

Behind the Buzz at Spring Street Studios

By Meredith Deliso

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Nicola Parente has a way of getting your attention. Four years ago, it was with [giant mushrooms](#) made of peat moss that sprouted from Art League Houston's patio. The piece, a collaboration with Divya Murphy, was in response to a *New York Times* article that named Houston the worst recycler among 30 cities in the nation (mushrooms, you see, are natural recyclers).

The Houston artist returns with another environmentally themed installation that is, to shamelessly use the pun, making some buzz. In "Colony Collapse" at micro scope 1824, a boxed-in gallery space at Spring Street Studios, Parente lines the room with more than 2,700 (!) brown paper bags from ceiling to floor -- a charming DIY beehive.



The message this time? Parente looks to bring attention to the worldwide decline in honeybee colonies due to pesticides and genetically modified seeds -- so-called colony collapse disorder. Since many agricultural crops are pollinated by honeybees, their absence can have disastrous effects for farmers.

Fittingly, there are no live bees in this makeshift hive, though the first thing you notice about "Colony Collapse" is the buzzing. It's incessant, and about the last thing you'd expect to hear inside the studio building. Parente has hooked you in.

In addition to the sound of buzzing, a video projected onto one wall of the honeycomb captures a handful of bees at work -- a memory of what once was. It's a potent message, the rest of the space notably, loudly empty. To further raise awareness of the issue of colony collapse, a pair of boards on the outside wall provide information on the crisis.

Your interaction with the hive is disappointingly limited -- as is the nature of the gallery, you can only look into the space through a window and door. But you are invited to leave a comment on a yellow Post-it note and stick it to the gallery's door, in effect adding a new layer to the hive.

"Nicola Parente: Colony Collapse" at micro scope 1824 at Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring Street, runs now through May 31. For more information, call or visit microscopeproject.com/2013.