

cityfood 1

SPECIAL ISSUE 2008

the kinetic
re-photo-cubic
revolution

as reported by Timothy Taylor

ART
+
FOOD
ISSUE



restaurants as galleries . top chefs as canvas . your dinner as art

The Kinetic Re-Photo-Cubic Revolution Continues:

A conversation with novelist **Timothy Taylor**

CityFood: You are a novelist, presumably toiling over your craft in solitude. These guys are visual artists using the back alleys of Vancouver as their public "gallery" How did your paths happen to cross?

Timothy Taylor: The studio from where Andrew Owen [also known as Andrew 01] works is actually just down the hall from my office in the Dominion Building. It's a friendly building, so we got to talking. He's a raconteur of unparalleled skill and intensity, as it happens. But our interests were also weirdly overlapping at the time we met. He had returned from Asia not long before, and had done a lot of work I really admired that seemed to follow the theme of how identity survives in highly mobile environments. I was right in the middle of an essay series for *enRoute Magazine* at that time about human mobility and our changing relationship with it. So we had lots to talk about.

Byron Dauncey [alias Cameraman] I met later, after Andrew had begun to use the street in his Local Photo Poster series. He'd heard that Byron was tricking out a railway transformer box to look like an alarm clock, set to ring at 9AM on the first night of last year's Eastside Culture Crawl. I knew I had to see it. So I went down. When Byron's clock went off, a light came on and this huge clock loomed out of the shadows. Byron's partner on the project, an artist named Emma, had rigged about 100 battery powered alarm clocks in zip lock bags around the piece. So in addition to this kind of ghostly monolith, the air was full of this ethereal beeping, oddly urgent and tranquil at the same time. People up and down the street just froze, listening, which I think is the effect when intensely familiar experiences are displaced and reworked.

I had just started work on a novel that had a street artist character in it around this time, so the timing of the clock seemed strangely fated.

CF: Andrew and Byron told us that before they met, each kept hearing about another artist who was "doing the same thing" and that they were even being mistaken for each other. In fact, we understand Byron contacted Andrew after reading about him in an article you wrote for a local newspaper, and thinking 'Aha, He must be the guy! Do you think their work is very similar? Or if not, how would you say it is different?

TT: Byron read my *Globe* column where I wrote about Local Photo Posters. Andrew had walked me around the Downtown Eastside showing me all these shots he had posted, 1:1 ratio photos [100% proportional] of distressed urban surfaces that he posted directly over the distressed surfaces they duplicated. The work was, at least on one level, a kind of object-subject confusion play. The photo and the wall are different, but how exactly? Andrew is into Zen Buddhism, in the pursuit of which questions of this nature are all-consuming. And I think that this kind of provocation, this business of making people think about the difference between reality and representation, is central to Andrew's project.

Byron, at the same time this all was going on, was involved in a number of projects that I now see were stemming from a similar impulse. He was posting these stickers everywhere, these last-generation light switches and electrical sockets. They'd be posted in various sizes, sometimes life size (a plug socket showing up at the base of a wall covered in graffiti, for example), sometimes iconically enlarged (a huge light switch on the outside of the Interurban Gallery). The familiar in the wrong place. The invisible made very visible. But he was also doing a set of pieces that involved taking a photograph of a site, then posting that photograph near the site, and photographing the original photograph in the same spot. The resulting photograph-of-the-photograph would then be posted in the same place. So you had a woman's feet walking down a sidewalk, posted to a hoarding directly above the spot where she had walked. And the photograph of the woman's feet photographed again as a different woman walks past the poster, her feet describing the same arc.

You can probably see the affinity that might form here. Photos-of-photos. Site driven images displayed in-situ. I think these projects arise from an impulse to push a person and make them wobble briefly in place, seeing themselves where they stand, and forced to contemplate, in however oblique a manner, the gulf that may or may not yawn between perception and reality.

CF: So if we understand what you are saying, then to take a photo of an object is to recreate it in a different dimension and element, and by placing the replication in proximity to the original, it forces the viewer to look at both from perspectives that they have not been preconditioned to.

TT: I think that's definitely part of how this kind of work affects the viewer, consciously or otherwise.

