

2010 CRITICS' PICKS 12/14/10

Sue Carter Flinn in Halifax | Stacey DeWolfe & Isa Tousignant in Montreal | Terence Dick in Toronto | Cliff Eyland in Winnipeg | Dick Averno in Calgary | Aaron Peck in Vancouver
 posted by Akimbog Staff - December 13th, 2010.

Time has come again for us to reflect on the year in art. From Halifax to Vancouver and parts beyond, Akimblog correspondents the world over have done their best to keep you on top of the exhibitions and artists that made the grade. We've seen as much as could be seen and said the things that needed to be said (across multiple platforms as our new website design, Facebook page, and Twitter account demonstrate). We welcome your comments and continued reading, and look forward to another twelve months of contemporary art in all its various guises.

Happy New Year,
 Terence Dick & Kim Fullerton



Sue Carter Flinn – Halifax

1. Okay, so maybe the official festival shuts right down at midnight, but **Nocturne**, Halifax's nighttime arts event, has avoided glass-slipper Disneyfication. In its third year artists took bigger risks with their projects, presenting more performance-based works and audience interaction. High-five to the organizers for opening the gates to the Public Gardens, notoriously protected by city bureaucrats, for an ambitious thirteen-artist menagerie of sights and sounds.



Eryn Foster, *Kardio-Karaoke!!!*

Nocturne also marked the beginning of a new fitness craze: Eryn Foster's *Kardio-Karaoke!!!* brought the athletic-minded and tone-deaf to the YMCA for a hilarious night of hosted karaoke in the gym's cardio room. It's rare to see that many artists sweating at once.

2. Elegantly curated by Peter Dykhuis, ***Giving Notice: Words on Walls*** at Dalhousie Art Gallery presented text-based wall art by Brad Buckley, Cathy Busby, Garry Neill Kennedy, Gordon



+ MORE



Lebredt, Micah Lexier and Christian Bök, and Lawrence Weiner. Busby's vinyl-lettered *Inspiring*, which uses Dalhousie University's marketing tagline "Inspiring Minds" along with thirteen other equally lofty "inspiring" taglines, shouted out confidently like a Tony Robbins seminar.

3. **David Hoffos'** intricate and cinematic video dioramas in *Scenes from the House Dream* at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia still haunt. More frightening than anything I saw on a big screen, I still get chills thinking about the mysterious open window in *Winter Kitchen*, the drifts of snow forming on the floor.

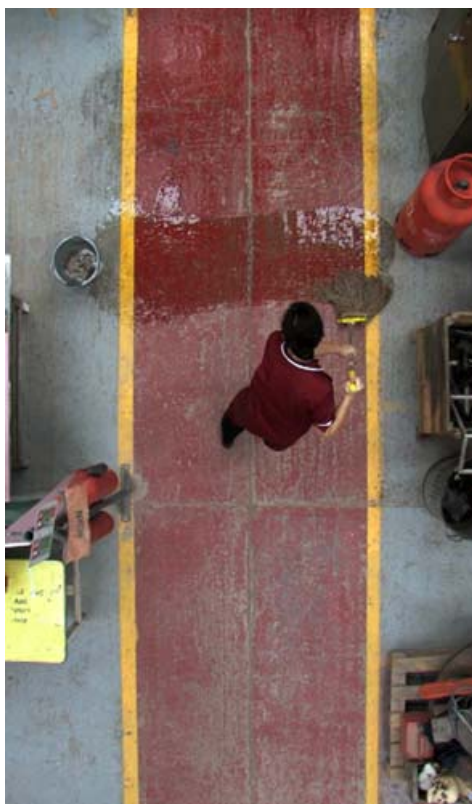
4. In examining the fragility of industrial-based economies, printmaker **Colin Lyons** didn't stop with paper. After creating his paper factory sculptures, Lyons soldered the zinc plates together, turning them into raw metal factory ruins. Lyons' show at Gallery Page and Strange (along with Scott Conarroe's quiet photos of empty railway tracks at MSVU Gallery) was a beautiful but depressing time capsule.

