



## GALLERIES



### Instant Coffee Disco Fallout Shelter

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BY DAVID BALZER June 17, 2009 21:06

#### EDITORIAL RATING:

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Disco Fallout Shelter, by local collective Instant Coffee, is the new Toronto Sculpture Garden piece after a year of Katie Bethune-Leaman's Mushroom Studio, and it's an apposite follow-up in many ways. Bethune-Leaman's project involved her occasionally inhabiting the stem of her 20-foot-tall mushroom, using it as a studio and allowing passersby to look in and to watch her work, and maybe even to try to strike up a conversation. By contrast, Instant Coffee's new work is about the cheeky cliquishness of conceptualism. It's a powder-coated pink bunker, set into a grassy hill at the end of a glittery yellow-brick road. Bass booms from behind the doors of the bunker, and a monitor at the foot of the yellow bricks shows us the ICers hanging out, presumably inside, like a clubhouse gang. The bunker isn't real, of course – the footage is pre-recorded – but this only emphasizes the you-can't-come-in message. Where Bethune-Leaman's whimsy was inviting, Instant Coffee's is repelling.

Actually, knowing this club won't have you as a member just makes you not want to join it. The duller aspect of the piece is, indeed, the monitor; it's like a cheap, four-frame riff on Warhol's Chelsea Girls, with board games instead of the sadomasochistic passion plays. Go see it in the rain to get the best grasp of its intention: you will be wet and cast out, with the pink, yellow and red of the piece popping out amid the green grass, emphasizing the purposeful tension between the Disco Fallout Shelter's open tawdriness as an object, and its ironic snootiness as a message. That tension is, granted, a mite reductive, but worth creating in a city in which middle-class, cool-kid collectives continue to spring up like, er, mushrooms. After all, the democracy of group art-making is pretty much fundamentally hermetic, the highly performative interchanges within the group becoming its own best product. One might add that art-making and even art-consuming are not always democratic – they're frequently tyrannical, actually. One doesn't get a deep understanding of where Instant Coffee stand on this issue, however. As colourful art about art that excludes, Disco Fallout Shelter seems, like so much contemporary collective art-making, just a kind-of elaborate, kind-of funny joke.

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEEKLY.COM

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