

Night Clubbing

Night Clubbing took place as part of the Queen Street BIA's Nuit Blanche programme in 2009, and was curated by Earl Miller. With this intervention, we were experimenting with issues of artifice, authenticity, and ways in which to present social commentary.

The setting is a crowded Queen West sidewalk at night. A storefront: the windows are translucent and disco lights are flashing from inside. The front entrance to the building has not opened. Music rumbling from bass speakers inside make the windows reverberate and throb.

A Bouncer stands in front of the entrance, intimidating because of his size, but with a friendly face. A line up of people ten to fifteen in number straddle the window and width of the building. They shift from side to side. People in the line-up check their cell-phones, primp their hair, and stare outward at the door. Every so often the bouncer tells them to be patient. But no one gets in.

The people in the line-up are hired actors and so is the bouncer. The space is empty inside.

The namesake of our Nuit Blanche concept refers to a song recorded on Iggy Pop's 1977 album entitled *The Idiot*, undoubtedly listened to on Queen West in the late 70s and early 80s. *Night Clubbing* also symbolized the changing Queen West street-scape, a part of Toronto's "Entertainment District", and what this designation means to the general public. Nightclubs in general represent the aspirations of the individual who is seeking entertainment, combined with fun and simple forms of self-expression. The problem with the entertainment district is that it was built on the a former cultural generation that populated the Queen West district in the 70s and 80s, a generation no longer inhabiting the area. This isn't to say that weren't some interesting warehouse parties that took place in the areas south of queen, north of king and in between Spadina and John streets in the 80s, but surely, one would have to agree that the area quickly became overrun with generic clubs in the 90s, until recently they became such a drain on the area, and so incongruous with the changing downtown core, that now they are in decline. But somebody had to make the area cool in the first place; hence what is ironic even more so is that condominiums supplanted the clubs, and that the condo residents could not stand the noise and crime emanating from the night-time party atmosphere.

Hipsters like to romanticize about the time before cool things went mainstream. In fact, which hipsters are we talking about? Because the original ones (one example, not all of them) first hung out at the Bohemian Embassy on St. Nicholas street in the early 60s, which was then briefly re-opened beside the Bamboo Club on Queen West in the early 90s - and which now exists as a lifestyle pastiche in the form of a condominium on Queen West West. But we digress, for what we are trying to say is that the art community covets exciting new cultural forms when they are in their germination stage; but often can only identify those cultures once they have fully matured - and that often the movement has run its course as soon as it has become identifiable. It's a slippery slope, deciding what has 'cred' and what doesn't, and that's probably become too much of a past-time of the new hipsters anyway. For when Queen Street West was reviving out of urban neglect in the 70s, many sole proprietors were bringing cultural hubs to the area out of a genuine altruism. Pages Books, the Rivoli for its food, music, art shows, and literary events, and Edward's Books & Art all come to mind. What was once an original cultural impetus, quickly was superseded by the Queen West of today - a form of an outdoor mall where the chain-store brand retailers from the Eaton Centre have replicated themselves a kilometre away - another form of simulation, but this one obviously un-artful.

The reason we recount this history, is that we get the impression that people who visit the area today, are unaware of Queen Street West's history. They may however, be feeding off its former essence. That was the purpose of *Night Clubbing*, for us to find a way to express the ambiguity of what Queen West means today.

Cities change, and so do neighbourhoods. This is a fact. Again, all of these ideas dovetailed nicely in a symphony of paradoxes, for we haven't even mentioned the unintended consequences of Nuit Blanche; a cultural event so enormous that the crowd is the art, and the art is symbolized by an empty storefront.

Desire and the creation of desire, and the artwork's role in this interplay are involved in ebb and flow as members of the public interact with *Night Clubbing*. Some people line up because others are lining up, some badly want to get in, and some people enjoy watching the sculpture as an ever-changing social experiment. *Night Clubbing* is ultimately a lament for the lost art and literature bookstore Pages that used to occupy the space. During the later 1970s and throughout the 1980s Queen Street West was a creative hub for artists, writers, and musicians. Now, multinational brand retailers, fast food, and condominium developments that have usurped the original ethos of this place, and have overrun it. As we are writing this, it will be almost two years that the space that Pages used to house is un-leased: the rent is too high.

Nightclubbing we're nightclubbing
We're walking through town
Nightclubbing we're nightclubbing
We walk like a ghost
We learn dances brand new dances
Like the nuclear bomb
When we're nightclubbing
Bright white clubbing
Oh isn't it wild...

Night Clubbing was a social sculpture that occurred at the same time as *Massive Sale: YYZ Mall*. We were participating in one form of critique at YYZ, the paradox of art within non-commercial zones, amidst the ebb of heterogeneity and unique locale in an urban context; and in another form of critique through a simulation of monoculture on Queen Street West at the site of the former Pages bookstore. This latter simulation elicited metaphors of urban memory, and the folly in which one place-marking and relevant cultural entity can be occupied by a space that only connotes commercialism - and that this can change can go unnoticed.