

How Representation Renews Perception in Detroit

Ashley Daniels and Anya Sirota

Design Studio Akoaki and Artist Olayami Dabls,

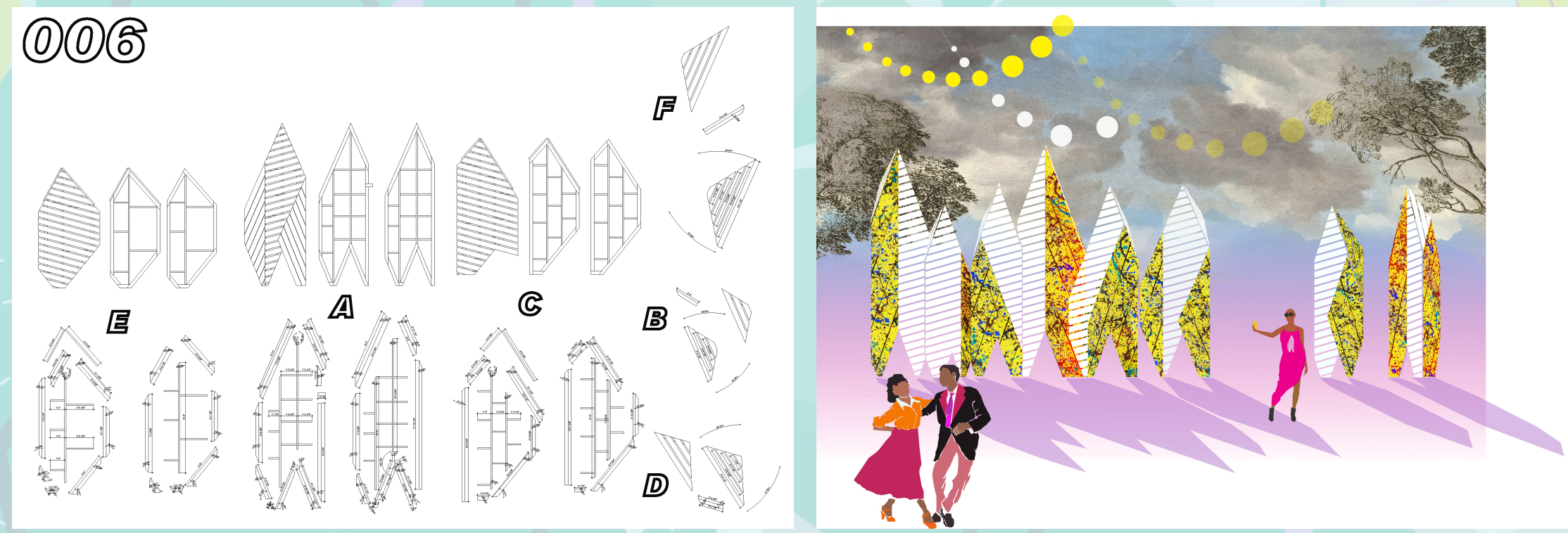
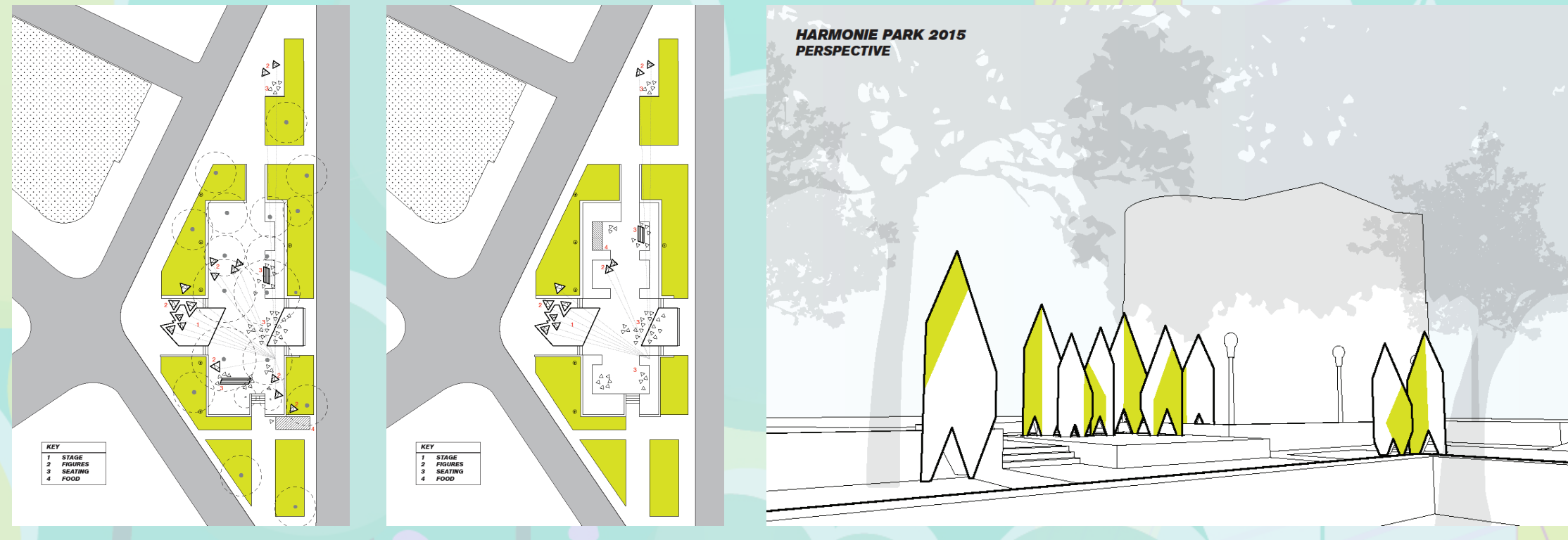
Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Detroit, a widely known city in a slow decline, has been in a process of renewal that retells the cautionary story of capitalism. The *Nice Outfit* installation in downtown Detroit, a collaboration between assistant professor Anya Sirota with her architecture studio Akoaki and the Detroit-based artist Olayami Dabls, challenges the commonly asked question of how art and architecture can produce a changing image in the city in order to positively impact communal experience. Built within a month at the Detroit African Bead Museum and reconstructed in Harmonie Park for the Carr Center's Summer in the Park concert series, the project brought together a diverse group of people both in its creation and for the installation. *Nice Outfit* is composed of 9 triangular figures or 'architectural primitives' designed by the architecture team using simple ingrained American wood construction. Select surfaces are decorated by Dabls, who creates heavily doused effects using layered paint and broken mirrors. The combined techniques make *Nice Outfit* both structural and symbolic: a backdrop for performances and events in the park and a public reminder of Detroit's important connection to African culture. Experiencing the installation, intensified by a funk concert at the opening, was stirring for many people, especially Detroit residents who have felt excluded by the redevelopment increase in downtown and midtown. The image of *Nice Outfit* will continue to tell the story of collaboration, diversity, and beauty beyond the short life span of the project.

