

MIT donates redesigned surplus FEMA trailer to arts organization

A surplus FEMA trailer, named the “Armadillo,” redesigned and transformed by faculty and students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Visual Arts Program, will be donated to a non-profit arts organization at a ceremony at the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston June 18, 2009.

Cambridge, Mass (PRWEB) June 1, 2008 – A day of activities at the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston on June 18 will celebrate the donation of the MIT’s “Armadillo” trailer to Side Street Projects, a non-profit organization based in Pasadena, California. The “Armadillo” trailer is the result of a year-long collaborative art project, the MIT FEMA Trailer Project, in which faculty and students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Visual Arts Program transformed a surplus FEMA trailer into a “green” mobile composting center with vertical gardens, rainwater catchment system, permaculture library, and indoor multipurpose space. The trailer has been dubbed the “Armadillo” for its ribbed retractable shell.

Jae Rhim Lee is Director of the MIT FEMA Trailer Project and a Visiting Lecturer in the MIT Visual Arts Program. Lee describes the Armadillo as “both a practical tool and a metaphor for how disaster can be transformed into a tool for environmental and community change.”

The Armadillo was originally one of thousands of trailers purchased by FEMA to serve as temporary housing in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. They have been tied to a host of issues surrounding indoor air quality health concerns, mental health problems in trailer parks, lack of affordable housing, and disaster management.

MIT students studied these issues and researched the environmental, political, and social history of the trailers under the direction of Jae Rhim Lee, an artist, permaculture designer and former consultant to the City of New Orleans Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Development. Students were then challenged to apply permaculture (a whole systems sustainable design approach) and environmental justice principles to the redesign and transformation of a single FEMA trailer into a model of urban sustainability and community change.

The MIT FEMA Trailer Project team chose Side Street Projects to receive the Armadillo after a nationwide search because of the non-profit’s commitment to art education and environmental responsibility.

The transformed Armadillo trailer will be handed over to Side Street Projects at a ceremony on June 18, 2009, at 5:15 PM, at the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy in Boston. Related events from Noon to 7PM include temporary art projects and gardening workshops. Following the event, Side Street Projects will take the Armadillo trailer on a National Tour that includes four stops at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and the Louisiana State Museum.

For additional information on the MIT FEMA Trailer Project, contact Ed Halligan or visit <http://visualarts.mit.edu/armadillo>.

About the MIT Visual Arts Program:

The MIT Visual Arts Program, directed by Ute Meta Bauer, is focused on a critical approach to art in an advanced technological community, and art that challenges traditional genres and the limits of the gallery/museum context. The program is part of the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and offers undergraduate and graduate courses.

Contact: Ed Halligan
MIT Visual Arts Program
vap@mit.edu 617-253-5229
<http://visualarts.mit.edu/armadillo>

###