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Radical Group Takes Aim at Landlords and Others

Activist Jeremy Jaime performs his one-person protest in a political street performance.

by Lauren Steiner
Wednesday, May 26, 2010

In a piece of public theater they called "Lights, Camera, Arson," a group of activists known as "Gay Shame" dressed as uniformed versions of landlords, tech workers, and newcomers to criticize gentrification in the Mission District.

Some 30 Gay Shame activists and allies who had seen their posters announcing the event walked the "Blood red carpet" they had set up outside of the Vida apartments on Friday night and were interviewed by an activist who pretended to be Frank Lisa, the owner of the building at 22nd and Mission streets that suffered a major fire in January 2013, displacing more than 60 people and killing one person.

The performance also gave voice to a widespread rumor that the Mission and small fire, and that other [several mysterious fires](#) in the Mission were intentionally set.

"I had a good advisor to learn it from, because I do not want wet controlled units here," the actor said. "I also plan to burn down the other 19 properties I own."

As investigators rule the way fire at Mission and small streets [determined the origin to be an](#) [electrical device installed](#) [illegal](#). A Gay Shame activist, who declined to give a name because all members of the group publicly speak only as "Mary," was unconvinced.

"Arson is very hard to prove, is my understanding, even [for] the best investigator" she said.

The parade across the red carpet also included an "arsonist" fine "Hank Lee" pretended to intervene in the fire and then [offered to buy](#) the property at a controlled bounds. The "arsonist" presented a business card stating Hank "your demolition service."

Though several passers-by either watched and expressed their enthusiasm for the event or brought their own costumes, one was dismayed at the severity of the accusations.

"It's tragic that somebody lost their life, but accusing someone of murder is very serious, and I don't think it's fair unless you've got the facts about that" said passerby and Mission resident Owen Thomas-Breitfeld. "I think it's important to bring attention to the issue of [unwanted 'murder' and all] the other words, and how," he said about the imperfect activists had set up.

Erin McElroy, a longtime activist who works with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, considered the street theater performance more in the realm of political satire.

"It's good to get the community together in a theatrical and satirical way," McElroy said, underscoring the importance of doing so on a public sidewalk. "We're losing public space, losing access to public space."

Newcomers and political figures were particularly critically satirized. The cast included a "Ben to Brooklyn" racer who channelled across the red carpet in a drunken stupor purportedly brought on by microbrew beers, a bloody-winged depiction of the pro-development SF Bay Area Renters' Federation figurehead Sonja Trauss, who answered every question with "higher density," and a fore Google employee who shouted off how artisan coffee.

"I'm almost a native, because I've been Brooklyn," the "chef" said. The rapidly gentrifying borough of New York is also [Gay Shame's origin](#).

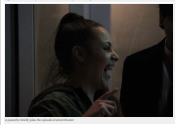
Another Gay Shame activist, clad in a black shroud and wearing a mask of Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom's face, took to the carpet to announce repeatedly about "jobs" and "the economy."

"So you're saying that tech is nothing your dicks?" asked faux-Frank Lee.

As for what's to be done about the prevalence of flees or displacement in the district, Mary wasn't sure – the action was focused on raising awareness.

"I feel like there's not a lot of attention being paid to these fires," she said. "We're more about disruption."

Signs read fake currency from the sidewalk after Gay Shame's departure.



A passerby briefly joins the spectator-interviewed.

Gay Shame activist Jeremy Jaime performs.

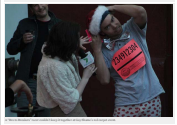
Gay Shame also took aim at the many developments in the Mission District.

An activist [trying to hold] a [cannabis-]shaped sign [with a lit end].

A protester shows "dykes on bikes."

Parade-by-bicycle.

"Thank God" talent to Charlie Sheen's.



A "Ben to Brooklyn" racer [with] the [c]ogether [w]ine Mission and single [cash].

"Thank [inaudible]," said "Frank Gentrification." Thanks [you]!

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