic "un-residency," culminating in a weekend program of Nguyen's installation performance, in which they would interact with audience members—and curious passersby—through what LACE's press release described as "a tea ceremony where visitors can join the artist for a conversation about the objects in the installation and their experience as an unhoused artist."

I found the artist sitting on a stool facing a similarly seated conversation partner, inches from the busy and noisy Hollywood Boulevard traffic. A table, neatly stacked with a hot water container, plates of



Artist Tinh Nguyen with audience members in *Hobollywood* (2023). Photo: Juan Silverio, courtesy of LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions).



Artist Think Nguyen with audience members in *Hobolollywood* (2023). Photo: Juan Silverio, courtesy of LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions).

cookies, tea bags, and paper cups, stood on one side; the other side was a blue tent, with its flaps open to reveal a clean and largely empty interior. I came with many questions, somewhat self-complacently knowing that my queries would constitute part of Nguyen's performance. Most intrigued by the innovative concept of "un-residency," I asked the artist whether it was a curatorial intervention, an artist-generated concept, or a merging of the two. Nguyen felt it was a merging of the two circumstances, as LACE could not accommodate an artistic residency, and as they had been living inside their car. "Did you know about a one-year performance by Teh-Ching Hsieh in which the artist lived outdoors? Hsieh was distressed when he was once compelled indoors by the police," I asked. "Yes, I do know about Hsieh's piece," said Nguyen, "but I was interested in exploring the indignity of someone who is housing-insecure." Raising their voice in an impassioned repartee, Nguyen asked, "Can an unhoused person also be an artist? Can an unhoused person have a career? Can an unhoused person make art? Can an unhoused person deserve others' respect?" I wondered if they might specify what "indignity" they meant, and Nguyen responded with a litany of complaints, including "the intellectual exploitation from the artistic community; the rudeness and entitlement of the homeowners' community; the violence and sexual exploitations of a non-binary individual by the houseless communities." Being a queer Asian, Nguyen added, made them a ready target for abuse by other houseless people. Nguyen was not able to bring their truck, for instance, to be part of the installation, because someone had slashed all four tires, leaving them no choice but to leave the vehicle in the parking lot where they stayed overnight. Before my conversation with Nguyen, I had felt general sympathy toward the unhoused population; the artist's confessions of their perilous

existence, however, made this calamitous social disgrace unbearably near and real for me.

Since I mentioned Hsieh's outdoor piece, I asked Nguyen if they had set "a condition" for their un-residency—such as Hsieh's self-imposed condition of remaining outdoors for one year—to differentiate the performance from their experience of housing insecurity more generally. To clarify further, I raised another example: *Within the Fourth Ring Road*, by the Chinese artist Yang Zhichao, who gave his own performance several conditions, including begging from strangers who didn't know his identity as an artist. Nguyen didn't know Yang's performance as a houseless person in Beijing, and admitted that no condition was set for *Hobolollywood*. Their artistic un-residency was symbiotically intertwined with their lack of stable housing. Perhaps to divert our conversation away from the discomfort of despair, I then asked Nguyen to follow the scenario promised in LACE's press release: to tell stories about the artifacts they found and collected on the streets. Nguyen showed me a "half-ring" they wore on their left index finger: "this half ring was originally a hair pin. I bend it to make my half-ring. I found this on a corner where it seemed to murmur to me, attracting my attention." Nguyen then led me, and a few other audience-participants, to their tent, pointing out an array of "talismans"—necklaces, beads in strings, fake jewels on broken twines—hanging from the top of the tent. It was the apex of their fabric installation—tent, comforter, and all—transported to the performance site in a shopping cart parked next to the tent.

While politics is a type of performance, a given performance does not necessarily have a political impact. *Hobolollywood* brings under the discursive spotlight a dire social problem affecting almost every Angeleno in one way or another. According to Nguyen, their piece touched on the larger themes



Artist Think Nguyen with audience members in *Hobolollywood* (2023). Photo: Juan Silverio, courtesy of LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions).

of “cultural anthropology, housing injustice, and excess consumerism.” The artist, however, played both anthropologist and anthropological research subject, experiencing, at least temporarily, the all-encompassing misery and injustice of the housing crisis, while at the same time accumulating the detritus of other people’s excessive consumerism. If there is a total overlap between the artist’s involuntary houselessness and the artistic un-residency they were commissioned to enact, how is the artwork defined? In what space does it exist? How much critical distance is required for any creative intervention into the dilemma exposed by *Hobollywood*? Are we asking too much for an artwork to create

social change? Were the conversations provoked by Nguyen’s topical performance merely dialogues for an interactive street theatre scene?

Making art in a turbulent age often bears the burden of social responsibility and political intervention. Yet, in *Hobollywood*, the politics of art manifests its power not so much in its activist demands but in the subdued poignancy of an artist exposing their existential precarity while persisting in seeking meaning out of mundane interpersonal exchanges.

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