5. **Kim Morgan's** *Range Light, Borden-Carleton, PEI* was a sixty-foot translucent latex cast of an abandoned PEI lighthouse that loomed overhead in the MSVU Art Gallery, floating like an amphibian with glowing scaled skin. Although I live minutes away from the Halifax Harbour, Morgan's sculpture guiltily reminded me of how disconnected I am from the city's marine history.



Stacey DeWolfe – Montreal

1. There were few shows in 2010 that stood out to me in their entirety, the exception being the incredible **Marcel Dzama** retrospective at the MAC. Though I'm long familiar with Dzama's illustrations, there was something about the immersive nature of the exhibition that allowed me to see the work with fresh eyes. It was the black velvet curtain at the entrance to the gallery that set the stage. In the first room, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness and settled on the first of his magical dioramas, I fell in love. Dzama's imagination is a marvelous place to spend time: dangerous, lovely, and oddly comforting.



Alana Riley, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Gray*, 2009-2010, video still

2. 2010 was also a year that found me reflecting on the city's private galleries: their struggles in a time of economic restraint, their role in nurturing community, and the ways that they balance commerce with curation. **Extreme Painting**, a multi-gallery initiative spearheaded by painter Ben Klein and gallerist René Blouin, brought larger-than-normal summer crowds to the Belgo. A show of this scope is bound to be uneven, but there were some definite highlights. My favorite piece was Alana Riley's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Gray* at Joyce Yahouda. Though not actually a painting – Riley, who is this recipient of the 2010 Pierre-Ayot Award, videotaped herself washing the paint-strewn floor of her studio – the work playfully illustrates how the stroke of a brush, or in this case a mop, brings a canvas to life.

3. My most frustrating experience this year was seeing the exhibition of **Abbas Kiarostami** photographs at Gallery Pangee. Kiarostami, who is without question one of the world's great auteurs, makes films that are as thematically heavy as they are visually stunning. His photographs are no different: stark black and white landscapes that he was compelled to take because it was too depressing to think that he might be the only one to witness their beauty. What depressed me was having to see the work in a small cluttered gallery instead of the hushed galleries of the MAC, a space with a gravitas befitting the work.

4. One gallery that stood out as having the most consistently interesting programming was Concordia's **Leonard & Ellen Bina Art Gallery**. I was particularly taken with *Magnetic North*, a group show officially curated by Charles Stankievech, though he credits a discussion with fellow curators Vincent Bonin and Michele Theriault in shifting the focus of the show from the concrete (arctic art) to the conceptual (the idea of the night sky and its navigational propensities). The exhibition, which comprised works by visual artists, musicians, and filmmakers, including Peter Mettler, was one of the year's most compelling curatorial projects.

5. And to conclude, a list of my five favorite works of the year: **Luis Jacob's** photographic opus *Album VIII* at Darling Foundry, **Terence Gower's** video *Ciudad Moderna* at the MAC, Sobey Award nominee **Brendan Lee Satish Tang's** incredible sculptures, also at the MAC, **Jessica Eaton's** *Umbra Penumbra* at Galerie Push, and **Philippe Blanchard's** wondrous animation *Quest for Fire* at the Milky Way in Toronto.



Isa Tousignant - Montreal

1. To start, the winner for Best Visiting Artist: **Jenny Holzer**. Her show at DHC/ART finally let Montreal in on the secret of her international fame. She's a brilliant, conscientious creator who makes the political personal in a viscerally affective – and therefore effective – way. The whole experience was enhanced by some fantastic curating which involved extra programming like a reading by local socially “engaged” poets that was more entertaining than it was grating – quite a feat. (I've put participant Carmine Starnino's book *This Way Out* on my Christmas list.)



Emmanuel Licha, *Mirages*, 2010, video still

2. The Best Political Art medal – a related category – goes to **Emmanuel Licha**, who created a transformative environment at SBC Gallery with his show *Why Photogenic*. Viewers were engulfed in a plywood structure from the moment they entered, mimicking the one they saw in his videos of the surreal place that is Fort Irwin, a military camp in California designed to look like Bagdad under siege. Truly a disconcerting experience, the show walked the increasingly thin line between reality and fiction in a way that made me question, um, everything.

3. Best Non-Art Exhibition this year goes to fashion designer **Denis Gagnon** and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, who paved the way and instilled some hope for the Jean Paul Gaultier show coming up at the museum next summer. The gallery design by architect Gilles Saucier – and Gagnon's mind-blowing artistry, of course – elevated the show from something pokey like their 2008 YSL exhibition to something edgy and museum-worthy.

