



The Other Side of Nuit Blanche

Tuesday, October 4th, 2011



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For the last four years, I have faithfully attended Nuit Blanche so, this year, I decided to do something a little different. During the Orientation Clubs Fair, my friends and I had signed up to be part of the Hart House Art Committee. I'm not sure why, considering none of us are particularly knowledgeable about art. But, as I'm sure you're aware, the Clubs Fair involves a lot of writing down your name/email on various organizations' lists - sometimes out of interest, other times just to be polite. It turns out that one of the sheets I wrote my information on was not only for the Art Committee, but to volunteer for Nuit Blanche as well. At first I was a little apprehensive but then I thought, why not? There's no real harm to be had.

Days later, my friends and I received emails informing us of the volunteer time and location: 7pm to 11pm at the Coach House. The Coach House? Where in the world is that? We wondered the same thing. It's a small structure in the middle of a parking lot behind the Faculty of Law building, across from Queen's Park. We had received word to meet at Hart House beforehand to figure out what we were supposed to do. After scarfing down sandwiches from Timmy's and racing across campus, we eventually found ourselves in a room filled with high school children covered in gold glitter and wearing aprons. It turns out these were some kids from Parkdale who were volunteering at the artisan farmer's market in the courtyard. They were supposed to encourage people to eat crickets (which were being cooked and served there), seeing as crickets are the food of the future... according to the exhibit. I'm not quite sure where the glitter came into play but, when it comes to Nuit Blanche, I've learned not to ask.

Eventually we were directed to the right people, given volunteer tags, and sent on our way to the Coach House. The exhibit we were volunteering at was called 'All That is Solid Melts into Air' by Mark Boulos. Here is the description from the Nuit Blanche website:

Two films projected on opposing walls feature intensely conflicting, yet inextricably intertwined forces: one shows frenzied stock traders at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange speculating on the futures of oil; the other shows guerrilla fighters in the Niger Delta preparing for battle against oil companies that extract and export oil from their land.

It was actually quite an interesting piece that seemed to invoke mixed emotional reactions from the audience.

Basically, our job was to make sure there weren't too many people in the film room at one time, answer

questions, and keep track of how many people came in and out. After the first 20 minutes or so, we noticed that the few people who were coming through seemed to have a hard time finding the place; they tended to walk down an alley and hop a fence just to get to the door. That's when we realized that someone should be out there, guiding people in. The building is sort of hidden and the map in the Nuit Blanche booklet was not particularly helpful.

We started taking shifts, with someone staying inside the toasty-warm and brightly-lit room while two others directed people through the bushes and around a building to the Coach House. Despite the chilly weather, it was a fun four hours. Standing outside, we were able to watch some intense people watch the films while, at the same time, we could talk to friends, fellow students and/or family members that showed up over the hours. At slower times, we kept ourselves entertained by partaking in a slightly altered version of Sheldon Cooper's 'Soft Kitty'; and texting people to come see the exhibit. At one point, while resting inside, we had a lovely conversation with an Italian woman about the beauty of her mother tongue and about her daughter, who is a professor of Rehabilitation



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Overall, the volunteer experience was fun. The time went by pretty quickly and there were still hours left afterward to go and enjoy the rest of what the city had to offer. Unfortunately, we never managed to visit the Parkdale kids and eat some crickets. But, then again, there's always next year.

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