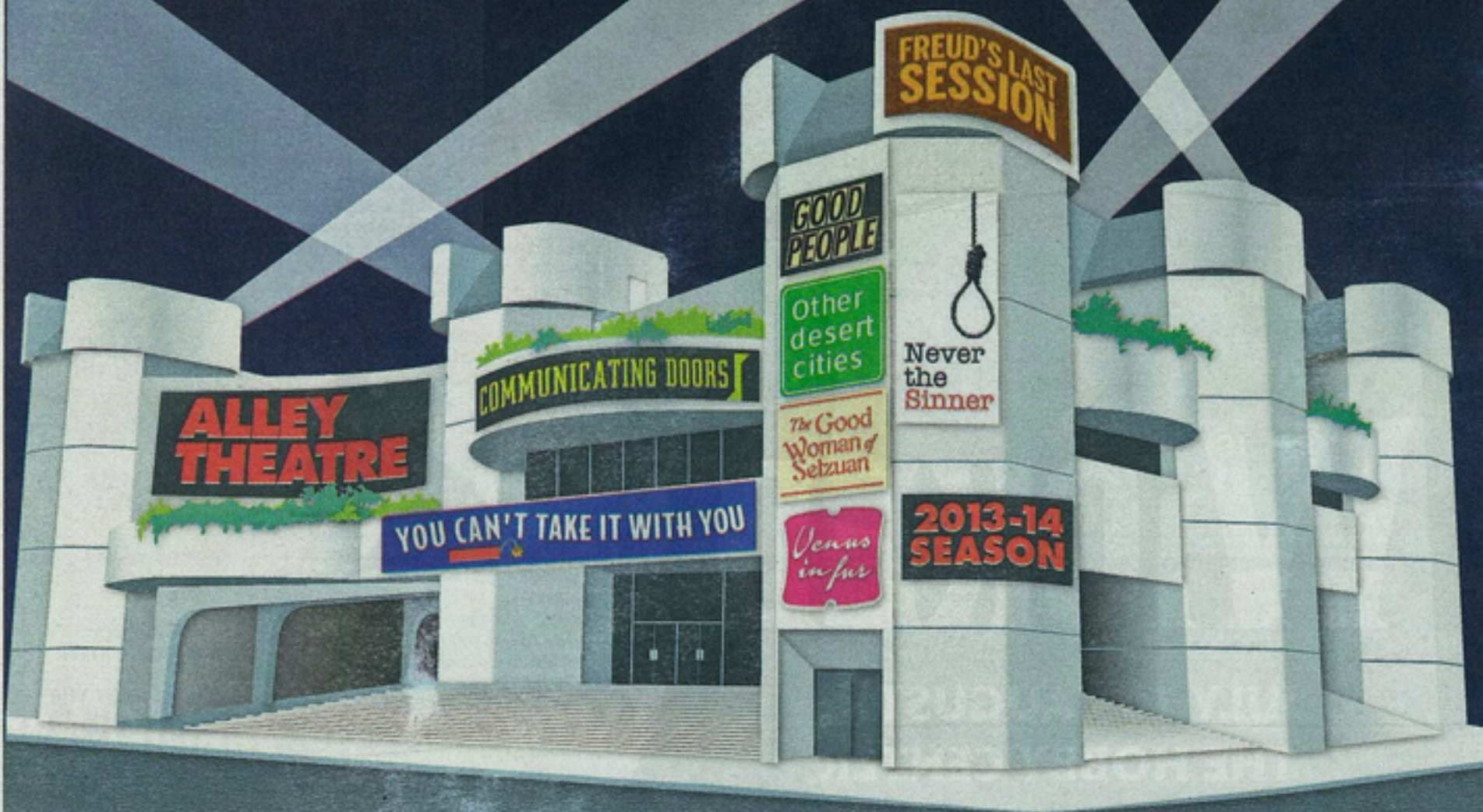


ZEST



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ART

'Colony Collapse' creates big buzz in small space

By Molly Glentzer

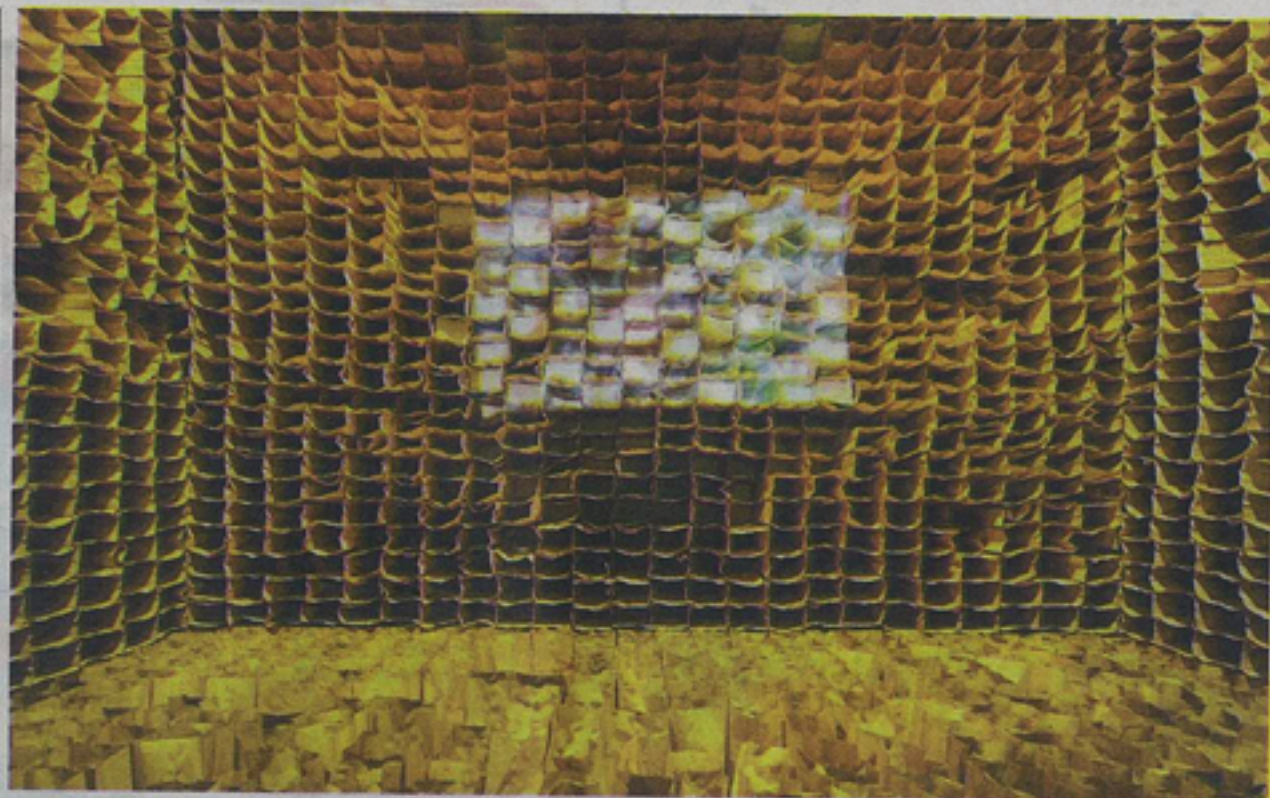
HC Micro scope 1824, an experimental installation space at Spring Street Studios, is smaller than some people's closets. But with changing exhibits that are viewed through a window and a glass door, it's often a hive of activity.

At the moment, it's literally a hive, although no bees are present. In theory, they have died, victims of colony collapse disorder.

Artist Nicola Parente wants to bring attention to this major environmental issue with "Colony Collapse." He has flooded the room with amber light and filled the floor, ceiling and walls with about 2,700 brown paper lunch sacks to simulate an empty beehive. A few of the bags on the back wall contain slips of white paper, forming a kind of pixelated screen for video of working bees.

"There's a certain segment where you'll see bees doing their thing, and you'll hear the buzz of nature and the vibrating through the wall," Parente explained recently, as he and friend Aaron Courtland put bags into place.

Parente, a native of Italy who lives in Houston, considers himself more of a painter and a photographer. His work has been exhibited in solo shows at museums in Mexico and Ethiopia in the past year. He's also collaborated with Dominic Walsh Dance Theater, and he shows locally at Gre-million & Co. Fine Art.



Michael Paulsen photos / Houston Chronicle

Artist Nicola Parente used more than 2,700 brown paper bags to create "Colony Collapse." The installation, bathed in amber light, is designed to look like an empty beehive.

'Colony Collapse'

When: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays through May 31. Artist reception 6-8 p.m. Saturday during the monthly Second Saturday open house.

Where: Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring

Tickets: Free; nicolaparente.com, www.springstreetstudios.info

"Every few years, I feel the need to do an installation-based work that has to do with the environment or whatever I'm struggling with," he said.

