

From bars to brollies, Bright Light shines

By Robin Laurence

Publish Date: February 25, 2010



Bright Light

At venues throughout the Downtown Eastside until March 21

On most late-winter nights at the corner of Hastings and Carrall streets, a cruel wind blows. The weather and the place conspire to produce a chilly kind of angst. Now, however, and for the next few weeks, the cold and the dark are dispelled by a project of temporary public artworks and events. Titled *Bright Light*, the collaboration of 14 arts organizations in the Downtown Eastside includes light-based installations, storefront video projections, open studios, slide shows, text works, a lantern procession, and an aboriginal arts and music festival. (For a full program of venues and events, see bright-light.ca/.)

Many of these fleeting works and happenings are visible or accessible only at night (although there are also accompanying daytime exhibits within some of the spaces) and all are commissioned by the City of Vancouver through its Olympic and Paralympic public-art program. *Bright Light* casts both critique and consolation across the DTES.

Projected onto the big front windows of Centre A are colour photographs of tea, tea accessories, and tea gatherings. Kitty-corner, in the small upper windows that wrap the façade of the InterUrban Gallery, video portraits of DTES residents unfurl in slow motion. Shot by Christoph Runne as part of an exhibit called *Far, Up Close*, these works attempt to replace the usual generalizations about the

neighbourhood—poverty, substance abuse, mental illness—with images of real people, each with his or her individual gestures, postures, and facial expressions. Each man or woman is shown pale and wraith-like against a dark ground.

As Runne writes in his artist's statement, the images of these unnamed people are "silent and ghostly", paradoxically amplifying their subjects' exclusion from the mainstream. Like the history of this troubled place, they haunt us.

Down the street and around the corner, at the Jeffrey Boone Gallery, is Rina Liddle's *We Are Watching*. It comprises an indoor projection visible through the gallery's Cordova Street window, and an outdoor projection on the east side of the building. The outdoor work displays jerky, jostling, low-res video footage of Olympic-related events and crowds, shot on cellphones by a crowd of amateur participants, transmitted to Liddle's computer, and then publicly projected. The indoor component shows live video from a surveillance camera pointed at passersby outside the gallery—and especially at the people who stop and look at the outdoor projection.

In this looping of different degrees of digital voyeurism, Liddle examines the links between mass public events and electronic surveillance. She also suggests the ways in which we all participate in our age's determined erosion of civil rights and of the public-private divide.

Up the street, at 33 West Cordova, the artists' collective Instant Coffee presents a funky ode to seasonal affective disorder (SAD), titled *Light Bar*. The entrance, an upstairs back door in Blood Alley, is screamingly illuminated with a ragged array of naked fluorescent tubes. Walk past it into a space that's part rumpus room, part nightclub, with checkered floor, plywood furniture, and twirling disco balls. The bar itself is a therapeutic full-spectrum light box at which delectable vitamin D cocktails are served.

A number of light-oriented events have been scheduled for this space. The night we visited, psychiatrist Raymond Lam delivered a talk on SAD, or "winter depression". Entertaining and informative, as they say, and strangely unexpected. Among many other info nuggets, we learned that the human biological clock is located in the suprachiasmatic nucleus behind the eyes. Groovy.

A few fraught blocks away, tucked into the historical, hidden Yue Shan Courtyard at 39 East Pender, is *GO! Gallery*. Subtitled "A Temporary Gallery for Permanent Change", it is the creation of ASIR Studio, Organelle Design, and Rural Urban Fantasy Project, which are hosting a series of events and performances until February 28. Our visit coincided with a nighttime screening of Marc Stephenson's fi *InOn the Corner*. We sat in the open courtyard, on bum-chilling benches, beneath a festive canopy of upside-down umbrellas lit like lanterns. Whether illuminated by red bulbs or by the silvery ambient light of the city, the umbrellas cast a celebratory glow across the site.

The film tells a grim and gritty story of a Native kid's descent into drug addiction and violence in the DTES—not exactly designed to obliterate the stereotypes. But that courtyard overhung with that canopy! Like so much of *Bright Light*, it is magical. Magical.

T&T: False Creek

At the Pendulum Gallery until March 3

When independent curator Patrik Andersson invited T&T to create a sustainability-themed exhibition for the Pendulum Gallery during the Winter Olympics, he made this request: “Think about what happens when the Olympic countdown clock goes below zero.” Tony Romano of Toronto and Tyler Brett of Bruno, Saskatchewan—who often make art together under the sobriquet T&T—responded with a cheery, postapocalyptic vision of Vancouver called *False Creek*. Specifically, their installation is a kind of after-the-gold-rush imagining of the area.

Located in the atrium of the HSBC Building at the corner of Georgia and Hornby streets, the Pendulum Gallery looks out at one of the gathering places for Winter Olympics crowds. The countdown clock, the teeming plaza, the floral-patterned north façade of the Vancouver Art Gallery, sky-high ads from corporate sponsors pasted across neighbouring office towers—all contribute to a hectic and boosterish temporary environment.

Inside the Pendulum Gallery, the huge mobile sculpture by Alan Storey that gives it its name dominates the space. As Andersson pointed out in a recent interview with the Straight, the immensity of the atrium has a tendency to overwhelm the exhibitions it hosts. Not, however, this one. The show consists of three car-based assemblages, a panoramic print, and a designated area where children can colour T&T-produced drawings. Also part of T&T’s project are a children’s picture book and a handsome catalogue with a smart and insightful essay by Jordan Strom, both available on-site.

The freestanding sculptures, which sit on carpets of bright green AstroTurf, represent whimsical houseboats. They’re composed of old car bodies altered with building materials, bicycle parts, flags, planters, propellers, and brightly hued paint. Among their many references are the inequities of Vancouver’s real-estate boom, the construction of the Athletes’ Village, and the now-banished floating homes of former False Creek squatters. The allusion to displaced squatters serendipitously coincides with Ken Lum’s temporary sculpture [*from shangri-la to shangri-la*](#), on display at the VAG’s Offsite space a couple of blocks west.

T&T’s installation also relates to their established brand of “carchitecture”—their future fictions in the form of computer drawings and sculptures in which abandoned cars are repurposed as structures in which people might live, work, and meet. As seen in the lively light-jet print that serves as a kind of illustrated guide to False Creek, the artists propose a postcar future for Vancouver in which, curiously, the waters of False Creek have not risen but have drained away, along with most of what we know of the area.

T&T’s postapocalyptic vision is not one of blasted nature inhabited by roving bands of thugs and cannibals. It is brightly coloured, optimistic, even utopian. Whether fishing, planting, dismantling Science World’s geodesic dome, working with various low-tech devices improvised from pedals and pulleys, or listening to minstrels, everyone in the community depicted gets along swimmingly. The sky is blue, the trees are green, and life is simple and harmonious. It’s a vision that, while deeply critical of our climate-altering ways, should appeal to both adults and children.

Source URL: <http://www.straight.com/article-292877/vancouver/bars-brollies-bright-light-shines>