

 Shotgun Review**Red76**

by Dina Pugh

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Collectives are a new hot topic for museums across the country, institutions attempting to reaffirm their anti-establishment street-cred by showing work that challenges the organization's own purpose as cultural mediator. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is hosting a year-long investigation into the phenomenon of artist collaboratives and the current Whitney Biennial is also featuring an number of artist groups such as Reena Spaulings, The Bernadette Corporation, The Wrong Gallery and Otabenga Jones & Associates -- all monikers for a larger body of artists working together with a particular mission, one that usually questions the role of the museum or the art-star frenzied market. The Portland-based artist collective Red76, featured in the current exhibition Peer Pleasure 2 at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, is one group that throws art conventions into disarray while effectively engaging a wide audience in unexpected locations from laundromats to karaoke bars.

Who is Red76? The only constant member is Sam Gould, who started the group in 2000 with Kris Soden to organize monthly art and music parties. These events have given rise to prolific collaborations with a network of artists, more resembling the structure of a rock band than the one-artist, one-product norm. The group's artistic production has been altered and influenced by the occasional participation of Paige Saez, Laura Baldwin and Jen Rhodes. However, it seems futile to their purpose to call out any more names. Authorship does not concern the group. Red76 is inclusive of all those who participate in their series of "How-To..." projects that call on the public to get involved. Anyone who conducts any one of these projects, such as a "Laundry Lecture Series" or hangs an informational flyer about Duchamp as part of "Free Art History" could seemingly claim membership to the group. Or, you could just forget about assigning any roles at all -- a challenge to how we, as both audience members and participants ingest, interpret and discuss art.



For the Peer Pleasure 2 exhibition, Red76 has created an installation of videos, photographs and ephemera that document their past projects in the same quick and dirty style as the interventions themselves. Spirit Quest, another artist collective, repurposed disused wooden crates through a process of sanding and finishing to create the platform and background of raw wood panels for the installation. Rather than opting for the standard museum wall text, the collective has chosen to draw their explanatory information with blue marker and black chalk, using arrows to point to corresponding photos, sketches and posters roughly stapled onto the walls. This raw presentation reminds the viewer that what you see is not a precious art work to behold; the art project has taken place outside of institutional sanctions -- in the streets or in public places -- produced with only a shoe string budget and a huge band of conspirators.

One photograph depicts a row of carrots sprouting up from the cracks of grey pavement beneath a freeway underpass. This is one possible enactment of the project "New Graffiti" that calls for any alteration to public space that may create a disruption to mundane consciousness. Red76 asks you to reimagine public space as your own and dare to think that you may be the creator of your culture.

A stop-animation video documenting Spirit Quest's workshop process plays alongside videos that relive a few more of these open-source projects such as a "Laundry Lecture Series" where people are indiscriminately invited to give talks at a laundromat of their choosing. "It's easy," Red76 says "invite someone to talk about something, bring your laundry, throw in a few quarters and some detergent and begin."

Voila! A pesky chore is made into an informative experience with a snap of the fingers.

"News Blackout" is an even simpler task demonstrated in a video by an artist taking a sharpie to a newspaper, blacking out strategic words, and an instantaneous message is put into the public consciousness about the censored content of our media.

On another monitor, protagonist Sam Gould is shown enacting "Protest Song Karaoke" by prefacing an apolitical karaoke song, "Sweet Caroline," with a fabricated political message -- Gould announces that Neil Diamond was lamenting over an old girlfriend who was forced to break up with him because of her anti-semitic parents.

Against a wall, stacks of brown paper shopping bags serve as invitations to "The Museum on the Heart on Your Sleeve," a picnic on the lawn of the Yerba Buena Gardens that will converge on June 6th. You are asked to create your own "museum," or any collection of meaningful objects housed in say coat pockets, backpacks, under hats, or simply conveyed through thoughts or conversations. Just imagine the nonsense and loveliness that will ensue as people bounce around picnic blankets to view each other's miniature museums.

Red76 is shown alongside Visible Collective's internet-based project "Disappeared in America," which gives a voice to the untold victims of the "war on terror" and Temporary Services who mine the territory of prison life through an artistic collaboration with an anonymous inmate "Angelo." These projects share the serious political tone of the exhibition in the downstairs gallery, Black Panther Rank and File, which mixes photo and video documentation of the radical movement with contemporary art reflecting on the Black Panther legacy. With this charged subject matter still knocking around in your head, you might find yourself in a conflicted headspace when confronted with Red76's seemingly light-hearted interventions. But to dismiss the collective on the basis of their humorous approach would be to miss the subversive point of their project.

While the Black Panther exhibition explores the political movement of a previous generation, "Peer Pleasure 2" asks: What is our struggle today? How is the younger generation challenging the current status quo? While Red76 may not be addressing a specific political concern, they are proposing an alternative of generating culture outside of institutional sanctions. Like the 1970's phenomenon of "guerilla gallerizing," in which artists organized exhibitions in unexpected locations, Red76 challenges

the very categorizations and hierarchies of culture constructed by institutions who deem what is worthy of being presented to the public and what isn't. Collectives provide an experimental forum for young ambitious artists to work outside of institutional approval and they do so with little or no money--just the pooling of energy and resources by their members. The message that Red76 sends is get out there, get your hands dirty, just do something!

The Whitney Biennial, a self-proclaimed "cultural barometer" and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, devoted in part to representing its local community, should be commended for acknowledging these ever-proliferating groups that are difficult to pin down or categorize due to changing membership and, often, an inconsumable final product. But can this type dynamic of work ever really sit comfortably in a static art institution? While Red76 is successful in their thoughtful installation that constantly points to the outside world, you still have to wonder if it even makes sense for these kinds of projects to be represented inside the very structure that it wishes to challenge.

For information on upcoming Red76 events in the Bay Area call the toll-free hotline 1-888-212-5652 or visit www.red76.com/howto.html.



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