

## Exit Through the Gift Shop Gift Shop

Developed from an exploration and recognition of the Young Gallery's position within the larger institution and through meetings with the museum's gift shop and FRANK Restaurant - the artists extend their project beyond the gallery into other areas of the museum.

The artists run Gift Shop Gift Shop with the AGO's gift shop as a parallel project during the course of the exhibition. This store within a store features souvenirs of the AGO gift shop itself, rather than the expected gallery mementos, as well as other related open-edition art multiples. Gift Shop Gift Shop works by the Martindale and Paquette are available alongside both collaborative and independent multiples by other local Toronto-based artists, designers and illustrators. The produces for sale develop out of self-reflective art making and many of the works transform raw street and everyday materials and images into privileged, valuable objects. This

project builds off the artists' affinity for collaboration and the practice of using reclaimed materials. Taking inspiration from existing gift shop souvenirs or using gift shop overstock, these items are examined and reworked to deconstruct how consumable objects are given value.



**GIFT SHOP**  
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Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette

## Complicity

*To be complicit in an act spontaneously brings to mind a wrong doing of some kind –*

*something to cover up or gloss over. However, this highly charged idea has both positive and negative associations. In popular usage, complicity is put forward as a negative undertaking, with connotations drawn from conspiracy theories and criminal acts. Instead, a positive application of complicity can be grounded in the constructive yet complex processes involved in collaboration. In collaborative art production, this form of complicity rejects radical negativity of the avant-garde; calling us in the art field to use imagination, enthusiasm and innovative practices to engage a wider audience. Accepting and making use of visual culture, mass media and fine art traditions, 'positive complicity' in contemporary art involves compromise and an awareness of what is given up and what is gained.<sup>1</sup> The notion of 'positive complicity', underlying our exhibition, necessitates an acknowledged but qualified involvement that reflects the value of multiple and diverse interests. This has allowed us to bring a controversial art form into the mainstream art world where the negotiation of diverging interests ultimately results in a temporary middle ground, not of concession but of consent.*

1 Drucker, Joan. 2005. Sweet Dreams: contemporary art and complicity. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. xiv

## Enter Through the Restaurant

### FROM STREET TO GALLERY

One of the most compelling but precarious aspects of this project is bringing art from the street into the confines of the gallery. Questions that arise from this move to the inside are: Does bringing graffiti writing and street art into an institutional gallery imply co-optation? What impact does shifting the context from street to gallery have on the artists and their artwork?

Context is vital to the artistic practices of both Martindale and Paquette. The institutional setting of the AGO alters the way ideas might otherwise be addressed on the street. The Young Gallery, host to the *Toronto Now* series, has a distinct identity. This context is unique in its material and intangible properties. The unintended tension between the Young Gallery and the adjoining FRANK restaurant demonstrate how the physical location influence the complex identity of the functional site. In contrast to an in situ physical location, the functional site may or may not be a concrete place. Instead, the functional site emphasizes the processes and relationships that take place within a space.<sup>1</sup> This type of site is mobile and most often temporary.

The Young Gallery is an alternative exhibition space that allows for greater freedom relative to the larger museum but it remains limited by conventional museum practices, such as how art is defined, selected, talked about and presented. Of course, even an unconventional space suffers from its own set of restrictions. The gallery is frequently criticized both

internally and externally for relegating local artists to a peripheral space with little visibility. Outdoor signage for the space is minimal, almost invisible next to the advertising campaigns for the gallery's paid programming and commercial marketing. Breaking, adapting or shifting these traditions, even temporarily, radically positions the artists in relation to museum history and practice.

Simply by placing their art in the Young Gallery, Martindale and Paquette restructure the space while at the same time the space restructures their practice. For example, some considers graffiti vulgar and crass vandalism, yet when placed within the gallery it transforms into an accepted and valued art object. The presence of this type of art in the gallery is controversial to many, both within the mainstream art world and the street art community. There is a visible and reciprocal push-pull in this negotiation. It is a slow process, one that at times might not feel critical enough or immediate enough but one that is extremely important in order to maintain the integrity of all those involved. At the same time, the gallery, like other, often outdoor, sites used by the artists, functions as a microcosm that makes visible larger institutional and societal practices. Regardless of their location inside the gallery or out on the street both artists continue to question and probe how space is constructed and used within contemporary society.

1. Meyer, James. 2000. "The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity." Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art. Ed. Erika Suderburg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 25

## In Perspective: Toronto 2011 – 2012

In 2011 the global population reached 7 billion. This past year has seen volcano eruptions in Iceland and Chili, massive floods around the world, the oil spill in the Pacific ocean, the Tsunami in Japan, the declaration of famine in Somalia, the Arab Spring, Occupy protests across the United States and Canada, the Stanley Cup riots, the Slave Lake fires, and the housing crisis in Attawapiskat. In Canada, after five years of minority rule, Stephen Harper won a majority Conservative government in the May 2011 federal election. These are but a few monumental events that shape our current world and merit attentive consideration.

On a local level the administration of Rob Ford has changed the foreseeable future of arts and culture in Toronto. The passing of NDP party leader Jack Layton, 40 days of protest in St. James Park questioning the ever-expanding disparity between the 1 and 99% and the ban on shark fin soup show a small slice of life in Toronto 2011.

With the new year upon us, what happens in 2012 remains unknown. Now is the opportunity to get involved in shaping the coming year.



Pascal Paquette, *Crate&Barrel, Commodity Over Culture* Installation view, Labo, Toronto, 2009