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TERENCE DICK
TORONTO
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If a survey exhibition is an artist's greatest hits, a group show is like a compilation album. A good compilation hits the zeitgeist on its head, capturing something of that moment in time historically, geographically, thematically, or uniquely. But for every essential various artists LP (*No New York* immediately comes to mind, also *Nuggets*, the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, and *The Indestructible Beat of Soweto*), there are crates and crates of wasted vinyl with maybe one or two interesting tracks, one hits, novelties, or oddities, the whole better left forgotten. That said, we stick with the form, because the collective presentation affords us the opportunity to distill unexpected sympathies from overlooked work or to identify forgotten histories in the play of influence and synchronicity. But it's a hard brew to boil and gallerists risk failure, so August seems to be a popular month to try out new mixes on an audience that, when they're not lost tourists, is often happy just to find an open gallery.



Roy Arden, *Sunmachine*, 1973, collage

Deep in tourist country in the Distillery District, **Clark & Faria** have put together a show that is sure to confuse and/or delight any inadvertent observers. *Bowie* is a collection of work referencing the titular pop star; the majority of it focused on portraits of various degrees of ambiguity (which suits the chameleon-like former David Jones to a tee). The central work is a series of drawings of the singer's hair through the ages by **Derek Liddington**. If I had my druthers, I'd crop then smaller and arrange them in a grid (I'm always suspicious of needlessly large format works). **Romas Astraukas'** pretty untitled watercolour resists the urge to hammer you over the head with Bowie's likeness. And **Roy Arden's** *Sunmachine* collage made me do a double take; it's resemblance to Steven Shearer's collages of glam-pop singers from the seventies is unmistakable, except Arden made his in 1973 when Shearer was still in short pants!

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Michael Smith, *Vertical Fire #1*, 2009, acrylic on canvas

Scrawling the title *Mayhem* on the gallery wall à la "Helter Skelter" sets a high bar for what's inside and **Nicholas Metivier** unfortunately doesn't reach the promised level of ultra-violence, but then again, I imagine he's much more of a gentleman than I. His collection of restrained chaos is built around large abstractions by recent OCAD grad **Rachel MacFarlane**. She works from maquettes which are then rendered as crowded, spatially disorienting masses of clunky shapes and bright colours. It's not really my cup of tea. I'm more drawn to the frenzied brush work of **Michael Smith's** dense landscapes (if you want to call them that) that remind me of the cacophonous free jazz I used to listen to as a way to soothe my own inner demons. That's what mayhem means to me.



Air Conditioned Jungle, installation view at Diaz Contemporary

Diaz Contemporary has taken things a step further by inviting YYZ's **Greg Elgstrand** (also a zone-meister for this year's Nuit Blanche) to curate a selection of increasingly familiar names. The gallery is transformed into an exterior street scene, placing the work out into the world in a simple gesture that adds an extra layer of context so as to generate some new possible meanings. **Carlo Cesta's** metal work is easily at home here and **Orest Tatryn's** neon just suffers from a particularly bright day. **Kelly Jazvac's** vinyl debris confuses me, while **Kerri Reid's** dangerously innocuous drawings are a delight to discover.



Toronto Terrarea Club, *aerarreT*, 2009

Kelly McCray at **Edward Day Gallery** has put together a compilation of supergroups with Foreign Legionnaires: Art Collectives at Work. Bringing together local art-gangs **FASTWÜRMS**, **Instant Coffee**, **Shake-n-Make**, **Team Macho**, and the **Toronto Terrarea Club**, McCray presents an array of alternate collaborative strategies that speak as much to process as they do practice. Team Macho contribute a large selection of eye-catching hand-rendered visual mash-ups of the detritus of popular culture. If the Royal Art Lodge could actually draw, they'd be TM. Newcomers the Toronto Terrarea Club, made up of Janice Demkiw, Emily Hogg, and Olia Mishchenko, are to blame for the most absorbing work in the space. Their *aerarreT* installation takes its lead from Jessica Stockholder and Sarah Sze to organize a dizzying assemblage of kitsch knick knacks, assorted mirrors, magnifying lenses, and hanging stuff into an alter to the serendipitous symmetries that we find (and crave) in the chaos of life.



David McMillan, *Valentina, Chernobyl*, c print, 2000

Finally, **Michael Klein** of **MKG127** has taken it upon himself to give back to his community by exhibiting the work of a handful of his instructors from the School of Art at the University of Manitoba. I don't think I've every seen a more unlikely gathering of styles, but the story that links the artists (**Robert Achtemichuk**, **Sheila Butler**, **Jeff Funnell**, **Rita McKeough**, and **David MacMillan**), the gallerist, his gallery, and the larger community from which they are drawn elicits more contemplation than a lot of high-minded thematic exhibitions I've seen in the past. And Klein's biographical notes make my day with their heartfelt tributes to his formative experiences with these folks who manage to be both artists and exceptional teachers.