

Passing Through is many public art works in one. The centerpiece of the project is a 5000 sq. ft. mural on Interstate 76. Twenty related satellite murals appear on old gas pumps, a delivery truck, highway trestles and buildings.

Attend to the Signs...Look For the Art Philadelphia Passing Through



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The Passing Through Principles

You will always see the Passing Through logo. All satellite sites derive their designs from words gathered at each site. Passing Through is both universal and specific.

Passing Through is a body of work. Each site contains part of a figure. The figure can be literal, as in a head or a hand, or it can be figurative.

In choosing sites, we always think of the act of passing through the city. We aim to represent many areas of Philadelphia, and we look to the compass for orientation. We have picked sites that are north, east, south and west of City Hall, the figurative center of Philadelphia. We even went so far as to plot the literal center of Philadelphia with the assistance of a civil engineer. It is not City Hall.

We are passing through life. When we are born, we pass through. We continue to pass through many spaces. The pace never lets up. We go from home, to school, and to work on the same paths each day. We pass through the same areas all the time. So we stop looking. The view becomes so familiar that it might as well be a neutral color, like beige. The Passing Through project calls attention to and removes us from the blindness of our daily commute. The signs become slightly different. The world is no longer a thousand shades of beige.

Eavesdropping/Surveillance

We are increasingly watched and heard. There is a mounting tension between our desire for attention and our desire for anonymity. We are becoming accustomed to surveillance. Our activities on the roadway are monitored by traffic cams. At the airport, we pass through security. Our transactions at stores and money machines are photographed. When we call customer service, we are told that our call may be monitored. By continuing the call, we implicitly agree to eavesdropping. When we conduct conversations on our mobile phones in public, there is a tacit understanding that others can hear us. Conversations between two people on the street are similarly poised between intimacy and public declamation.

Our words travel from our mouths into the public airspace. The listener pretends not to hear another's complaints, hopes, and plans. The act of making a phone call is so engaging that the talker enters a trance state, approaching the states induced while watching television or playing a video game. The mobile talker cannot slip entirely into telephonic trance. He must still negotiate the random intrusions of the world around him.

In the case of the Passing Through project, someone is really listening and taking down all that is said. It's never been easier to eavesdrop on strangers. Passing Through heightens our attention to what we have lost, and what we are giving away.

During the eavesdropping process, we collected thousands of words from all over Philadelphia. The three most frequently heard nouns are Mom, Home and Cash. We all think of these words many times a day. When we are in our cars listening to the traffic report, we hear the phrase "two three four times a day." It is the commuter's mantra.

Signage Shows The Way

Signage is commerce, directive and limiter. Signs are ubiquitous. Everywhere we look, text is in our line of sight. We are bombarded with words holding us at bay, telling us what to buy and which way to move. Right Turn Only. One Way. Stop. Tadpole's Hole. Ventilation Contractor. This way up. Helping People Move Ahead Worldwide. Highway Temple of Love. Spring Garden Street and Rising Sun Avenue. There is a need to communicate behind each sign. Not only do signs tell us where we are, but they also direct us to where we are going. Stick with the arterial and you will go far. There are so many signs, such a jumble, that we do not see them. Passing Through points out these signs by changing them.



Signs For People Who Need A Sign

Ours is a world of kismet, of coincidence, where a simple sign from the heavens can change the direction of an entire life. How many times have we looked for a seemingly arbitrary sign to guide us in a decision we're unable to make on our own? Something strikes us deep. "It's a sign," we say. We're on the right path. If he calls me tomorrow, that means he likes me. If I pass a blue house, I'll get the job. These signs reassure us that beneath the chaos of the universe lie order, justice and redemption.

It is possible to reverse the conventional signage process and to create signs that point to much larger messages with much deeper truths about our lives.

It is not enough to walk up to a stranger and ask, "Where are you going?" The question is a frame. The answer will be canned, fumbled, and prepared for its audience. Instead, Passing Through listens to the words that drift past. The Passing Through project points to the wisdom amid the chaos.

The Rite of Site

Each Passing Through site is tailored to its location. Once we secure a site, we gather words by eavesdropping. We collect images from the site. These pieces inspire the design. The finished site is generated by its location. The product is universally understandable. Passing Through is about community and culture. It is about the words we think, the words we hear, and the words we see.

Text/Words/Language

The fragmentation of information. Language is a bridge between us, a bridge that helps bring us together. The words are an undulating wave, like a piece of fabric. The text on textile. Some signs fade. Other signs are painted on top. Pentimento occurs when the old signs bleed through the new.

The Passing Through Franchise

All of the Passing Through sites are branded with the Passing Through logo. That's how you know that each work of art is part of our project. The logo is based on the red, white and blue U.S. interstate sign. The use of a trademark is a comment on the prevalence and power of logos in our culture. The first step to marketing a product is to come up with a brand identity.

Passing Through The City

Consider the provisional state of all our spaces. It is a transience that is intransigent. We are always passing through the same places. As commuters on the major roads, we see the same landscape day after day. What moves you? Is it work? Love? Why are you on the road? We all have our reasons for passing through the same places in a relentless rhythm.

