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Nasher Sculpture Center records a first, naming Rick Lowe its inaugural Artist-in-Residence



By Michael Granberry

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Rick Lowe grew up in rural Alabama, the son of a single mother, who had 12 children. They were sharecroppers. Lowe worked the fields with his mom and his siblings until he left for a small college in Georgia, where he discovered he was an artist in the making.

On Thursday, Lowe became much more than that. The Nasher Sculpture Center named him its inaugural Artist-in-Residence, making it the only area museum to have such a position. Now 52, Lowe was part of the Nasher's 10-year-anniversary Nasher XChange project, for which he conceived a community art venture in Dallas' richly diverse Vickery Meadow, where almost 30 languages are spoken daily.

"I was kind of nudging them to think about an expanded engagement with that project," Lowe said by phone, while driving through northern England, en route to Liverpool. But, he said, he had no idea it would morph into this.

Nasher director Jeremy Strick "put the two together," Lowe said. "Looking at establishing a residency program and continuing to engage with *Trans.lation*," the name of his unconventional Nasher XChange project that he hoped would "push the boundaries" of traditional sculpture. In the end, "Jeremy just asked me," he said. "Would you want to consider doing a residency, and being the inaugural resident artist? And the answer was, yes, of course."

Strick, who spoke by telephone from Paris, said he had been "thinking for a while about the possibility of artist in residence at the Nasher as a way of deepening our involvement with artists, our engagement, bringing artists into the life of the museum. But bringing Rick in really grew out of his work with us on Nasher XChange and *Trans.lation*."

"We were having a lot of talk about how the life of *Trans.lation*, after Nasher XChange, and how to continue to build on what had been started there. Rick wanted to keep going with this, and we wanted to think about ways in which the Nasher could continue to support that. And so, an artist in residency seemed like the perfect way to keep the Nasher engaged and supporting *Trans.lation*, keep us supporting Rick's work and bring Rick closer to the Nasher, into the life of our museum. It seemed like a way to accomplish a lot of good things."

Lowe created in Vickery Meadow, near Skillman and Northwest Highway, what he calls a "community-engaged social sculpture project." *Trans.lation* featured a series of workshops, three free-standing White Cube gallery spaces for exhibitions and Pop-Up markets that accentuated the diversity of the region.

Strick would like to see more of that. He sees Lowe's new position as "a platform for Rick, to continue his work on *Trans.lation*, that is, working with the community in Vickery Meadow, working with artists throughout the Dallas community, bringing people together to effect a kind of transformation."

Lowe is no stranger to such efforts. In Houston, where he lives and will continue to do so, he conceived "Project Row Houses," for which he received international recognition, including kudos from the *New York Times* and others. He planted "Project Row Houses" in Houston's Third Ward neighborhood, where he and his team saved a series of shotgun houses from demolition, turning them into galleries, classrooms, studios and gathering spaces.

Lowe also worked as a guest artist on the Rem Koolhaas-designed Seattle Public Library, *Small Business/Big Change* in South Korea and the Borough Project for the Spoleto Festival 2003 in Charleston, S.C.

Strick said that until Lowe came long, "Dallas had very little awareness of the wealth of talent residing in Vickery Meadow, let alone its extraordinary diversity."

He called Lowe "an extraordinarily thinker and an extraordinary artist. He's extraordinary in the way that he works with people. He has a way about him in which he draws out the best in people. He's able to achieve extraordinary things through a collaborative process that is almost invisible."

Lowe sees his art as "working within community, facilitating relationships between communities and artists. *Trans.lation* grew out of that desire." Such an approach "gives me a chance to work around the city and expose people to my ideas, to a practice of art that goes beyond the traditional practice of sculpture ... one that falls into the realm of social sculpture, if you will."

He said he hopes to "continue to develop relationships," in Vickery Meadow and elsewhere, "to build a stronger awareness within the city of Dallas about art that pushes beyond conventional boundaries."

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