



GALLERIES



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Will Munro: Total Eclipse The AGO presents a glimpse of the DJ/activist/promoter/restaurateur's work

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BY DAVID BALZER August 11, 2010 21:08

EDITORIAL RATING:

To Sep 26. Tue, Thu-Sun 10am-5:30pm; Wed 10am-8:30pm. Free. Toronto Now (beside Frank restaurant), Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas W. 416-979-6648. www.ago.net

Don't go to the current show at AGO's Toronto Now space looking for an exhaustive statement on the late Will Munro's accomplishments. The space is too small to take in everything that the DJ/activist/promoter/restaurateur did -- and in this respect the much bigger but by no means huge Art Gallery of York University, which, under the auspices of Philip Monk and Emelie Chhangur, will present a larger retrospective in 2012, has their work cut out for them. The issue here is how an art institution can do justice to the work of someone who gave so much creative vitality to actual communities

across the city. It is possible -- look at the AGO's own, effective display on the early innovations, social and aesthetic, of Coach House Books -- but needs to be handled in a sensitive, creative matter. That has been done with the work here, yet one sees only a fraction of the story being told.

That's OK, for the fraction is complete in itself, filling the small Toronto Now space with dignity and colour, and consisting mostly of indications of Munro's influences, which always played such a vital role in his many, overlapping vocations anyway. One could call it fan art, but it's fan art of a very special, dynamic, political stripe.

A quick glance at the room immediately reveals Munro's queer-art troika: Klaus Nomi, Leigh Bowery and David Bowie, the former two of whom get large wall tapestries, and the latter a silkscreened mirror. The tapestries are remarkable: they are displayed beside Munro's cheeky redux of Black Flag's Slip It In album cover, and, like so much of his art, extol crafting as a linchpin of DIY culture -- as something with which one literally sews (or tapes, or staples) oneself onto a community and a history. The Bowery piece is one of my favourites (Pan Wendt and Luis Jacob, who is involved with the curation of this show, showed it at JMB Gallery's "Funkaesthetics" last year) because of its individual detailing, the large sequins and patched-together panels of male briefs proclaiming the performative, glamorous, subversive aspects of crafting that Bowery himself championed.

Spend some time with the YouTube videos available at the media kiosk -- highlights include an excerpt from the Maestro documentary on Larry Levan and The Paradise Garage, and an exciting piece of Michael Clark choreography -- to get an even deeper sense of why Munro did what he did. Far from the last word, this show is a mere primer for the many appraisals of Munro's work to come. Here, we get a glimpse of his taste and influences; next, with hope, we'll see how they translated into a practice that changed the lives of so many Torontonians for the better.

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