



Edgar Arceneaux and the Watts House Project @Farmlab

February 17, 2009

After a free, vegan lunch buffet – and a lot of chatting and networking – a gregarious mix of L.A. activists, amateur farmers, designers, artists and neighborhood friends settled in to listen to tales unfold regarding Edgar Arceneaux's continual re-development-as-art-project in the Watt's towers neighborhood area.



Arceneaux's been working on the Watt's House Project ever since Houston's own Rick Lowe (Arceneaux's mentor) was asked to come to L.A. to start a similar project to his super successful Project Row Houses in Houston's Third Ward neighborhood. Arceneaux worked with Lowe to begin the Watt's House Project – a community-building project that emerged when neighborhood groups, artists and activists crossed wires to create new forms of civic networks, political forces, and aesthetics. But when Lowe was called back to Houston for duties related to Project Row Houses, Arceneaux naturally stepped in to accept the passing of the torch.

WHP plans to secure a foreclosed property on 107th street to ground its physical presence in the region, serving as a community hub and base of operations for the future of the organization (including a community center, exhibit area and artist-in-residency space). But in the meantime Arceneaux and WHP are renovating and improving the façade of the entire 107th street residential block facing the Watts Towers. This current revitalization work gives the WHP project staff a reputation for helpful community service in the area while at the same time, secures meaningful neighborhood connections with residents.

Arceneaux continually reminded the audience at Farmlab that this was meant to be a participatory session and that suggestions, tips, volunteer input were all up for discussion – Arceneaux reiterated that the project team (himself included) still has much to learn from others in the neighborhood and related groups.

So what began as a conventional slide show-lecture became a who's-who of South L.A. activism and a networking session for anyone concerned with the region around Watts. From representatives of LAWorks, to gang violence activists and political consultants; folks spoke up to offer criticisms, neighborhood information, city plans for the area, and, of course, anecdotes

about the towers and the site. Arceneaux's mission is not a simple one, and he'll need loads of help to get there – but he got a little closer today with an enthusiastic outpouring of resources and support.