

Sweet Indulgences, Carnival Cravings

Indulgence was certainly the character of this year's sprawling extravaganza of happy art mayhem. For a spectacular five days we could all we feel we had the Royal Jelly. Eastern Edge staff Joe Fowler said it best when, brandishing a copy of the publication Sweet Tooth, he announced to the crowd of boisterous artists "you are the gooey goodness at the centre of all this."

It was hard not to believe that except for the carnival theme that this was not a curated event. There was a curious reciprocity between the projects of the invited artists that went far beyond superficial similarity. It seemed that each project's performance played with our sensory perceptions and value systems— creating new shared spaces in old familiar places.

Michael Waterman's Sound Labyrinth plunged us into a pitch-black, tent-like interior at Christina Parker's Gallery. The darkness forced us to attend carefully and puzzle over Waterman's sound installation. Normally, I get caught up in the wonder of the mechanical inventions: the whirring, chiming, eccentric devices that make sound visible. But denied this sensory data, the auditory events triggered by motion sensors took on a less predictable nature. Waterman, who is exceedingly affable, referred to this installation as a kind of sonic house of horrors. Smitten, I was only horrified at the one-night duration of the event and when one of the fiendishly clever machines accidentally caught on fire!

Donald Lawrence also cloaked us in darkness with his floating camera obscura at the Quidi Vidi Gut. Inverted images, the reflective properties of water and Lawrence's skillful manipulations complicated the simple technologies to delicious effect. A swell of interest at the dock meant that I did not get into a kayak but that gave me time to talk with others about their direct experiences. There was appreciation for the opportunity to experience Lawrence's trademark fusion of urban and wilderness practice, its hybridity, which my brain turned into hyper-practice. Another comment I cherished was that the kayak was like prosthesis for the body.

The body in motion, whether triggering Waterman's audio intervention, or being guided in a kayak would become a common denominator throughout the Carnival. Andreas Buchwaldt's Accordion Exoskeleton was by his own description a full body prosthetic. Its vents with curved around his joints and swallowed his face turned his physical movements into sound. A man with a musical exoskeleton would be a welcome addition to any carnival sideshow, as were the dramatic fire-jugglers and surprisingly vaudevillesque bellydancers.

The sacred and the profane space created with artful body movement was also at play whether in the Weiner Sugar Dance Tent in the Eastern Edge parking lot, where Sara Tilley and her attendants Kyle Bustin and Elling Lien communed with riotous spirits and offered us sacramental candy. You had to supply your own hallucinations. Mind you, I

think some of the motorists and tourists along the way between the EE headquarters and the LSPU Hall certainly thought they were seeing things. A float with taxidermist bears with horns, a moose, biblically clad acolytes (plus baseball caps), bells, whistles and general revelry added to their confusion. This was Charmaine Wheatley's downtown parade. Her artist statement "literature" was rich with misogynistic biblical quotes urging us to burn seductive, freewheeling women. That troubled me until I surrendered to the parade. Then it became clear that Charmaine was a woman-artist-in-charge and concerned about younger women, who had not been part of my older generation's feminist fight or its necessity. At that point, the parade for me became a Mardi Gras-esque opportunity to cavort with demons. No whips, only ribbons.

What more soothing remedy could we have had to this outburst of Charmaine Wheatley's than Breastival Vestibule by Rachael Shannon? Rant and response. Exhale and inhale. The Breastival was an inflatable architecture that temporarily took over the Craft Council parking lot. It was a sanctuary of quiet conversation where visitors were asked to remove their footwear and enter its carpeted interior. Shaped by feminist and queer politics it welcomed us like a huge breast. Unbeknownst to Rachael Shannon, this parking lot has been a disputed area between sex workers, their clients and the downtown community. Shannon's art was a powerful healing.

-Gloria Hickey, 2014