



VILLA TORONTO: THIS IS NOT AN ART FAIR!

BY YOLI (YOANNA) TERZIYSKA

"Villa Toronto—This is not an art fair!"

"Why are there so many people here?"

"It's for the Raptors game."



Ragnar Kjartansson, *S.S. Hangover*, 2013, Music by Kjartan Sveinsson; Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik and Luhring Augustine, New York

This is a conversation I overheard between two hurried commuters while attending opening night for the event *Villa Toronto* a couple of evenings ago. Organized by Warsaw's Raster Gallery and presented in association with Toronto's Art Metropole and other local art organizations, the week-long event brings together 19 international private galleries to collectively curate a show for the city's public.

The confused conclusion of the two commuters may point to the event's successful intent: to create art encounters for the, perhaps unsuspecting, general public. The main exhibition's venue is Union Station's Great Hall, one of the city's busiest traffic points that sees some 300,000 commuters from Toronto and surrounding areas daily.

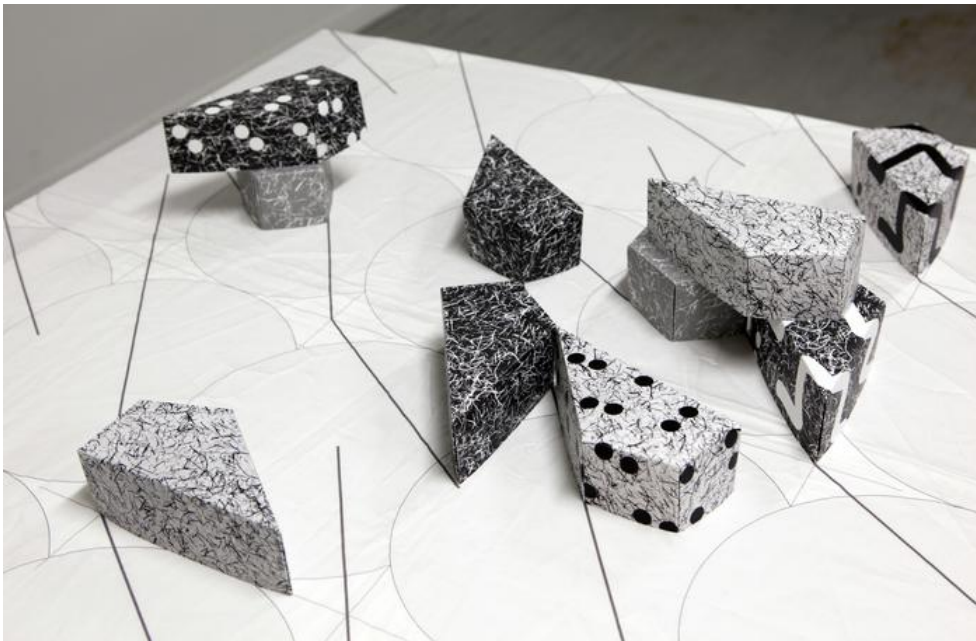


Guillaume Leblon, *Le secret*, 2014, painted wax, painted resin, fabric, orange, lemon, steel, metal, ink, 80 x 400 x 10 cm; Photo: Francois Doury;

Courtesy of Jocelyn Wolff Gallery, Paris

Villa's advertisements make a point of clearly stating that it is **not an art fair**—despite the basic resemblance to one in bringing international galleries together to present in one space. What sets the ephemeral event apart from an art fair is Villa's mission to bring art for public viewing, always for free, in an attempt to undermine market-driven affairs. On opening night, the space was busy with both Toronto's art enthusiasts and perplexed passersby observing a range of works including installation, video, and performance art.

The outcome of the event seems perplexing as well: in an attempt to bring art to the general public, Villa certainly interferes with unassuming commuters' daily route, provoking statements such as "*feels out of place*," "*it's in the way*," or "*I have no idea what this is*." Of course, among a disapproving audience, there is a volume of people that wholeheartedly support and appreciate Villa's effort—the cross-cultural circulation and exchange of art. This event gives to the public what art fairs fail to: the ability to interact with art without the ever-present concerns of institutional restraints, social or economic status, and of course, money.



Shane Krepekevich and Elif Saydam, Pop-up for Art Metropole, 2013, digitally printed fabric, digital print on paper, metal clips; Photo: Shane Krepekevich; Courtesy of Art Metropole, Toronto

There should be at least some part of an artwork or exhibition not burdened by money, and for this reason, Villa is a great event with an exceptional intent. Its execution, outcome, and the public's attitude are altogether different stories that may ultimately prove conflictual. It could be due to the lack of clear signage and advertising of what the event is, or it could be the potential sense of being ambushed by video art while trying to find a ViaRail ticket booth.

This installment of Villa—it has previously taken place in Warsaw, Reykjavik, and Tokyo—continues to bring international art to the public for free—however, could its shortcomings compete with the ones of art fairs? On one hand, we have art fairs that are clear in their aims (and their ugly sides): come pay to look at art, and then pay more to buy it. Art is money and status, money is status and art.

On the other hand, there is Villa that wants to bring art to the community in an innovative manner: its purpose is noble, socialist, and captivating. However, it may result, conversely, in an event that feels intrusive and alienating to its intended public.

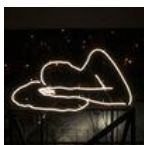
—Yoanna Terziyska

(Image at top: Michal Budny, Untitled, 2013, paper, adhesive tape, wax, varnish, wood, cardboard, 64 x 50 x 2, Courtesy of Raster, Warsaw)

Posted by Yoli (Yoanna) Terziyska on 1/19/15

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