



## 'Ever Green' at Monte Vista Projects: Free Christmas Trees For Rent! But is it Art?

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### Trees for rent

A free tree for the holidays... wha-what!?!? And it's art? One of those bad boys would normally set you back at least \$50, for a small one. And then they die (well, really they're already dying the moment they're cut down for your yuletide pleasure -- it's kind of sick when you think about it that way...). And they make a mess and you have to haul it out of your house in time for the city-sanctioned pick-up. The exhibition "Ever Green" at Monte Vista Projects in Highland Park attempts to solve this problem for you, served up as some bangin' art.

"Ever Green," going on now through December 18, is a collaborative exhibition with works from The Portable Forest, Bianca D'Amico, Nicole Antebi, and Amy Blount Lay. While The Portable Forest's contribution, *Portable Forest Tree Library*, is the attention-grabber in this show (did I mention a free tree for the holidays? oh, I did...), works by D'Amico, Antebi and Blount Lay complement and boost up The Portable Forest's tree rental service as a full program of art chock-full of environmental goodness.

Functioning not just as a rental service but as an installation, trees-for-rent in the *Portable Forest Tree Library* are purposefully placed within the exhibition space so they soak up optimal light from the grow lights. Installed in Monte Vista Projects especially for "Ever Green," the stark glow from these

lights, provided to prevent the trees from dying in Monte Vista's windowless gallery space (which certainly would be an ironic twist) cause some difficulty adjusting to the particular brightness as you step in from the street. Acknowledging the requisite artificiality of the space in order to house the trees helps us to situate the *Portable Forest Tree Library* as art, and not just your average holiday tree service.



Nicole Antebi, *Arboretum of Removal*

As the trees go out, Antebi's *Arboretum of Removal* comes into view -- a series of stickers representing each of the trees in the *Portable Forest Tree Library*. A few doomed conifers destined for the *Portable Forest Tree Library* never survived their transport from an [online merchant](#) to the exhibition site. The fallen few, however, remain marked along with all of those rented out in Antebi's contribution. (Isn't it kind of awesome how the works in the show actually work together?) *Arboretum of Removal* represents a lack, causing visitors to the space to imagine the general manifestation that her stickers stand in for. Just think -- what if Antebi made a sticker for all the trees that get cut down everyday? There'd be a whole lotta stickers out there.



Amy Blount Lay's *The Last Time I Tried To Be Human, It Almost Killed Me: Evergreen Rookery*

Some trees feature miniature installations from Blount Lay, *The Last Time I Tried To Be Human, It Almost Killed Me: Evergreen Rookery*. The works, described by Blount Lay as "a series of environmental cautionary tales framed by the North Sea Selkie myth," are intended to be nestled into the trees, found like the special prize in the bottom of a cereal box. Only better, because it's the special prize in the Christmas tree. The tiny sculpted selkies (for those of you not up on your north Atlantic mythology, they resemble seals and can turn into humans) accompany many of the *Portable Forest Tree Library's* larger trees, looking almost like seal family nativities. Cute, right?

D'Amico's *make love plant a garden / excuse me, i planted /planting a party*, a fern planted inside of a disco ball, hangs from the ceiling of the gallery. You might be wondering, "where's the party?" as you step into the tranquil exhibition space, but really the party's in your head. The disco ball presides over those heavy-on-the-nog laden parties you imagine you'll have as soon as you get that holiday cheer installed in your living room. As opposed to The Portable Forest and Antebi's works, which evoke the "out there" kind of nature, D'Amico's work makes you think about the kind of nature you can bring in. Fern in a disco ball.



Bianca D'Amico

Just imagine this puppy  
presiding over your  
drunken holiday madness.  
Or any drunken madness.

There's a precedent for this sort of thing. Like Joel Tauber's [2007 installation at Susan Vielmetter](#). Tauber's project adopting a tree in the Rose Bowl parking lot, bringing the sickly thing back to health, and cultivating cuttings as the objet d'art of his work is probably the most precious thing I've ever seen.

The noticeable lack of any mention of the word "Christmas" in Monte Vista Projects' discussion of the exhibition should be noted. While everyone from The Sierra Club to your great-aunt Alice has something to say on the matter -- because, apparently, if you're not going to call it a "Christmas" tree, that's now a political matter -- it seems that conversation is often not so much about the tree as it is the holiday.

This exhibit, by contrast, focuses on the plant. So even if you're not down with calling them Christmas (or holiday) trees, it presents something substantive to think on -- the exchange of goods in a gallery setting, as well as the short life of our foliated friends and our relationship to the environment. I love the environment as much as the next gas-guzzling Angeleno (oh... the shame I feel every time I roll down the 10), but a lot of "environmental art" makes me cringe. Not so for this intelligent exhibition, whose message is subtle through is practicality.

If you're lucky enough to find a live tree left from the *Portable Forest Tree Library* in the exhibition space, seize the opportunity and take one home for the holidays. The only stipulation is that you don't kill it, and return it to The Portable Forest by January 7, 2012. Even if there aren't any trees left in the space (which would be a good thing, right?), the remaining works in the space, and what's represented through the absence left by the *Portable Forest Tree Library*, is well worth checking out.

*"Ever Green" runs through Dec. 18 at Monte Vista Projects, open Sat. and Sun. 12-5 p.m., 5442 Monte Vista St., [montevistaprojects.com](http://montevistaprojects.com)*

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