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ART PREVIEW ARCHIVES

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Living for the City

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There's something ironic, and perhaps even disconcerting, about the fact that hip-hop music (the marker of all things urban) names suburban white youth as its principal consumer fan base. Such ironies are the subject of *(sub)urban*, an exhibition at Urban Space Gallery curated by artist and Carnegie Mellon professor Ayanah Moor. This layered group show addresses the complexities of identity within the urban/suburban (sub) context.

The very word "(sub)" suggests being a part of; within. Adam Grossi, a graduate of CMU and a former student of Moor's, inspired Moor's concept for the show. He's an artist who views his work as a form of activism in which he attempts to "critique prevailing systems of thought and articulate visions of change."

Grossi's "Self Portrait Under the Influence," a painting in acrylic, charcoal and spray paint on paper, depicts a young white male, head turned slightly, and wearing nothing more than a smirk-like expression and roped necklace with a larger-than-life clock pendant reminiscent of Public Enemy's Flava Flav. He stands in front of the American dream -- white picket fence, front lawn, garage, driveway and detached homes.

This piece provocatively alludes to the irony of the American suburb -- created to separate whites from the often blighted, black urban centers, only to witness its youth's yearning for cultural products of the city -- hip hop -- and all things *street*.

Andrew Sonpon, a multi-media artist, combines film and video with built structures to explore issues of race, class and perception. Constructed from wood, sensors, speakers, video monitors, paint and plaster, the Lincoln University professor's "Wishing Well" features a video image of the artist, crouched and holding his knees, seemingly immersed in water, with the sounds of water and voices uttering a series of wishes -- "I wish you wouldn't wear your hair that way ... I wish your skin wasn't so dark" -- expressing the pressures human beings place on one another to fit within prescribed categories.

Philadelphia-based artist Maritza Ranero raises questions about the influence of the "suburban" on the "urban." Inspired partly by her memories of growing up with rock, disco and country music, Ranero's "Eyes Without a Face" (recalling the Billy Idol '80s hit, and perhaps the 1959 Georges Franju film of the same title) is composed of an album cover modified by her drawings. Ranero's process -- transforming existing images with pencil and eraser -- began with magazine imagery: Often, as she puts it, she forces the image of her own face to "fit into the eyes of the images" on the

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page. The drawings suggest the individual's struggle to maintain balance between our internal inclinations and external (societal/cultural) requirements.

New York-based artist Ricardo Francis tackles urban myths and misconceptions in his work. The exhibition includes two mixed-media paintings: "National Identity" features the figure of a pigeon, an icon of the city, surrounded by iconic images of American culture, while "A Question of Authenticity" depicts two male boxers, one darker-skinned, one lighter-, standing glove to glove, appearing hesitant, not quite ready to fight, with such words as POLICE and POLICY inscribed satirically within the piece.

Artist Mario Marzan explores memory and perception, the "real" and the "imagined," in a series of intricate, map-like pencil drawings. Marzan's work balances a chaos of movement with a call for calm and stillness. It evokes a feeling of transformation and continuity. Although his work does not explicitly identify the urban or suburban place, it addresses the cyclonic nature of society and the human desire and struggle to survive -- to make it.

(sub)urban continues through Nov. 20. Urban Space, 709 Penn Ave., Downtown. 412-288-0383.



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