



GALLERIES



Will Munro's "Leigh Bowerly" from Luis Jacob and Pan Wendt's "Funkaesthetics"

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Business as usual

The year in Toronto visual art: Institutions, scenesters and the like

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BY DAVID BALZER December 16, 2009 21:12

As far as I can tell, 2009 was an unexceptional year for visual art in Toronto. There's no reason to blame this on the recession; we've had many cruise-control periods before. In fact, it's pretty much the rule, the advents of the AGO renovation and, two years before that, of the first Nuit Blanche being striking anomalies. And, as 2009 draws to a close, those things remain remarkable simply because they're rare, actual occasions for a general audience to engage with art.

I've already made my feelings clear about the massive problems with this year's Nuit Blanche, and stand by them. Might I take this opportunity to request that the city invite critics of the event to a troubleshooting session? Name the time and place and I'm there. As regards the AGO, it is apparent they haven't had the stellar year many were expecting — they certainly haven't blazed any trails, or redefined the city's relationship to art in any palpable way — but I'm glad they're open. As a big fan of museums, I missed the finesse and internationalism of what they hosted; as a big fan of modernism, I delighted, this year, in their shows on Alexander Calder, Edward Steichen (my very favourite photographer), surrealism (the effect of which might refute my comment above — didn't it seem like the movement was on everyone's mind this summer?), even Tut (whose tomb was discovered in the '20s and effected a style revolution then) and the brilliant William Holman Hunt (yes, he's a modernist).

Kudos to Barbara Fischer and Natalie De Vito of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, which is, quite simply, the new Power Plant (where, by the way, De Vito used to work). While I am not always in accord with their tastes — they brought Mark Lewis, an artist whose success and acclaim continue to baffle me, to this year's Venice Biennale — I admire their chutzpah. Two of the year's finest shows were at the JMBG: Nancy Campbell's "Noise Ghost," which compared and contrasted Shary Boyle with Shuvina Ashoona; and Luis Jacob and Pan Wendt's "Funkaesthetics."

A few more shout-outs: the Gardiner Museum, which continues to be a valuable venue (their Viola Frey show was a real treat); Nicholas Metivier, a high-end commercial gallery, yes, but one of the few local entities up to international standards (Douglas Walker and Joanne Tod both did wonderfully there this year); John Gould, whose drawings and films, on display at Roberts Gallery this summer, continue to haunt me; and gallerist Paul Bright, who left for New York, but not without giving us a wonderful William Buzzell show.

Bright will be missed, and his departure speaks to the faintness of younger voices in the city. Don't get me wrong: I see the willingness of people to get together and do things — artist-collective The White House's recent move to Kensington Market and the concurrent opening of Jon McCurley's Double Double Land Land in the same neighbourhood are excellent signs. But where is the attention to quality and craft? If this is purposeful — i.e., a reaction against the art establishment — it is also a dangerous stance against a wider viewership. I've said it before and I'll say it again, proudly: I don't review parties or scenes, however much I love and participate in them; I review art.

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you fucking talked at their space that they organized and that your fucking thanks?

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Dec 20, 2009 6:09 PM
- 

clueless

check your facts, double double land is not run just by jon mcurley - it is run by steve thomas and daniel vila. second, they do not just have parties art exhibitions like 'a humming tune' group show featuring the drawings o amy bowles, julia kennedy among others: <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=177358813122&ref=mf>

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Dec 20, 2009 6:01 PM
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Have you ever been to Show & Tell Gallery?

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Simon
Dec 19, 2009 6:19 PM
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maybe im overreacting; after thinking about it , i agree there needs to be bigger push for emerging artists, as a critic David reviews art in galleries it is disappointing that young voices arent heard merely enough in institutic Obviously this is ignorance on the part of the institutions who arent taking risk, not on behalf of the critic.

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Xenia benivolski
Dec 18, 2009 6:45 PM
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Clarification really necessary? OK

Hey Xenia I love the White House! You know that, and I said it above. I kr you're not a gallery. I'm just using these two venues as a jumping off poin explore how young artists practice and are received within the larger visual-arts community. I think it's apparent. Sorry, though, if it seemed bij or clueless: it wasn't intended to and, in my opinion, doesn't come off this at all. All the best.

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David Balzer
Dec 18, 2009 6:04 PM

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