

Toronto

2010 Nuit Blanche

posted by Terence Dick - October 5th, 2010.

In an attempt to avoid the now almost universally reviled **Nuit Blanche** crowds and their attendant line-ups (to paraphrase Sloan: it's not the event I hate, it's the fans), I changed my strategy this year and went to bed early on Saturday so I could wake up at three Sunday morning to cruise through the final hours of white night in a relatively uncluttered fashion. In doing so, I realized two things: one, sometimes the crowds are essential to the experience (see *Nuit Market* below), and two, not everything lasts until seven a.m. This latter fact had me rushing against time to see all that I could see before my bicycle turned back into a pumpkin at the break of dawn.



Dean Baldwin's temporary bar on ice

My first stop was **Hart House** where **Dean Baldwin's** ice house/bar was still in full swing (which isn't that hard considering it's capacity is about half a dozen people). At this point in the night, the NB patrons consisted almost entirely of kids in their twenties. OCAD prez **Sarah Diamond** pointed this out at a panel discussion held later Sunday afternoon at the Drake, noting with optimism the enthusiasm with which the youth take to the event. The question remains whether that enthusiasm translates into anything more once the sun comes up.



Getting ready for another match at *Reunion*, 2010

Also at Hart House was a performance of **Marina Abramovic's** *Imponderabilia*. This oft-seen but rarely experienced work (at least for those of us who couldn't make it down to the MoMA for her recent retrospective) consists of two naked performers standing on either side of a doorway while the audience passes one-by-one between them. Like a lot of the best contemporary art, what seems goofy on paper takes

on a whole new weight in person. As it became my turn to do the deed, I had to steel myself like I was about to jump off a cliff, and in that short walk I was more present than in front of any other work that night. Not surprisingly, this became the standout experience of the night for me. Interestingly, two of the other exceptional pieces were also recreations of decades-old work. Zone B curator **Sarah Robayo Sheridan's** *Reunion* reunion at the Ryerson Theatre was an unexpected delight in its adherence to old school contemplative rigor: the folks played chess while the electronic music burred. Thankfully, she didn't try to sell it with a DJ adding beats. She just matched the venue to the history (Marcel and Teeny Duchamp and John Cage's performance in the same space in 1968) and turned it into something both old and new.



Folding Micah Lexier's paper sculptures for *Vexations*

Martin Arnold and **Micah Lexier's** performance of Erik Satie's *Vexations* was also a variation on a performance organized by Cage decades ago. They played with the structure of this normally eighteen to twenty-four hour piano solo by turning it into a duet and making the score a sculptural element that accumulated on a long table over the twelve hours. Their use of the existing architecture was perfect and at six in the morning, with a couple dozen repetitions to go, I could easily have lingered here until the very end.



Nuit Market shoppers

The one contemporary contemporary art piece that stood out for its reflection on the demographics of NB and the meaning of the crowds was **Mammalian Diving Reflex's** *Nuit Market*. The transplanted shopkeepers from the normally suburban, weekend-only Weston Flea Market were shutting themselves down when I passed by around 5:30, but from talking to chief Mammalian **Darren O'Donnell**, I got a good impression of what a melee the earlier part of the night had been. As a conscious dig at the urban elite who dominate NB both as artists/organizers and patrons, *Nuit Market* was a clever riposte to what rapper Knaan in his facebook blog referred to as "white people's Caribana."



Writing on Michael Fernandes' wall

The rest of the best could be found, for the most part, in the business district with **Zilvanis Kempinas'** *Big O* being a pleasant surprise for those who hadn't seen it in a previous exhibition at the Blackwood Gallery and **Michael Fernandes'** *Arrivals/Departures* eliciting some good interactivity with just a blackboard and some chalk.



Max Streicher, *Endgame (Coulrophobia)*

Max Streicher struck again with his terrifying at six a.m. dissolute clown heads mashed between two old bank buildings. These should become a permanent fixture as a warning to all stockbrokers about the risks of inflation and market bubbles.



Agnès Winter's ad for Holt Renfrew

The biggest failures of the night clustered around Zone A where **Agnès Winter's** collage of smiling folk set to the tune of Charlie Chaplin's *Smile* had me rolling my eyes right through the top of my head at its lack of any critical core. For a paean to happiness to be presented on the front of the highest-end shopping mall in the city seems both like a gross slide into advertising and an insult to those who can't afford the joy to be found within. No joy was to be found at **Kent Monkman's** performance in Yorkville Park either as, rumor has it, a couple residents from the nearby condos shut it down by eleven o'clock. Congrats, Toronto, you still manage to find a way to be lame.



Ed Pien taking down his shadowbox on Queen West West West

As I made my way home along Queen West, searching for any holdouts in the last half hour of the night/morning, I thought that this year's Nuit had come through with enough magic moments to make me feel good about my impending exhaustion. As contributing artist **Mark Laliberte** had mentioned in an interview in one of the city's weeklies, Nuit Blanche is really only five days (nights) old, not five years old. And it seems to me that every time it happens, we understand the city and, more importantly, public art in new ways. So it was with a sense of giddy satisfaction that I watched **Ed Pien** take down his shadowbox at the farthest western point of Zone C before turning up Sorauen Road and heading home.



Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. He is currently working on a catalogue essay for urban printmaker Matthew Janisse, a review of William Eakin's found photography, and a cinematic account of the suburbs. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog.

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