4. Emmanuel Galland and François Lalumière joined forces and wits to make the year's Best Public Art piece: *Invert Me Out* at Articule. After sitting in the coffee shop across from the gallery day after day (ah, the leisurely lifestyle of Montreal artists), the duo noticed that Articule's architecture is the exact mirror image of the paint supplies store next to it. So they took over the gallery's façade and storefront during its summer break, painted it the same colour as its neighbour and reproduced every minute detail of the store's window decoration – except opposite, like in a mirror. It was a trickstery piece of subtle yet brilliant urban intervention.

5. And finally, drum roll please... the utmost, tippy-top, Bestest Show of the Year came courtesy of **Marcel Dzama** and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Dzama kicked 2010 off with a bang of excitement and had me envisioning a year filled with inspiring art exhibitions featuring full-sized bear costumes, delicate idiosyncratic narratives, haunting dioramas, and a full-meal-deal of food for thought.



Terence Dick – Toronto

1. I tend not to throw words like this around, but *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965-1980* was the most "important" exhibition of the year in this burg bar none. I wouldn't call it my favourite, I wouldn't say it was for everyone, I wouldn't even say I liked it, but I would have gone back again and again if I had the time (and it wasn't installed literally from corner to corner of the city care of the four galleries at the University of Toronto). I'm still wrestling with its significance and waiting for a suitably massive catalogue to allow me to contemplate the ideas of all this idea-oriented art, particularly as it undergirds our present post-conceptual (whatever that means) times. (*A to B*, a multiple and then some companion collection crammed into MKG127 and curated by Micah Lexier gets the first runner-up nod here.)

2. As for my most highly recommended local exhibition of the year, it was **David Hoffos** at the MOCCA hands down. This touring exhibition was especially handy when I had to recommend

contemporary art to skeptical newbies as the initial wow-factor won hearts and minds unilaterally. And in a rare instance of aesthetically rigorous populism, the art people loved it too because Hoffos managed to exercise restraint in his haunting but never Hollywood haptic video installations. (Earlier in the year and for a sadly brief run, Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller's *Ship o' Fools*, installed in Trinity Square Park for the Luminato Festival, made for an equally accessible art experience for young and old alike.)



Ryan Trecartin, *K-Corea INC. K (Section A)*, 2009, HD Video

3. But if I was going to name my favourite exhibition of the year, the answer could be none other than **Ryan Trecartin's** playhouse at The Power Plant. Retinal burn never felt so good, black box video works never had better furniture for lounging (Duh! These videos aren't short, so why not give the visitor a fucking chair?! Finally someone figured this out.), and someone under thirty made something that felt like the present or the future, definitely not the past.

4. I'm going to cheat here and give a shout out to all the artists and works that stopped me in my tracks (and in doing so, kept me going). To name names: **Josh Thorpe** in *Empire of Dreams* at MOCCA, **Jennifer Murphy** at Clint Roenisch, **Emily Vey Duke & Cooper Battersby** at Jessica Bradley, **Murray Favro's** lathe at Christopher Cutts, **Jannick Deslauriers'** fabric tank at Whippersnapper, **Guido van der Werven** walking in front of an ice breaker at Prefix ICA, and **Ed Pien & Samonie Toonoo** at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery.

5. I'm going to rant here and ask the **major institutions** in the city to step it up in the new year. The AGO is risking a further decent into insignificance (and debt) if it continues to misjudge its potential audience and disappoint its current one. Nuit Blanche can't rely on its momentum for another year and the new curators need to get a good grasp on what works (as art and not simply spectacle) for next fall. The Power Plant is getting some renovations done and a new curator, but has yet to take command as the city's leading contemporary art stronghold. They should keep an eye on the MOCCA, which has initiated a partnership with the National Gallery that could be a game-changer if it works out. The all-city symposium on a Toronto Biennial earlier in the year held promise, if only as a gesture of solidarity, but we'll just have to wait and see what, if anything, comes of it.



