

# HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

## Fire Over Water at the Public Pool

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This past Friday, I drove to Hamtramck, Michigan. Hamtramck is a culturally diverse home to a lot of musicians and fine artists, and it is almost completely surrounded by Detroit. I drove down Caniff Street, and this drive reminded me of why I love this community. An old "Welcome to Hamtramck" sign guides you in, and then you drive by old shops and new endeavors. I was welcomed by a slew of great street art. I then drove by the celebrated [Planet Ant Theatre](#) (a theater company, improv colony, and record label, housed in a purple three-story tenement). And then I was at my destination: [Public Pool](#).



Even though people have bombarded me with news of the great things Public Pool has been doing, this was the first time I stopped by this new gallery space (opened in 2010). In a postcard moment, as I walked toward the gallery, the current artist-in-residence, George Rahme, was outside talking to a mother and child about the art space. This space is the essence of community and open discourse.

George welcomed me in to talk about his latest work. For his show, *Fire Over Water*, he creates his collage work in the gallery prior to his opening on September 15. He has three huge pieces (in various states of completion) that cover the walls of the gallery.

As of late, I have come across a lot of contemporary collagists. It seems a natural response to this dizzying information age -- a way to take in and digest the layers and layers of imagery and color thrown at us on a daily basis. Some collage artists do not have the artistic eye to know when to stop or the discipline to make a compelling, well thought-out piece. Other artists, like George, approach this medium with a true artistic eye, and they create pieces that are structurally sound, and they create pieces that tell complex and engrossing stories. George noted that he does not believe he is making collage per say. "It's more like painting, or manual Photoshop."

I agree. George's first piece that I saw when I entered the gallery echoed more of the style and genius of Julie Mehretu's paintings than any of the collage art I have seen. I am extremely glad that I decided to drive down Caniff this past Friday, and I encourage you to do the same. This is a perfect venue to experience a truly creative soul hard at work -- open doors and open conversations. Below is my full interview with George.



**Colin:** First, what or who inspires you?

**George:** I can't put my finger on one thing in particular; there are no hierarchies in my head. Yet there is something to see in all things, and there is always something to learn--especially from your surroundings, and culture. I find that the way in which things function between micro and macro scales inspiring. Nature, and also the friction and tension that exists within culture, and how it is something to move through.

**Colin:** How has your experience at Public Pool been?

**George:** Amazing. I have found enormous inspiration from this experience and I am gracious for the opportunity. Also, I've really enjoyed working with Steve Hughes and hope to do more collaboration.

**Colin:** Have you learned anything from having your studio in a gallery -- working in front of the public?

**George:** I've learned more about how downtown Hamtramck functions. Living on only the second street from Caniff I am amazed as to how dramatic the change has been and how Hamtramck is the center of the metro area, as well as the nuts and bolts of diversity in Southeast Michigan. This opportunity has allowed me to see my new work with fresh eyes, considering most people who wander in are not familiar with art, and sometimes beautifully naive. For me, experiencing the people is like experiencing something completely new to myself.

Becoming punctual with how my time is spent, although it can become too routine, could be its downfall.

**Colin:** What are the good and bad things about working in Detroit as compared to the other places you have worked and shown

(New York in particular)?

**George:** like I said, there are no hierarchies. Everything is relative, just some things I choose to do. I feel being here I can make a stronger impact on the community and not jumping into the spotlight. Working away from commerce and the influence of mainstream New York is important to me. NY is not what it once was, and I and probably many other artists find comfort in raw gems like Detroit.

It's important to know what is going on in the world; we are all living on the crossroads. To have a global representation in art is important. To make work that speaks to everyone no matter where they live. This is what I believe, and that is why I am represented by [Fred Torres](#).

**Colin:** How has your art career changed over the past five years?

**George:** My network has expanded, allowing me the opportunity to exhibit globally and include my work in collections outside the U.S.

**Colin:** Do you have any mentors?

**George:** Yes. Paul Nilsson, Jim Ferguson, Chido Johnson, Gilda Snowdan

**Colin:** What current artists inspire you?

**George:** El Anatsui, although I have not seen his work in person yet. The 2011 Venice Biennale. Christina Galasso and many other people who are close in my life. But I am also inspired by anyone, even if they are not an artist. I enjoy diverse perspectives. Mostly I am inspired by those who are excited and inspired themselves. Meeting my new friend today Thomas Gerald.

**Colin:** Where do you see Detroit in 10 years?

**George:** The city is going in good directions and possibly some bad directions. The farming and adding more green space is essential. Yet we still need to get rid of the incinerator which is crazy to have in the center of the city. Not to mention the corruption (at all levels) this tends to plague this place, which needs a cure not a Band-Aid.

You used to be able to counter the corruption with the amazing underground parties that sparked the world. Unfortunately the parties are no longer here, but the slum lords still own the buildings... well most of 'em.

All the newly restored skyscrapers downtown once were venues for all night parties. I had much more fun in Detroit before it started to hit the mainstream. I am beginning to embrace this however and somehow do good things with the newly flourishing art happenings.

I don't feel like I can compare this city to any other. It's totally unique, but may have some similar qualities to other places on Earth. It's always been about the future here. I believe we are in the forefront of America.

**Colin:** What's next?

**George:** As of now, I am hoping to work with the city of Hamtramck in creating pop-up studios. In effort to highlight Hamtramck's great spaces which are available, and with all hopes to interest people, artist, and businesses. I also plan on visiting my buddy, Trent Abbe to work on some printing which will be used in my next piece. And in the mean time I look forward to preparing for a couple shows west of the Mississippi, one in Montana, and another in San Francisco.



[Public Pool](#) is located at 3309 Caniff, Hamtramck, MI 48212. George Rahme's Fire Over Water runs from now through October 27. The gallery is open daily, and you can stop by and meet the artists. There is an opening reception on September 15, 7 pm to 11 pm (refreshments courtesy of Traffic Jam).



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