

[HOME](#)[CALENDAR](#) + [EXHIBITIONS](#) + [CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS](#)[JOBS](#) + [WORKSHOPS](#) + [PUBLICATIONS](#) + [AKIMBLOG](#)[SUBSCRIBER LOGIN](#)[SEARCH](#)[SUBSCRIBE](#) + [RSS](#)[ABOUT](#) + [CONTACT](#) + [SERVICES](#) + [ADVERTISE](#)

Akimblog



2008 Critics' Picks

The Year in Review from Coast to Coast

posted by Akimblog Staff - December 17th, 2008.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.... Actually, right now, it's just the worst. The year started off alright, business as usual, with nary a thought of belt-tightening. Come summer, the Conservative government called an election and then announced a series of multi-million dollar cuts to arts funding. Suddenly the country was up in arms! Nothing unites a bunch of artists more than a threat to their meager financial freedom. And what an outcry it was! Quebec jumped in full force, email chains started linking, subversive YouTube videos were produced. The capital-A Arts were finally an election issue and the Conservatives suffered for it. But then the bubble burst and all bets were off. This financial crisis signals dark ages ahead for anyone interested in arts funding, gallerists hoping to sell work, and institutions needing to raise money. Next year is going to be a heavy one, so – on that happy note – let's look back at the past twelve months to see what lifted the hearts of Akimblog's national correspondents. These are the pictures, people, places, performances, etc. that kept us going on.

Happy New Year,

Kim Fullerton & Terence Dick



Aaron Peck - Vancouver

1. Perhaps most successful for the discussions it provoked, *Exponential Future* at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery did something worthwhile: it made people passionate about the state of art in Vancouver. Many people disagreed with the selections (which is, I think, positive); it was the usual suspects, but so what? Some of the work held up, some of it didn't. For an exhibition purporting to represent a generation, the work in *Exponential Future* was strikingly similar (all of it research-heavy referential, concept-based art, neglecting a lot of other social practice, new media, performance art, or painting). I



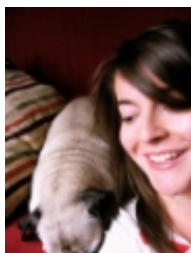
Vitaly Medvedovsky, *The Hunt*, 2008, oil on panel

2. It was only this past weekend that I stumbled into **Galerie Push**, one of the latest additions to the rapidly expanding Mile-End art scene. Push is a little space with big intentions, showcasing some of the city's finest emerging artists and, at the same time, nurturing the next generation of art collectors. Amongst the artists on the gallery's roster, I was particularly taken with the odd and lovely paintings of Vitaly Medvedovsky, whose work was also on display this summer in Art Mûr's *Fresh Paint*, their annual exhibition of new works by the region's top graduating MFA students.

3. Over the last decade, **Bree,ree**'s Todd Stewart has made a name for himself as a much-sought-after graphic artist, known especially for his work designing some of Montreal's best rock posters. Recently, Stewart has made a move toward more personal projects, landing at General 54 this fall with **Lost Layers**, a show featuring a series of prints exploring the many facets of the city. Stewart is a skilled illustrator and his work here has a distinct character recognizable from his more commercial pursuits, but what lingers is the emotional depth of the pieces: the loneliness, romanticism, nostalgia, glory and wonder they evoke.

4. When contemplating the shows that struck me this year, I found myself returning to three individual **multi-screen video** works, each of which has stayed with me for different reasons. In March, there was Nelson Hendrick's syncopated play with shapes and rhythms *Map of the City* at Article and Kerry Tribe's lovely and intellectually-resonant *Here and Elsewhere* which screened as part of DHC/ART's *Re-enactments*. The MAC's Quebec Triennial, which is deserving of its own mention, had Bettina Hoffman's *Émile*. There is something benignly and wonderfully perverse about this group of teenagers who lay strewn about while the ground-level camera circles around their static bodies.

5. And finally, though some of the big shows this season (eg. *Sympathy for the Devil* at the MAC and Christian Marclay's *Replay* at DHC/ART) have been a little hit and miss, the abundance of **rock-related art** in galleries has definitely been energizing. For the most part, where these shows faltered was in the sum of their parts, while the individual pieces - Warhol's screen tests for the Velvet Underground and Christian Marclay's fantastic four channel *Video Quartet* come instantly to mind - made manifest the compelling link between art and rock, image and sound.



Isa Tousignant - Montreal

1. The most unapologetically traumatic sensual experience provided by art this year was without a doubt **Christian Marclay's *Crossfire***. The ear-popping, cacophonous work positions the viewer in the middle of a room whose four walls are screens that play, each in their own sequence, series of shooting scenes from mainstream movies. The sensation of being hunted is absolutely visceral and, once the brain catches up to the idea that there's no actual threat, oddly addictive. I could have stood in that crossfire for hours. Does that say something about me?

2. The best art book to be published locally was **Conundrum Press's monograph on Shary Boyle**, the publishing house's most aesthetically ambitious work yet, and a great step in a new direction. The high-gloss reproductions of her perverse porcelain sculptures of mutilated creatures and evil pixies do absolute justice to the works' finesse.

3. Most exciting trend around these parts is that despite the dastardly economic situation (the drought of arts funding in the first half of the year followed by the collapse of the global economy, no less), **new commercial galleries** are springing up all over the place. There is hope! The three prizewinners are Division Gallery, IPS and Push, all dedicated to representing young and groundbreaking representational artists.



2boys.tv, *Phobophilia*, 2007 (photo: Guy L'Heureux)

4. The trophy for trippiest transdisciplinary creation in 2008 goes to ***Phobophilia*** by the infinitely entertaining **2boys.tv**, a duo composed of Stephen Lawson and Aaron Pollard. These local boys have traveled the world touring their filmic and performative skits in the alterna-cabaret/drag spheres, but they've only recently entered the bona fide visual arts world. *Phobophilia* was a poetic feat of illusion, emotional intensity and performer's endurance.

5. Not to end on a sad note, but the biggest loss to the city this year (or more like early next) will be **Marc Mayer's** transition from the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal to the National Gallery. His tenure at the Musée breathed new life into the institution and this year alone, produced the incredible Triennale du Québec - the year's best exhibition in my books - as well as the awesome *Sympathy for the Devil*. But, lest we be selfish, that's exactly the type of show we need in the capital. Our loss is the country's gain.