

Detroit's Heidelberg Project: Empty street means room for art

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Image 1. The Number House is a famous part of the Heidelberg Project. Tyree Guyton started the project with his grandfather in 1986.
Photo: Nic Redhead/Flickr

The city of Detroit, Michigan, has many empty houses. It has as many as 12,000 abandoned homes. There are thousands more empty lots where homes used to be.

More than 2 million people used to live in Detroit. Now, there are not even half that many people. More than 1 million people have left the city.

The Neighborhood Was A Mess

Tyree Guyton grew up on Heidelberg Street in the 1960s. The street is on the east side of Detroit. Back then, it was a nice, safe place. People took care of their houses. Neighbors looked out for one another.

Guyton left Detroit when he was a young man. When he returned home in 1986, everything had changed. It looked like a bomb had gone off, he said. Many people had moved away from the city because there was no more work. Car factories used to give good jobs to people in Detroit.

Now, that work was being done by machines. The factories had either closed or moved.

Guyton decided to do



something about the problems facing Detroit.

Painting Dots And Collecting Stuff

His grandfather had taught him to paint houses and buildings when he was a boy. So Guyton set out with a paintbrush to help save his city. He began by painting colorful polka dots on nearby empty houses. Slowly, he started spreading his art all around the city.

Guyton did not stop with dots. He collected things left behind in empty houses and lots. He brought home everything from TVs and telephones to shoes, dolls and stuffed animals.

Guyton then carefully put these things in empty lots. He nailed them to empty houses and dead trees. All that stuff became part of a story told by his art. It was the story of Detroit, a city left behind.

People Come To See The Colorful Project

The work Guyton was doing around Heidelberg Street became known as the Heidelberg Project. It made him famous. Now, 275,000 people visit the Heidelberg Project every year.

Heidelberg Street and its homes keep changing. There is color everywhere. There is always something new and unexpected to see. One house is painted with 100 clocks. Another is guarded by five metal robots. Old cars are decorated with hundreds of colorful faces.

The Art Is Here To Stay

Guyton's art has changed his neighborhood completely. The drug dealers moved out a long time ago. There are children playing here now. Heidelberg Street is not a dead place anymore. It is very much alive and improving every day.



Guyton has plans to turn the street into a neighborhood arts center. Soon, children will have a place to make their own art.



Quiz

- 1 Read the section "The Neighborhood Was A Mess."
- Which sentence in the section explains why a lot of people left Detroit?
- (A) Back then, it was a nice, safe place.
 - (B) Guyton left Detroit when he was a young man.
 - (C) Many people had moved away from the city because there was no more work.
 - (D) Car factories used to give good jobs to people in Detroit.
- 2 Which section gives information about what Guyton did with things he found in empty houses?
- (A) "The Neighborhood Was A Mess"
 - (B) "Painting Dots And Collecting Stuff"
 - (C) "People Come To See The Colorful Project"
 - (D) "The Art Is Here To Stay"

- 3 Read the paragraph from the section "People Come To See The Colorful Project."

Heidelberg Street and its homes keep changing. There is color everywhere. There is always something new and surprising to see. One house is painted with 100 clocks. Another is guarded by five metal robots. Old cars are decorated with hundreds of colorful faces.

Which question is answered in this paragraph?

- (A) How many homes are on Heidelberg Street?
 - (B) Who painted old cars with hundreds of colorful faces?
 - (C) What will people see when they visit Heidelberg Street?
 - (D) How long did it take to paint a house with 100 clocks?
- 4 What information will the reader find in the section "The Art Is Here To Stay"?
- (A) some ways that Guyton has improved Heidelberg Street
 - (B) some ways that Guyton decorates empty houses on Heidelberg Street
 - (C) the first thing that Guyton did to help save Heidelberg Street
 - (D) the reason that Guyton was interested in Heidelberg Street