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Artists working together — Bottom, from left) Souhail Kizilcasi, Arvin Rahmani, Sarah Ahmad and Jean Turner with (on ladder) Babette Slaw and Rob van der Schoor — install Rahmani's "Fish Story" at the Hyde Gallery on South Main.

'Memphis Social'

Vast project spans breadth of city's arts scene

By Fredric Koepfel
Special to The Commercial Appeal

“**M**emphis Social” might be a good name for a newspaper’s local party column, but the term has more serious intent in regard to the series of exhibitions and performances launching Friday on South Main, Downtown and Crosstown and at Marshall Arts and Caritas Village.

The vast project, curated by Tom McGlynn of the Beautiful Fields Collective, runs through May 18. It’s sponsored by apexart, a nonprofit contemporary visual arts organization based in Lower Manhattan that opens crowd-sourcing fundraising efforts and will promote “Memphis Social” and the city of Memphis in full-color brochures sent to arts organization

around the world.

This weekend — that is, Friday through Sunday — will feature an array of tours, receptions, parties, musical and art performances in most of the venues that include dozens of local and regional artists on the “Memphis Social” roster. It promises to be one of the biggest and most inclusive arts events in the city’s cultural history. All events, exhibitions and performances are free and open to the public.

How did all this happen?

In a telephone interview from New Jersey, McGlynn first described a previous event mounted by Beautiful Fields Collective outside Fresno, Calif., an “out-of-the-box show to specifically exploit socially engaged artistic practices, including performance, that focused on a sense of place.” He traced the germination of

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"Memphis Social" to Rob van der Schoor, a Dutch artist who exhibited in Memphis at the old Jay Etkin Gallery.

"We had worked with Rob in previous shows," said McGlynn, who counts himself among the city's boosters now, "and he mentioned Pinkney Herbert, and Pinkney seemed to know everybody there is to know in the visual arts in Memphis, and he pointed me in valuable directions. I came down to Memphis two or three times, and it became clear to me that Memphis is a real place, with a real sense of identity, and I came to love the city."

"Memphis Social," however, is not intended to be a snapshot of the city as seen in the work of myriad artists, and its organizers refer to it, however spread out it may be, as one exhibition.

"I wanted to go deep," said McGlynn, "and explore many contexts. I didn't want to do a window-dressing show that skims the surface." He described Memphis as a city that's "extremely important to the American imagination. It's a city constantly in flux and transition, and that sort of movement is one of the subtexts at Beautiful Fields. Memphis is a gem. Some people might not think of it that way, but I do."

The only way to take a multifaceted approach was to produce an encompassing set of exhibitions and performances in spaces that involved



KATIE MAISH/SPECIAL TO THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Greely Myatt installs his piece "rocker" in the Hyde Gallery at Memphis College of Art's Nesin Graduate Center on South Main.

the breadth of the city's arts and cultural scenes, hence the wide geographical range of venues. To deal with the complicated scheme on the ground, McGlynn contacted Katie Maish, who has a master of fine arts degree in photography and a graduate certificate in museum studies from the University of Memphis. Before returning to school, Maish worked as a print production manager for International Paper, often managing 30 to 40 projects at a time — experiences, she

said, "that served me well in the past few months while managing the logistics for the show."

Maish described "Memphis Social" as "very complex in terms of scope, content and level of detail." Her tasks included reserving rooms for visiting artists, arranging receptions, printing historical photographs, developing a social media presence, designing and printing event guides "and loaning my bed for a conceptual art piece."

One of those enlisted for

curatorial and multitasking duties was the ubiquitous Dwayne Butcher, who organized the show for the Crosstown space.

"I got involved because Tom asked me to be a part of the exhibition," said Butcher, "and it happens that I'm curating shows for Crosstown now. I asked people who I knew would have work to install on short notice, so it's Alex Paulus, Tad Lauritzen Wright, Maysey Craddock, Bobby Spillman, Anna Roach and Melissa Dunn. It's a painting show

of new, emerging and established artists living and working in Memphis."

Butcher also has two pieces in the exhibition at the Hyde Gallery at Memphis College of Art's Nesin Graduate Center on South Main.

Altogether, close to 80 artists and performers, most local and regional but some national and international in reputation, are involved in "Memphis Social," displaying work or performing at 17 galleries, museums, storefront spaces and other venues.

'MEMPHIS SOCIAL'

The opening weekend features two receptions and a party, all free and open to the public. For the extensive schedule of exhibitions and performances Friday through Sunday, visit memphisocialartexhibition.wordpress.com, or go to the Memphis Social page on Facebook.

Friday

- Grand opening reception, 5-8 p.m., Hyde Gallery at the Nesin Graduate School, Memphis College of Art, 477 S. Main. Work by 30 artists. Call 901-272-5100, or visit mca.edu. Open noon-5 p.m. Wed.-Sat. through May 18.
- Memphis Social After Party, 7-11 p.m. The Cotton Museum of Memphis, 65 Union. Art installation, Lester Merriweather; screening of Kara Walker video. Call 901-531-7826, or visit memphiscottonmuseum.org. Open Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday noon-5 p.m. through May 18.

Saturday

- Marshall Arts Gallery, 639 Marshall, 5-7 p.m.. Work by more than 20 artists, music by Johnny Lowbowe. Call 901-406-6978, or visit marshallarts.com. Open noon-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday or by appointment, through May 18.