In 2009, he and Divya Murphy turned Art League Houston's patio into a garden of giant mushrooms made of wire forms stuffed with peat moss. I loved that installation but fretted the live plants woven in, still in their plastic nursery

pots, weren't watered.

Parente said he was illustrating how mushrooms are a natural recycler in the environment. The indoor component of that project drew attention to Houston's ranking as the nation's worst big-city recycler.

"Now our mayor has done tremendous work. We've improved since the installation, which is great," he said. He wasn't taking credit, but



Jordan Campbell, left, discusses "Colony Collapse" with Parente at Spring Street Studios.

he does like to encourage awareness.

"It's important to have art speak about important subjects," he said.

"Colony Collapse,"

which seemed like a relatively simple concept, took him longer to build than he expected, even with help from friends. He was still tweaking it

last week.

Parente said an article in Science magazine convinced him that pesticides and genetically modified seeds are causing colony collapse. No one argues that bees have a lot working against them, including habitat loss; and no one has yet figured out how to solve the growing problem.

A March 28 article in the New York Times reported that some U.S. beekeepers lost more than half of their hives this winter. They provide bees by the truckload each spring to work fields and orchards in California, like migrant workers with wings. The colonies pollinate crops that represent about a fourth of the American diet, including apples, cherries, watermelons, onions and almonds. So when bees die in Montana, it's an issue at your neighborhood grocery store.

In his "Colony Collapse" statement, Parente quotes Albert Einstein: "If the bees disappear, mankind would have only 4 more years of life."

Visitors to micro scope 1824 are welcome to leave comments using supplied Post-it notes. A few days ago, the door was half-covered with them.

"I can't bee-lieve how cool this is," one visitor wrote.

"This scares the beejesus out of me," wrote another, who added, "I hate bees."

Well, at least people are buzzing.

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