

## THE LITTLE THINGS

R. M. Vaughan on the strange manifestations of grief

PAGE 5

## OFF THE RAILS

At Union Station, a week-long international art happening that's free and open to the public

PAGE 2

## Globe Life &amp; Arts

## EXHIBITION

## An art happening in the heart of the city

Villa Toronto is an event/performance/party that is inhabiting the Great Hall of Union Station for the next eight days

JAMES ADAMS

The dividing line between art and life always has been more wavering and smudged than firm and fixed. The past 100 years, especially, are strewn with projects that have striven to make art a part of life and not just commentary on it, or an interpretation or an enhancement or a consolation.

Add Villa Toronto to that list. For the next eight days it's inhabiting the Great Hall of Union Station in downtown Toronto. Currently in the throes of an almost \$1-billion revitalization, the station funnels more than 200,000 subway and train commuters through its doors each weekday – the kind of “audience,” in other words, any art gallery or museum, public or private, would love to engage for 20 – heck, even 10 – minutes a day.

Defining Villa Toronto is next to impossible, so description might be the best way to limn its contours and content. It's actually the fourth iteration of an event/exhibition/performance/party that was started in 2006 by Warsaw's Galeria Raster and held for a week in a villa in the Polish capital. Others have since been staged in 2010 and 2011 in, respectively, Reykjavik and Tokyo – centres that, though not global arts hubs à la New York and Berlin, nonetheless “have a lot happening” and deserve wider exposure, according to Villa Toronto project co-ordinator Stu Monck.

Don't think of Villa Toronto as kin to, say, Art Basel Miami Beach or the Toronto Art Fair. All Villa Toronto happenings are open to the public and free. Nothing's housed in cubicles. And forget about selling. The Great Hall is Villa's heart and hub, hosting 24 or so artworks or events from eight Toronto and 11 international arts institutions (including galleries from Milan, London, Tokyo and Berlin), but none of what's being presented there carries a price tag.

The same goes for venues such as the Drake Hotel, the Goethe-Institut, the Stephen Bulger Gallery and the 8-11 art collective, which are mounting performances, screenings, panel discussions and the like. Of special interest at the Art Gallery of Ontario Friday evening is the renowned boundary-crossing/guitar-playing Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson. A participant at every Villa to date, Kjartansson will be presenting “an evening of misery” at the AGO's Walker Court in association with long-time collaborator/pianist Davio Por Jonsson.

Another idea to discard with respect to Villa Toronto is that of thematic unity. There is none. “Creating an art community in this space, in this city, that's more important than any curatorial overtone,” Monck says. “It's about conversation, a little bit of confrontation.” Indeed, the co-ordinator confesses quite a bit of his



Pass the Hat, by Dean Drever, is a five-metre-high totem pole made from 10,666 stacked sheets of paper. The piece is one of about 24 artworks or events displayed in Union Station. JOHN DEAN/THE ESKER FOUNDATION AND MKG127

time has been spent “watching how people move through Union Station, wondering how to pack it with art,” and wondering: “How do you get people to slow down, to take the next subway?”

Should *Port-o-Potty*, a chrome-plated sculpture by Newfoundland's Zeke Moores, go here or there? How about Moores's shiny, bronze-plated dumpster called, aptly enough, *Dumpster*? Is *Pass the Hat*, a five-metre-high totem pole made from 10,666 stacked sheets of paper by Toronto sculptor Dean Drever, better positioned near a wall or out in the open? Where's the best place to project Kjartansson's video of the ambitious performance piece, *S.S. Hanger*, he created as Iceland's

official entry in the 2013 Venice Biennale? What's the best way to hang *ZR Hallelgeist*, a huge ink drawing on diaphanous kite fabric by Switzerland's Reto Pulfer, from the Great Hall's ceiling?

Preparations for Villa Toronto have been in the works for at least two years. During that time it's enlisted the support of, among others, the Polish Ministry of Culture, the Toronto Arts Council and Osmington, Inc., the real estate firm responsible for managing Union Station's new retail space. Raster founders Lukasz Gorczyca and Michal Kaczynski first visited the Ontario capital “a few years ago, just investigating what was going on,” scouting locales, consulting with groups

such as Art Metropole, the city's world-famous artist-run centre founded in 1974 by the General Idea trio. Notes Monck: “They like to do a lot of research” before deeming a particular city or scene worthy of Villa-ization. “They saw that [in Toronto] there's so much sizzling under the surface, that there's something brewing here that's not getting out to the international arts community.”

Monck says Villa's founders are looking to regularize the timing of their roadshow, perhaps doing it every two years, with Mexico City offered as a next possible location. But what's stuck in Monck's mind is the aftermath of its Toronto iteration. “Is it really going to rattle the community

into being more connected with the international arts community?” he asks. “What I'm pushing for is that there will be this trickling of energy into the Toronto art scene ... a transportation of thought from Toronto to people coming here from abroad, and vice versa.”

Villa Toronto, organized by Raster Gallery (Warsaw) in association with Art Metropole (Toronto), runs Jan. 16-23. The Great Hall at Toronto's Union Station is Villa's hub with events and exhibitions running daily 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Other Toronto locations are also hosting events. For a detailed agenda and list of participating institutions, go to [villatoronto.com/toronto](http://villatoronto.com/toronto).