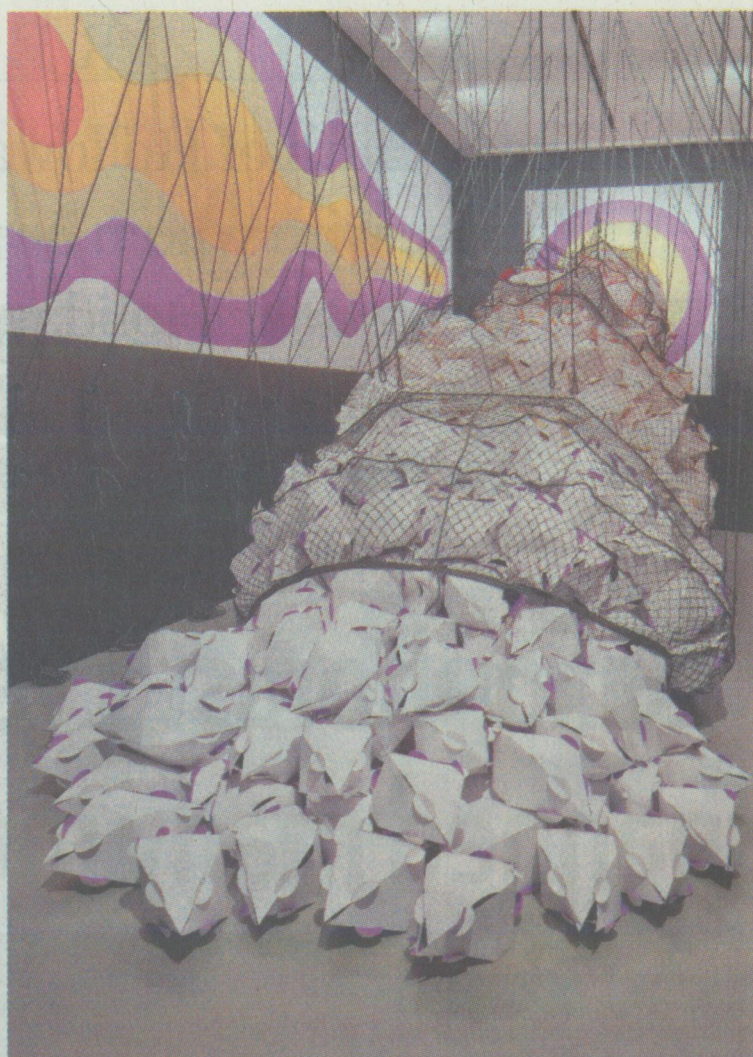


Questions & Artists



HARDLY PAPER THIN

Montreal's Séripop duo take postering to a whole new level



Ella Fitzgerald once crooned about a world with a paper moon. But in the art installations of Montreal duo Séripop, paper makes up whole worlds. With an exhibition on in Mississauga, Ont., Séripop's Yannick Desranleau and Chloe Lum talk to Leah Sandals about posters, plagiarism and more.

Q You guys made street posters for eight years, and when I step into your paper installations I often feel like I'm stepping into a giant poster — very immersive and fun. What's it like for you?

Desranleau We try to be playful; it keeps us from getting bored. One thing we really like is working with the ephemeral aspect of postering. You put something up on the street and it gets covered and destroyed.

Lum And so all our installation work is made to be destroyed. There's often elements on the floor that people will walk on, that get more and more beat up as more people visit.

Desranleau Our installations are also a nod to this idea that the poster is one of the only ways for people to express themselves in an urban context.

Lum And express themselves freely — I mean free as in not costing money, because we can't all hire a billboard or commission an architect. Other than postering, people in cities are pretty powerless to affect how the surroundings look. So we're interested in posters as markers of space.

Desranleau Posters are interesting as community-oriented art objects as well. If you are in a neighbourhood, the posters kind of speak to that neighbourhood. We're interested in how posters can create an environment.

Q You started postering to promote your band, AIDS Wolf. What comes first for you — music or art?

Lum It's shifted back and forth a lot over the years. When we started collaborating together it was just playing in bands. Starting to do posters was a happy medium between our separate lives and art practices.

Desranleau There's also something romantic about being a poster artist that was really attractive to us.

Lum Yeah, your work is, from the get go, all over the city. You don't have to get an exhibition, because everybody sees your work anyway. And that worked out great for us because within six months of deciding to dedicate ourselves to postering we were in conversations with giants of the field who were taking us on in informal Internet mentorships. In the world of contemporary art, that just would not happen!

Q Who helped you out early on?

Lum Probably the biggest influence was Art Chantry, a Seattle designer known for creating the look of grunge. He would critique our work, not mincing words. He told us that basically any creative person is full of mediocre ideas and you have to get them all out of your system before you can do work that you will be satisfied with. Combined with posters having a quick turnaround, that was really liberating, thinking, OK, not everything we have to do is perfect, we just have to get onto the next thing.

Q It must be strange, though, to go from a very public sphere to where you are now, mostly working in galleries. How do you explain that transition?

Desranleau Well, galleries respond well to the way we use the medium now. We wanted to take the ingredients of postering and organize them in a gallery situation where we could work more formally.

Lum And we never saw ourselves as "street artists." We actually felt alienated from that. Aesthetically, mostly. And we're not really joiners.

Yannick We also like it when art puts itself back into question. I don't find that happens so much with street art.

Q You guys have this rock 'n' roll side, but some of your installations are based on more ivory-tower material such as Le Corbusier and Moby-Dick. How does that show up?

Yannick One thing I'm interested in with Le Corbusier was the fact that he was just kind of making it up, just a guy f—king around with his own medium. Some of his stuff was good, some bad. Part of what we do is a critique of what was bad, but it's also a fascination with his level of freedom.

Lum Some of our new installations developed while I was taking notes on Moby-Dick. I read a lot of fiction and I always write down key sentences and words. Sometimes I steal them for lyrics, sometimes we incorporate them in our installations, and sometimes they just stay in notebooks forever. I'm a total plagiarist of sentences.

■ Séripop: Landscapes Events Reproduced continues at Mississauga's Blackwood Gallery until March 4. For more information, visit blackwoodgallery.ca.

National Post