

'Sh!t Show' Art Exhibit Hopes to Raise Awareness for Public Restroom Access in Northside

Cincy PHLUSH wants to install a Portland Loo in the neighborhood. A petition will be available to sign at the exhibit in favor of the efforts.

By [Katie Griffith](#) on Thu, Jan 11, 2024 at 1:50 pm

The Cincinnati chapter of nonprofit organization PHLUSH (Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human) is hosting a group exhibition to raise awareness surrounding public restroom accessibility.

“PHLUSH is excited to be a part of this creative effort to bring awareness of the need for 24-hour public restrooms,” Justin Jeffre, co-founder of Cincy PHLUSH, said in a press release. “Artistic activism could help Cincinnati become a grown-up international city that is accessible for all.”

For the exhibit, local artists were prompted to create works that transform toilet seats into nonfunctional masterpieces. Curator Jeni Barton says she was blown away by the work created, which represents more than 20 artists' different methods and perspectives.

Sh!t Show opens Friday, Jan. 12 at PAR-Projects in Northside, where Cincy PHLUSH currently aims to install Cincinnati's second “Portland Loo.”

“We have everything from sculptures and assemblages to light up toilet seats, interactive toilet seats. We have some pieces that you need 3D glasses to look at,” Barton says. “Just a little bit of everything has come in. We even have one that someone has made out of a urinal. There's a squirt gun game where you can kind of test your aim. In fact, it is called ‘Test Your Aim’ I believe.”

PHLUSH was founded in the Pacific Northwest. It advocates for toilet availability and bringing accessible bathrooms to public places. The Portland Loo is an initiative created by PHLUSH, with one Cincinnati installment at Smale Riverfront Park on The Banks.

The Loo is a one-unit stall open 24/7. It was created to be easily maintained and safe for all users. Barton hopes that the exhibit and installment of Portland Loo's will raise awareness and dispel the stigma surrounding 24/7 public restrooms. The nonprofit also wants to bring attention to the “societal repercussions” of exposure to human outdoor waste, which has been linked to a rise in hepatitis A, according to the press release.

“A lot of the things that we hear back in terms of why they don't want to have 24-hour accessible public bathrooms is because people may go in there and sleep or do drugs and use them for purposes they're not intended for,” Barton says. “But the Portland Loo has actually been designed specifically to deal with some of those issues.”

Barton says the walls are made with antimicrobial material, so they are easy to clean. The bottom

of the structure is open, so patrons can see if the Loo is being used or how many people – if more than one – are in there. Providing public bathrooms doesn't just serve people experiencing homelessness, either.

“It's something that actually impacts every single person,” Barton says. “When you stop to think about it, you're like, wait a minute, yeah, I should have access to a bathroom when I'm out and about, and so should others. And then people start to ask for that service. But we can't do it without the cooperation of city partners and neighborhoods for location and placement. So the more we can share this exhibition, take it on the road and spread awareness, the more that we can get people passionate about this, and we can start to see more and more public bathrooms popping up.”

Barton says that Northside is currently dealing with an outdoor human defecation problem and Cincy PHLUSH has a plan in the works to present to community and city leaders for a Portland Loo installation in the neighborhood. The initiative is also looking into fundraising efforts and will offer a petition at the *Sh!t Show* exhibit that patrons can sign in favor of the Loo.

“We're working with the Northside Community Council and things to target some areas that are dealing with a problem with outdoor human defecation,” she says. “We are working with them to try to bring some Portland Loos to Northside, which is why we thought staging the exhibition in Northside could bring awareness to our efforts in that neighborhood.”

Barton says the plan is to get approval and funds to install a Portland Loo in Northside sometime this year. Everyone involved hopes to gain traction on the initiative as soon as possible.

The opening reception of *Sh!t Show* is from 7-10 p.m. Friday at PAR-Projects and features live music from Jay Hill and DJ Mech. The exhibit runs through Jan. 26.

“This is an important issue to address, and I am excited to contribute to an exhibition that highlights where we can be more considerate of the basic needs of humans in public spaces,” contributing artist David Estep says in the press release.

Visit [PAR-Projects](#) in Northside at 1646 Hoffner St. and check out cincy.phlush.org for more information.