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## Arise injects new life into an abandoned North Braddock church.

By **Brendan Purves**

The last yellowed pieces of stained glass cling to the window frame as the late-afternoon sun casts a jagged arc onto the dusty, warped hardwood floor. The remnants of Sunday-school playthings and ecclesiastical refuse lie in the corners by mounds of plaster fallen from the gaping hole in the sanctuary's once-ornate ceiling. North Braddock's United Brethren in Christ Church has sat in ostensible ruin since it closed in 2004. But today, a team of multidisciplinary artists has been turning it into something meant to both speak to the community and act as its mouthpiece.

The project called Arise is the brainchild of Elizabeth Monoian of The Society for Cultural Exchange and New York City-based project leader Clarinda Mac Low. Mac Low, a self-described "conceptual performance artist" who makes "situations," intends Arise to demonstrate the possibilities of simply using the materials at hand.

"It's an act of secular salvation," says Mac Low. "You are saved through the renewal of the space."

Installation artist Brenda Battad, a student in art and electrical engineering at Carnegie Mellon, is transforming one room using paper that was left behind. "I'm making new things out of old things," says Battad. "And eventually I'm going to interact with it."

Claire Hoch, another CMU artist, is using the plant called the tree of heaven to evoke both the community's decline and the possibility for regrowth. Trees of heaven were planted along the sidewalks of Braddock Avenue, the community's nearby main drag, says Hoch. Now they grow in area vacant lots. Hoch is relocating these short, shrub-like trees to planters in an upstairs Sunday-school classroom at the church.

"They used to be decorative," Hoch says of the resilient plants. "Now they grow out of wastelands, like what this church has become. I'm going to reframe them in perfect planters as perfect weeds."

Documenting the project is Nashid Ali, a senior film student at the University of Pittsburgh. His movie, *Dreams of Heaven Lee*, is being shot under Mac Low's direction, and with the help of North Braddock resident Jeremy Cannon and many local children.

In all, eight different artworks will be scattered throughout the space when Arise hosts its formal opening, on June 15 and 16. Arise will remain open until June 30.

The United Brethren church is located in the residential neighborhood just two blocks uphill from Braddock's Carnegie Library -- which itself sits on an intersection where, in April, it was among a cluster of buildings that hosted 1,200 visitors to the multi-genre FLUX art party. FLUX was just one of a series of events and initiatives by local activists and entrepreneurs intended to revitalize the old mill town. Perhaps Arise, rebuilding from within, can become another such catalyst.

*Arise Opening reception 6-8 p.m. Fri., June 15, and 1-5 p.m. Sat., June 16. United Brethren in Christ Church, corner of Jones Avenue and Hawkins Avenue, North Braddock. Free. 412-539-9306 or [www.culturepush.org](http://www.culturepush.org).*

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