



## ART

# Maria Bang Espersen's New Art Project Focuses on the Wild Weeds of Midtown



By Daniel Renfrow

May 23, 2019 10:22PM

Houston-based Danish artist Maria Bang Espersen hopes that her new project WEEDS, which opens tomorrow in the parking lot of 4106-4108 Caroline Street in Midtown, the future home of Houston's soon-to-be-built Innovation District, will cause Houstonians to start thinking a little differently about the often overlooked category of plants that lawn owners everywhere love to hate.

The artist describes the project, presented with assistance from vocalist/artist Emily Æyer (one of Byline Houston's contributing editors), as a "pop-up art" experience centered around creating dialogue about the wild plants growing on the streets of Midtown and how the less-than categorization that is frequently given to them intersects with how society often categorizes the victims of gentrification, particularly the homeless.



It started out as a project that was primarily looking at hierarchies and how we have a tendency to categorize things and describe things as having more or less value," says Espersen, noting that at one point she had been looking at trees, particularly oak trees, which are prevalent throughout Houston and in her native home of Denmark are used to symbolize royalty. "That made me think of weeds as something that possibly stands on the opposite end of those more majestic trees. We often see weeds as something that is just occupying space without us wanting it there. It's one of those things that we tend to remove, but really what is being found out is that weeds really hold a lot of power within themselves."

In a city like Houston that is particularly prone to flooding, weeds are useful because they have deep root systems and can help transport water away a lot faster than a green lawn can, says the artist. Some weeds, like Dandelion, which can be used to make wine and a substitute for coffee, are even known as super foods.

The project will see Espersen setting up a tent in a section of the parking lot that will hold repose over a collection of weeds from the site that Espersen has planted in pots created from clay collected from around Houston. Espersen will be inviting participants to sit under the tent with her to do drawings of the plants and to start discussions about society's oft-maligning categorization of weeds and how that connects back to the gentrification going on in the area.

Dice University has been buying up a lot of the Midtown area recently so it can serve as



just within the past few years they've been putting up chain-link fences in this area, and it seems to be primarily to push out the homeless that occupy some of that space," says Espersen. "They have a bunch of architects working on transforming that into something very different, which will thereby change the neighborhood and possibly result in quite a bit of gentrification, even further than what it has already been in this area until now."

Espersen says that her project, which is very much about priority and categorization, will use weeds in a conceptual way for people to think about and visualize these subject matters.

The official opening for WEEDS, funded in part by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, will be Friday, May 24 from 6 p.m to 8 p.m. and will include a performance by Houston-based water artist Megan Easley and a screening of "a messy story about oak and," a short film created by Espersen and Emilý Æyer.

The project will be open to the public from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. from Friday, May 24 to Sunday, May 26, with a closing reception for the project scheduled for Sunday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Emilý Æyer

gentrification

Houston Arts Alliance

Innovation District





By Daniel Renfrow

## Recommended



ART

## The Weekend Menu: August 8, 2019

ART

## Snap, Crackle, Pop: Anything goes as Pussy Pop returns for second edition

---

SIGN UP FOR BYLINE HOUSTON'S  
WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

# THE BEST OF THE WEEK

SUBMIT