Nice Outfit

Ashley Daniels, researcher
Anya Sirota, mentor
Design Studio Akoaki & Artist Olayami Dabls, design collaborative
Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

DESIGN



Olayami Dabls, Detroit's local artist, was once centered downtown. After being pushed out by big businesses he resided in the North End of Detroit. The structures are meant to look as if Dabls is marching back to downtown. Dabls' art is centered around African culture. The heavily painted and bright faces represent that and the mirrors help see the world around you.

Programs like Rhinoceros and Adobe Illustrator were used to create these images and plans. Each structure had their own plan through Rhino.

FABRICATION



After being primed, the framing was constructed with two layers of pinewood 2x4's with plywood gussets in between, secured with liquid nails and screws. Plywood cladding was then primed and painted before screwing them into the framing. After, Dabls saturated select boards with his art. The mirrors and small wood pieces that were used by Dabls was put on with liquid nails and screws.

Each face is held together with steel seam plates and secured to the ground with angled iron footing and anchors screwed into the cement.

PROGRAMMING



At the opening, Funk music performances featuring the famous Parliament Funkadelic bassist, T Money Green, flute player Gail Soo Hoo and guitarist Andre Fox were accompanied by contemporary rap artists. The programming illustrated how bringing together music and architecture can activate public space and unify diverse groups of people.

ABSTRACT

The Nice Outfit installation in downtown Detroit challenges the commonly asked question of how art and architecture can produce a changing image in the city in order to positively impact communal experience.

Built within a month at the Detroit African Bead Museum and reconstructed in Harmonie Park for the Carr Center's Summer in the Park concert series, the project brought together a diverse group of people both in its creation and for the installation.

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The opening event was stirring for many people, especially Detroit residents who have felt excluded by the redevelopment increase in downtown and midtown. The image of Nice Outfit will continue to tell the story of collaboration, diversity, and beauty beyond the short life span of the project.

Nice Outfit opened on July 2nd in Harmonie Park and will remain on view through the end of September. The installation serves as a scenographic stage for the Carr Center's Summer in the Park concert series. Performances every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at 6PM.

Photo Credits: AKOAKI, Charlene Uresy, Kirk Donaldson, Martin Elliot