

10 NEW COMPANIES

Tuesday, June 22, 2010 Toronto Edition

[Login/Register](#)



[wheels.ca](#) [healthzone.ca](#) [yourhome.ca](#) [parentcentral.ca](#) [toronto.com](#)



- thestar.com
- Web
- find a business

[Home](#) [News](#) [GTA](#) [Opinion](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [A & E](#) [Living](#) [Travel](#) [Columns](#) [Blogs](#) [More ▾](#) [Autos](#) [Careers](#) [Classifieds](#) [Deaths](#) [Real Estate](#)

[Home](#) [Blogs](#) [Untitled: Contemporary art in Toronto and beyond](#)

« [back to Untitled: Contemporary art in Toronto and beyond](#)

01/01/2010

Happy New Year: Best of the year that was

For whatever reason -- list burnout, maybe; we spent a lot of time with 'best of the decade' lists this year -- the paper didn't do a best of 2009 in any category. So I'm going to right here and now, on the first day of 2010. It's got a hard act to follow; in no particular order, here's my best of the best of a pretty great year, 5 deep.

1. Noise Ghost: Shary Boyle and Shuvina Ashoona at Justina M. Barnicke at Hart House



A deft, intuitive pairing by guest curator Nancy Campbell that was truly revelatory about the practices of two -- if you'll pardon the pun -- apparently polar opposites. Boyle, of course, is the (well-deserved) darling of the current Toronto scene, and Ashoona a rising star in the frigid northern hotbox of Cape Dorset (see: Annie Pootoogook). The parallel collections of works on paper quietly showed without telling what we all like to believe, I think -- that we're more the same than different, and the common hunger to experience something emotional and true, like what the best art offers, serves to unite us.

2. A Roomful of Stuff I Made (and collected): Ken Nicol at MKG127

A springtime thrill, Nicol's collection of works on paper and masterful, wryly obsessive objects was the major home run of any commercial gallery show this year for me. Every piece was confounding in its simplicity, and suggested a disturbingly active mind at work; I'm thinking in particular of a favourite piece, a tiny specimen bottle in which Nicol had placed 1,000 fruit flies, counting them out in obsessive exactitude; Nicol, of course, includes a hand-made apparatus for the the process, not just the finished product, and it's so perfectly precise you'd swear it was machined. It's a good metaphor for his work in general, which, to me, is an ongoing self-portrait of someone simultaneously trying to divine order from chaos, and the sublime from the mundane; but done with such endearingly twisted humour, it never fails to engage.

Untitled: Contemporary art in Toronto and beyond



Murray Whyte covers visual arts for the *Star*. He's also a feature writer for the Saturday and Sunday *Star*. He has written about art for the New York Times, Canadian Art magazine, the National Post and many others.

[Subscribe to this blog's feed](#)
[Follow him on Twitter](#)

Recent Comments

Archives

- [June 2010](#)
- [May 2010](#)
- [April 2010](#)
- [March 2010](#)
- [February 2010](#)
- [January 2010](#)
- [December 2009](#)
- [November 2009](#)
- [October 2009](#)
- [September 2009](#)
- [More...](#)

Categories

- [Art Spaces](#)
- [Painting](#)

Art Links

- [Akimblog](#)
- [Art Review](#)
- [Artfag](#)
- [Arkrush](#)
- [Artnet](#)
- [Canadian Art](#)
- [Daily Serving](#)
- [NY Times ArtsBeat](#)
- [Sally McKay and Lorna Mills](#)
- [The Guardian Art Blog](#)

Related Links

- [Today's Online News](#)
- [TheStar.com](#)



3. House on Fire: Sarah Anne Johnson at the AGO

I'm pretty hard on the AGO, as anyone who's ever so much as skimmed anything I've done on ye olde institution would



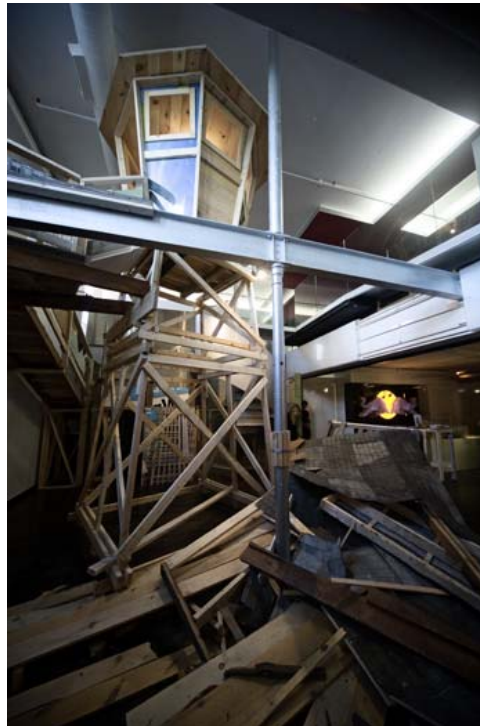
know; but this one, simply, hit it out of the park. Johnson, a thirtysomething artist from Winnipeg, often combines homespun photographic manipulations -- images purposefully crudely retouched by hand, drawn or scribbled on -- with eerily primitivistic, archetypal-seeming sculpture, detailing a dark inner mythology of her own making. For House on Fire,

which the AGO smartly acquired, Johnson's subject was not mythology, but a dark episode in her family history; her grandmother was one of the unfortunate few who was an unwitting subject of pharmacological mind-control experiments surreptitiously conducted by the CIA on patients at the Allen Memorial Institute at McGill University, Montreal.

