

The man with a vision

SiteLines artist Jason Middlebrook strides to raise town's self-awareness

By Rebecca Piro

Being elevated 11 inches off the ground can make a world of difference, as far as artist Jason Middlebrook is concerned.

Middlebrook is one of nine artists participating in *SiteLines: Art on Main*, a summer-long art exhibit sponsored by Phillips Academy. Installations up and down Main Street are meant to create dialogue between the town, the school and surrounding communities.

Middlebrook's contribution – a raised platform 11 inches off the brick and cement of Main Street's sidewalk – is meant to create a new vision.

"The platform is my interpretation of Andover."

The project, a striped structure made of crushed, recycled Coke bottles, and constructed around a tree and a light post in front of Old Town Hall, is appropriately titled "What to Look For."

The idea is to provide a place and opportunity for people to look around at things they would normally pass by without a second glance, says Middlebrook. Not only will those people get a closer look at the things that make up Andover, he hopes they might develop a bit more vision about the town in which they live – with a little help.

That help comes in the form of two plaques, tacked onto the platform and modeled after plaques posted at zoos outside the animal cages.

Created by Doherty Middle

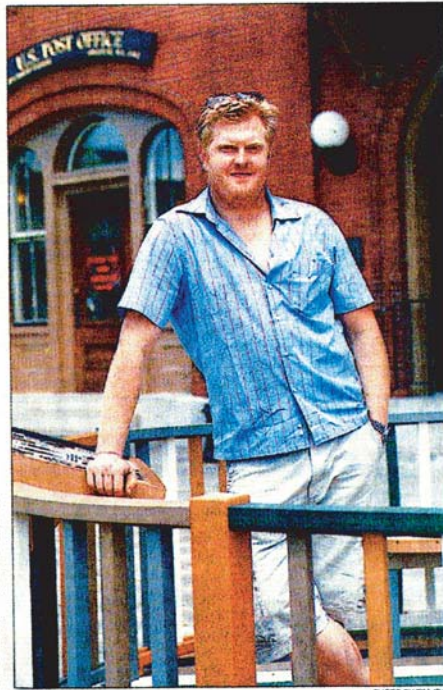


PHOTO BY TIM JEAN

Come on up – Artist Jason Middlebrook invites passersby to view Main Street from his handmade platform, one of nine *SiteLines* projects exhibited this summer.

School students, one calls the viewer's attention to objects frequently seen in town, ranging from squirrels to SUVs. The other is the students' vision of how they see themselves, such as their favorite musical bands and their dreams for the future.

"The platform is my interpretation of Andover, based on (surveys from) Doherty students," says Middlebrook. "I was interested in classifying what would be here."

It's not that people who step onto the platform wouldn't take

the initiative themselves to look around, says Middlebrook. "Naturally they're going to look. I wanted to add a educational component."

The plaques on "What to Look For" make up only half the zoo analogy. "We're being looked at as much as we're looking," says Middlebrook, standing on the platform. "All of a sudden, we become the artwork as well. It's a pedestal effect."

The viewers themselves – almost like animals in cages – involuntarily become a part of the experience of Main Street.

"What to Look For" is the

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California artist's first interactive sculpture, and he'd like it to stick around. *SiteLines* is scheduled to end come September, and town officials approved Middlebrook's project with the understanding that he would disassemble it at that time. But Middlebrook is hoping the town will change its mind and agree to keep it as part of the downtown landscape.

"It's almost 100-percent maintenance free," says Middlebrook. "I think people like it."

Plus, he reasons, the striped platform attracts a little more life to the front of Old Town Hall. "At least this way it's interactive," he says, shrugging towards the conventional benches sitting across from his colorful creation.

"Those are creatively boring."



Artist Jason Middlebrook says the view from his 11-inch-high platform can be just as eye-opening as the view from this perspective, taken from a window at Old Town Hall.