CF: But how much of a role does the choice of medium play? And does the artists' choice of repellent, unattractive objects (back alleys, stained and crumbling walls), actually enhance their message, or so get in the onlooker's way that it becomes a barrier to understanding it?

TT: I tend to think it enhances the message because the medium is also the subject of the work. Both Andrew's and Byron's work is, in at least some part, about the exact surfaces on which the work is inscribed: the back alley, the stained and crumbling walls.

CF: Let's talk about the dumpster in that context, then. That was actually what tweaked our interest in the first place. After years of working to glamorize food, we stumble across

.../ continued from page 24

someone who had gone into the forbidden zone and was actually beautifying an end product of food production - the containers holding all the discarded and decaying waste of a restaurant's kitchen. That's something that people try very hard to hide from view, it's the opposite of the image they have worked so carefully to create. So to us, it was a fascinating choice of medium.

TT: Well exactly, although the emblem created there might not be pointing back upstream just at food consumption. The dumpster is the destination for all manner of consumer goods. With the treatment Byron gave the dumpster, sure, he beautified this thing that governs the ugliest end of the consumer digestive track. But he also drew our attention to it in such a way that provokes us to think about our participation in the happier, shinier parts of the whole consumption drama. I don't find this work particularly political or judgmental. It just seems very aware.

CF: The big risk that we see, is that many people will look at this art and immediately dismiss it as another form of graffiti -- or worse, the simple defacing of public property.

TT: Well graffiti is in the galleries now and Banksy is selling for whatever, a lot. Which may mean nothing to the artistic value or intellectual content of the work, but it's highly relevant to the question of how people view the work. And in that regard, I have no difficulty imagining something similar happening in this realm to what happened already some time ago in so-called "outsider art". A flocking of interest and the emergence of new connoisseurs. It has happened so often that I can't believe that street art would be spared.

CF: But Byron and Andrew say they use the street as their canvas and their gallery only. They passionately declare that they are not street artists. Can the public be expected to understand the difference? Or do they need to?

TT: Well, the public probably won't understand the difference as long as the work is being put up in the street. There, no matter what the artists' intention, I think a particular kind of intersection is formed between viewers and artists. The viewer sees something that the forces of nature cannot fully explain. Where did this come from? Why did the person do it? Sometimes, as you point out above, the response is even more towards indignation, more along the lines of: How dare someone do this here? But no matter, the street provokes these types of questions. And as questions, rightly or wrongly, they tend to lose their perceived mystery when paintings are hung in a gallery. The street has a certain power that way.

Editors note: for example of how the process can have the same effect of heightening perception of objects, only via materials chosen from the opposite direction. Take a look at our cover art which was conceived and executed by Andrew Owen and Byron Dauncey. The location was Boneta restaurant in Gastown and all the food in the photos were styled by Boneta's Chef Jeremie Bastien.

Our thanks to Timothy Taylor for this interview. Timothy is the author of the critically acclaimed and bestselling novels *Stanley Park* and *Story House*. He's also a columnist for the *Globe and Mail* and a Contributing Editor at *enRoute Magazine* and *Vancouver Magazine*. He lives in Vancouver and is at work on a third novel."

.... continued from page 32/Young Artists In a Restaurant Landscape

Brietta by Erin Evans

Acrylic paint on glass

On exhibit at Boneta Restaurant (see page 32)

I graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2000. After graduation, I left Vancouver for Japan, and later Korea to explore the art and culture of those two countries. My current body of work strongly reflects this time I spent in Asia, as it explores the fragility of life's veneers through abstract colour and textures.

I returned home in July 2002 with an extensive portfolio and I have continued to explore my current themes on large-scale canvasses. While I continue to do my art, I am also employed as the reservations manager at West restaurant.

For several years now, I have been exploring a painting technique of composition and execution that is organic and about gestures. By painting on glass, a way of turning paintings "inside out," viewers can see the underbelly of a painting. The result is a collection of images that shows us all that we are the sum of our parts, both by nature and nurture.

My artwork came to be at Boneta because my husband Andre, who is one of the restaurant's partners, asked me to paint two pieces to frame Chef Jeremie Bastien's projected menu over the kitchen. Later he selected a few other pieces he was drawn to out of my collection.

Erin Evans work occasionally appears at the Helen Pitt Gallery in Gastown. She may be contacted through Boneta Restaurant.

...continued on page 38