Cliff Eyland – Winnipeg

1. Winnipeg's **Daniel Barrow**, whose art I greatly admire, has finally won the Sobey award. I am also a huge fan of Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, whom I saw as his main competition this year. As happy as I would have been to see the three of them share the prize, Barrow has deserved this plum for some time.

2. Platform curator **J.J. Kegan McFadden** is everywhere doing everything in Winnipeg, running this town like nobody since Wayne Baerwaldt ten or so years ago. McFadden had his first solo show

as an artist at 803 Gallery recently, proving that smart people can make good art, too! McFadden trained as a curator and art historian at UBC, but he has no training as an artist, so good for him.



Wanda Koop, *Untitled* from the series *Hybrid Human*, 2009-2010

3. **Wanda Koop** has become a benchmark of artistic ambition in Winnipeg. Her Winnipeg Art Gallery retrospective was kaleidoscopic, crammed floor to ceiling with work. I especially liked her watery landscape paintings and the miniature dioramas made by Stephen Hunter of past Koop installations.

4. When **Divya Mehra** was in high school I characterized Winnipeg as the town that conceptual art forgot. Kegan McFadden (that guy again!) curated a knockout first solo show for this smarty-pants artist that included an automobile affixed to a gallery wall. How did Winnipeg get from the Art Lodge to Divya Mehra in only a few short years?

5. I love **Karen Asher's** photography. Her solo show of colour photographs last year was another Platform production. She's a recent art school graduate whose photographs have the intimacy of her teacher Larry Glawson's pics, the raw truthfulness of David McMillan (another of her teachers), and the purist formality that I associate with both mentors. She makes square C-print pictures the old fashioned way, with chemicals and film, and then has us identify with her subjects in images that are full of sentiment and colour. There is much empathy and not a glimmer of ill will in this art.



Dick Averbs - Calgary



Creatmosfera, *River of Light*, 2010 (photo: Carlos Amat)

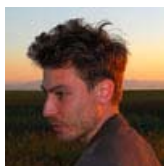
1. Topping my list for 2010 art projects in Calgary is **River of Light**, a night-time, one-time only, time-based public art installation that comprised five hundred large, illuminated, coloured spheres, floating several miles down the Bow River from the City's outer limits to the downtown core. This simple but stunning display of glowing orbs created a variegated raft of shimmering light: quiet in nature yet compelling in form. Undertaken as part of the City of Calgary Public Art Program, *River of Light*, created by UK-based Creatmosphere, was one of six public art projects commissioned for the summer of 2010 under the title Celebration of the Bow River.

2. Second on my chart is **Unravelling the Yarns: War Rugs and Soldiers** at The Founders' Gallery, an exhibit that brings together contemporary fine craft from Afghanistan in the form of war rugs, displayed alongside some of the weapons that are depicted in these contemporary handmade weavings. Showcasing the Fyke Collection of Afghan War Rugs, this A-grade show is high up my list for three reasons. Firstly, the importance of exploring contemporary non-western practices, specifically in the context of a host institution that is highly implicated in the rupture at hand. Secondly is the extraordinary framework of curation that underpins this project. And thirdly is the venue. Located in The Military Museums, the Founders' Gallery is one of Calgary's little-known gems: a relatively new art gallery dedicated to temporary programming that showcases contemporary art alongside historical works and artifacts.

3. **Jamelie Hassan** may be known for many reasons. Her installations, writing, international exhibition record, and winning of the Governor General's award are well documented, but until now her films and videos have not been considered or exhibited as a singular entity. Fortunately this has all changed with the advent of *The Films and Videos of Jamelie Hassan*, curated by Miriam Jordan and Julian Jason Haladyn. Nine works make up this collection including *Sister Speak to Me: A Tribute to Zahra Kazemi*. Made with Tyson Haller in 2003, this is a counter monument to the beating death of photographer Zahra Kazemi at the hands of Iranian authorities in Tehran. Attending the premiere screening at the Glenbow, watching the footage, and listening to Hassan talk in person about the events, I couldn't believe it was seven years since Kazemi's untimely passing. But in a world too often charged with uncertainty, I found these collected works reassuring: a grain of hope here, a crumb of comfort there, all brought about by a slowing of the space-time continuum.

