

## The NOW Service Bureau

The NOW Service Bureau offers visitors the opportunity to use the gallery as a forum for pressing Toronto issues. Pushing the idea of Toronto Now to its edge, the artists appropriate the AGO logo and the Now name to provide a place of artistic creativity that encourages thoughtful action on local issues. This Do It Yourself (DIY) agency reflects the artists' interest in the tension between the rush and impatience of our current lifestyle and the benefit of slowing down, being mindful and aware of environmental, political and cultural topics. This friction is supported by the DIY mentality that privileges the experience of the here and now in order to provoke change through self-consciousness, self-transformation and social interactions or exchanges.<sup>1</sup>

Martindale and Paquette's installation includes a workspace for the artists and a lounge and work area for visitors (with free Wi-Fi access provided by the AGO). Next to their service counter, a comment wall offers space for visitors to display and reflect on their own ideas. Posting personal responses to current local or global issues, visitors contribute their own creative energies to the installation. Two time-lapse videos of graffiti writing taking place outside the gallery and a large-scale NOW sculpture round off the installation. *Infinite NOW* (2012) is a dynamic artwork that is completed, not by the artists, but by the visitors. Approach-

<sup>1</sup>Dezeuze, Anna, ed. 2010. The 'do-it-yourself' artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 15.

ing the wall the viewer stands between two mirrored NOW sculptures that reflect their image ad infinitum.

As a DIY agency the artists flip the expectation of a functional service bureau and instead look to the visitor to participate directly through attentive awareness, conversation or action. While the artworks function independently the installation contains elements of social practice that strive to foster relationships and promote discussion.

As a forum this exhibition extends beyond the physical space of the gallery. The artists host several outreach programs aimed at getting the conversation started. These activities aspire to bring together different groups to talk about what matters to them in their city and how art can play a vital, action-led role in daily life. In *Tagging Along* the artists lead two outdoor walks exploring commissioned and unsanctioned artworks within the AGO neighborhood and the surrounding community. *Youthful Perspectives* invites youth visitors on an artist-led tour of contemporary art. Starting in the Weston Family Learning Centre's Educations Commons the artists lead this free tour through the AGO collection and end

in their own installation, making full use of the museum. As a result the Young Gallery, which hosts the NOW exhibition, functions as a hub for the various activities that make up this extensive project.



Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette

## The Artists

**Sean Martindale** combines his fine art and design background with street art to communicate complicated ideas with visual simplicity. His process involves ongoing interventions that use reclaimed, recyclable and plant materials. Determined to start a conversation, Martindale's work focuses on exploring the visual language of signs while making sculptural DIY creations that are often reproducible and open-sourced.

A recognizable figure in two distinctive art worlds, **Pascal Paquette** has spent the last decade traversing the contemporary art scene, while learning and expanding on his graffiti writing practice under the pseudonym Mon Petit Chou. Paquette's thematic interests interrogate the transformation of culture that occurs when two or more economic, social or cultural realities collide. He works primarily through painting but also employs street art, graffiti and photography in projects that are often site-specific or geographically dependent.

Martindale and Paquette's artistic practices place them literally and metaphorically outside and inside the mainstream art world. Their works navigate and negotiate the divide between public and private space connecting through a visual language of signs and images that incorporate the world around it, allowing multiple points of entry. The artists' works share thematic explorations of the politics of public space,

mainstream and alternative visual and text-based languages and intervention practices. Both artists often work in a collaborative manner, either through intended joint projects with other artists or by allowing their artwork into the public domain and

opening up each piece for unexpected authorship from often-unknown sources. The emphasis on collaboration stems from a desire for dialogue that is critically engaged but without strict parameters for participation.



Photograph Cindy Blazevic

**“Contemporary art has the potential to play an integral role in society by opening up spaces in which individuals may reexamine their own lives and their relationship to the world”**

– Morin et al.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morin, France, et al. 2000. “Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Contemporary Art Exhibitions.” *Art Journal* 59.1: 4-21.