The resulting work occupies a space somewhere between darkly fantastical, half-remembered nightmare and a chilling reality almost too brutal to be believed (above is a photograph Johnson has re-imagined, of herself and her sister being held by her grandmother, as children; the encircling vines growing from the tortured woman's figures speak of a permanent, inexorable haunting). Personal, affecting and thoroughly worked through -- Johnson's pieces, both photographic and sculptural, carry a tragic personal weight with their perfectly rendered, hand-made qualities -- House on Fire is exactly what the AGO should be doing.

4. Tower Block: Cedric Bomford at Red Bull 381

Known for his imposing architectural installations, Bomford touched down in Toronto this year with an entirely new context: The corporate home of Red Bull, on Queen Street West. Of course, a large chunk has served as a non-commercial gallery for a couple of years now, under the cleverly provocative guidance of Nick Brown, but that doesn't change the fact that this is where Red Bull -- yes, the hypertensive energy drink -- does business; Bomford's rough-hewn installations are imposing wherever they go, but here, in a polished urban place of business, the impact was exponential: Bomford's crudely dystopic construct infiltrated every corner of Red Bull's foyer, forcing everyone -- corporate guests, couriers, whoever -- to interact with it; context isn't everything, but it's definitely something, and in this case, the context gave Bomford's project new life in unexpected, confrontational ways -- which is exactly the experience I crave in these things. It was a major 'wow' -- the likes of which we don't see often enough.



5. The Leona Drive Project

More Star Blogs
 TheStar.com Photos
 TheStar.com Videos
 Commenting Guidelines
Advertisement

Legal Notice

TheStar.com
 Copyright Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved. The views expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Toronto Star or www.thestar.com. The Star is not responsible for the content or views expressed on external sites. Distribution, transmission or republication of any material is strictly prohibited without the prior written permission of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited.
 For information please contact us using our [webmaster form](#). www.thestar.com online since 1996.



A joint curatorial project between York University's Janine Marchessault and Ryerson's Michael Prokopow, the cynic might assume that their take on their subject, the liminal zone occupied by inner-ring suburbs as cities re-urbanize and wipe them away, might be numbingly academic. That's 90% wrong. By that, I mean about a tenth of the Leona Drive Project, in which 5 modest post-war suburban houses in North York were taken over by about a dozen artists or collectives, were too obliquely intellectual to truly engage, but as far as I'm concerned, that's a pretty great ratio. Simply put, The Leona Drive Project was, on the whole, one of the most readable, playful, provocative, elegiac and profound exhibitions on the suburbs I've seen, and believe me, I've seen a lot.

An Te Liu's outside Monopoly house, above, became the exhibition's recognizable icon for this reason, encapsulating a lot with a little -- the reductive dynamic of urban policy and commercial development, and its rendering of the architectural life cycle of house to home to economic unit in gentrifying urban landscapes, Liu laid out a readable, inviting welcome mat to all comers; once you were through the door, it was hard to leave.

Posted by murraywhyte at 02:30:15 PM

[Save to Delicious](#) [Tweet This!](#) [Digg This](#) [Reblog](#)

TrackBack

TrackBack URL for this entry:
<http://www.typepad.com/services/trackback/6a00d8341bf8f353ef0120a795e800970b>
 Listed below are links to weblogs that reference [Happy New Year: Best of the year that was](#):

Comments

You can follow this conversation by subscribing to the [comment feed](#) for this post.

Verify your Comment

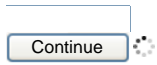
Previewing your Comment

Posted by: |
 This is only a preview. Your comment has not yet been posted.

Your comment could not be posted. Error type:
 Your comment has been saved. Comments are moderated and will not appear until approved by the author. [Post another comment](#)

The letters and numbers you entered did not match the image. Please try again.
 As a final step before posting your comment, enter the letters and numbers you see in the image below. This prevents automated programs from posting comments.
 Having trouble reading this image? [View an alternate.](#)





thestar.com

- [Corrections](#)
- [Contact Webmaster](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Site Map](#)

Toronto Star

- [About](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Subscribe Self Service](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [News Releases](#)
- [Star Internships](#)
- [Careers at TheStar.com](#)

Advertise with us

- [Media Kit](#)
- [Online Advertising](#)
- [Print Advertising](#)
- [Special Sections](#)

Initiatives

- [Santa Claus Fund](#)
- [Fresh Air Fund](#)
- [Classroom Connection](#)
- [Community Giving](#)

Stay up to date

- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Twitter Updates](#)
- [News Alerts](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Mobile Devices](#)

[parentcentral.ca](#) | [wheels.ca](#) | [yourhome.ca](#) | [toronto.com](#) | [pages of the past](#) | [Stock photos](#) | [New in Homes](#) |



© Copyright Toronto Star 1996-2009 | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)