4. Maintaining the theme of otherness and continuing to build a challenging framework of art and culture in Calgary, fourth on my list is **Kent Monkman's** epic *The Triumph of Mischief*. Programmed by Jeff Spalding back when he was at Glenbow's helm, this masterful show included large scale canvasses, installation, and video, bringing to the fore aspects of sexuality, First Nations rights and new takes on art history. Sure, it may not meet everyone's criteria for honourable mention, but the scale and brio of these works can't fail to impress.

5. Turning to spaces and art that are off the beaten track, but vital in leveraging the kind of visibility that the top four projects are opening up, my number five spot goes to **Jennifer Crighton's** *Sweater Porn* at the Pith Gallery and Studios. Crighton's knitted forms stand proud beyond the others mentioned here for the manner in which the installation reveals the hand of the artist. The domestic dressing of the studio gallery, the provocative draping of human bodies, and the grassroots atmosphere of the venue made for a decidedly hand-made but copacetic feeling of human need for community.



Aaron Peck - Vancouver

1. Perhaps I've been a little obsessed with the idea of lateness this year. George Baker's essay "Late Criticism" in *Canvases and Careers Today* tipped me off to how the term "late style," which refers to the work made by an individual artist nearing the end of his or her life, could be applied to contemporary art and criticism, although I'm skeptical. In his catalog essay, Jeff Wall writes that **Kerry James Marshall's** paintings "refuse the verdict of lateness." Marshall takes up an extremely traditional genre (history painting) but rethinks it in radical ways – both in terms of his subject matter (black cultural experience) but also in terms of form. Marshall's exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery is his first Canadian solo show and Vancouver has been lucky to have it on display for the better part of the year.



Stephen Waddell, *Wrestlers*, 2010

2. All seven of **Stephen Waddell's** photographs at Monte Clarke Gallery this year examined what I like to call “photographic looking.” What these pictures consider is more complicated than “the gaze” and the specific tradition of theory that comes with that term. Rather, they examine the ways in which the camera positions the viewer within a complex set of visual relations. *Wrestlers* is perhaps Waddell's most significant work yet in the way the subject and composition examine photography itself. Moreover, Waddell claims *Wrestlers* was produced entirely by hand, and a brief inspection of the photograph reveals the handmade quality: errors in application of the prints to board, paint drips on the frame, etc.; it's fascinating in that way and a classic Waddell reference to painting.

3. Walter Benjamin suggested that technologies are most visible at the moment of their birth and obsolescence. Benjamin's observation is an apt way of thinking through the work of **Mark Lewis** (also seen this year at Monte Clarke). Lewis uses a convention of early cinema (the silent short) and updates it with contemporary technology. Of particular interest was *Willesden Laundrette*; *Reverse Dolly*, *Pan Right*, *Friday Prayers*, a film picturing a neighborhood in London. The piece considered frames within frames: both the way the camera framed the film and the way the architecture depicted framed the shots. *Pull Focus: Gasometer* also floored me for the way in which it filmed the shifting light of the lid of a Gasometer, in effect turning that lid into what appeared to be an aperture.

4. For **Geoffrey Farmer's** exhibition at Catriona Jeffries, the gallery was stuffed, like a Christmas stocking, with 365 puppets. Each puppet was made of wire and paper collaged from Life magazine and art history textbooks. The effect was haunting, eerie, hilarious, and baffling. The puppets had distinct characters so it was rewarding to roam around the gallery examining each. Accompanying the installation, Farmer presented a projection: a montage of images also taken from Life magazine. He seemed to be exploring the way in which we perceive, perform, and perhaps archive, the passage of time.

5. If, for better or worse, one of the recent trends to emerge in contemporary art concerns not a return to institutional critique but institutionality as a medium itself, then Artspeak's transformation into a temporary site for the Zürich-and-Berlin-based bookstore **Motto** seems to epitomize this trend. (This is somewhat of a conflict of interest as I sit on the board of Artspeak and one of Motto's participants, Publication Studio, published a book of mine this past June. But with that declared, I'll continue...) Along with turning Artspeak into a temporary bookstore, Motto also held weekly talks from other visiting stores, publishing projects or artists such as the Los Angeles store Ooga Booga, Portland's Publication Studio, or Dexter Sinister's Stuart Bailey, transforming Artspeak into a discursive space devoted to a discussion on publishing and books.

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