

## THE CURATION ISSUE



PHIL VELASQUEZ/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Ellen Gorney, left, one of the project's originators, and Jody O'Connor, curator of this year's show, discuss "After Supper Visions" in the photo exhibit's Loop space.

# HEART, HUMANITY

Photos by the homeless reveal world 'no one else is paying attention to'



**RICK KOGAN**  
Sidewalks

best to utter a "Not today" or "Sorry," but more likely to walk past as if they do not even exist.

For the next few weeks you will have the opportunity — and I do mean opportunity — to meet some homeless people. They will be inside a small storefront space at 23 E. Madison St., where there are 66 photos on the wall, stunning in their variety.

These are the work of 22 homeless photographers and part of Pop-Up Art Loop, that May-through-October initiative of the Chicago Loop Alliance, which pairs artists and property owners to create, in prime locations, temporary gallery, exhibition and interactive spaces at no cost ([popupartloop.com](http://popupartloop.com)).

This particular show, one of about a dozen pop-ups, is called "After Supper Visions" ([aftersuppervisions.com](http://aftersuppervisions.com)), and it was born a decade ago. That is when Father Wayne Watts, associate administrator for Catholic Charities, and Ellen Gorney, a senior administrator, got the idea to give disposable cameras to some of the people who came Tuesday nights to the Catholic Charities St. Vincent Center on North LaSalle Street to partake of food provided by some of the city's best restaurants and served by volunteers.

Standing in the Madison Street gallery last week, Gorney said: "We have come such a long way. Seventeen photographers that first year and more every year since. And the work — the

work immediately and continually surprises all of us in its heart and humanity."

Standing with her was Jody O'Connor, a professional photographer who has been involved with the project since its inception. She is one of many volunteers who've spent their Tuesday nights giving client-photographers advice and counsel: "The whole message to them is to be true to yourself."

In previous years the photos were on display for only one day, during a benefit when some 200 photos, 8-by-10 and handsomely framed, were hung in the St. Vincent Center dining hall. Those photos sold — and the show always sold out — for \$100, with \$75 of that going to clients, some of whom used the money to buy their own cameras.

This year the benefit went as well as ever, and there was a second one-night show in Evanston. And now this high-visibility Loop show.

"I immediately sensed how worthy this project was," said Tristan Hummel, a graduate of the School of the

Art Institute of Chicago and the curator/project manager for the Loop Alliance. "They cold-called me and asked to participate and, serendipitously, a space had just opened up.

"I got a sneak peek earlier in the week, and the work is remarkable. These people, without any formal training, bring such a fresh eye to their subjects. There are so many cool images."

On Tuesday, O'Connor and Gorney were hanging those cool images on the walls of the space on Madison Street. Each client-photographer was represented by three photos, along with accompanying biographies, photos of themselves or a philosophical statement.

"It was difficult to curate a show like this," O'Connor said. "The clients

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— *Tristan Hummel, Loop Alliance project manager*

care so much. It was also difficult to select the 22 who are part of the show. It could have been 80."

"I just can't go to Costco again," said Gorney, referring to the many trips she has made to that retail outlet to get photos processed.

She said this with a smile, hoping (if not knowing) that she will be making many more trips, because prints of the matted photos on exhibit are available

for \$30 each.

Said O'Connor: "I want the people, photographers and viewers, to feel good when they come in here."

Said Gorney: "I want to sell, sell, sell."

Said Watts: "This gives artists a little taste of heaven. They share their joy."

Said Maureen Kelley, a freelance photographer and another longtime volunteer who has worked with the client-photographers: "During the selection process, we helped the artists choose those photos that they wanted to display at the show. These images convey their feelings, thoughts and emotions."

During this exhibit, which ends Oct. 25, many of the photographers will be on-site.

"That is a major point," Gorney said, "to have the artists interact with the public."

There is no firm schedule for when or if a specific artist might be there. The photographers' lives are hard and unpredictable. When asked where he lived, one told me, chillingly, "Nowhere really, and everywhere."

But consider yourself lucky if Amie Davis happens to be sitting in the space. She will be in a wheelchair because she suffers from a kidney ailment. She is also legally blind. "High partial, they call it," she said. But her enthusiasm is palpable when she says: "I always have a camera with me.

Thanks to selling some photos at previous shows, I was able to buy my own camera, and I take it everywhere. With that camera I see stuff that is really beautiful in this world, stuff that no one else is paying attention to."

"After Hours with Rick Kogan" airs 9-11 p.m. Sundays on WGN-AM 720

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## 10 WHO CURATE LISA JUNKIN

# Sharing history, authority

Lisa Junkin, 30, interim director, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum

**Background:** Grew up in Virginia; studied art education at School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Recipient of the Association of Midwest Museums' 2011 Promising Leadership award. Intended to work in art museums until visiting a show at the National Building Museum in Washington that taught inner-city children about design. "That just changed everything for me — that place really knows how to make concrete interesting."

**Known for:** A social justice approach to history exhibitions. Last year, after being approached by former members of Chicago's Vice Lords gang, she co-curated "Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords." Worked on an ongoing film series about sex; on a continuing program that invites artists to create a museum label in their respective medium; and on the permanent history-of-Hull-House exhibition.

Future exhibitions include a program of bands interpreting labor songs, and a show on play as a human right.

**Curatorial approach:** "I am interested in shared authority, community curating — opening up the question of expertise. An academic historian might say there are ways we gain authority. Oral histories, for instance. Community curating asks how you can also bring in the neighborhoods, which tend to tell different stories."

**On the rampant use of "curate":** "Mixed feelings, considering my work is about handing curatorial tools to people excluded for so long. But are you ceding authority or sharing? I want a balance. Part of the reason the word has weight is because it comes with responsibility, and there is a lot of bad community curating — mainly because someone asked (a community) a question and then didn't really want to deal with the response."

— C.B.



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