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BY SOPHIE CHAUVENT JUNE 21, 2014

THE NECESSARY INTERCONNECTIVITY BETWEEN ART AND BUSINESS

Since the past few weeks and as the sun finally returns, Montreal has launched a slew of festivals for all kinds of art aficionados to feast on. One of the most highly anticipated of all was the Chromatic festival, an awesome blend of Montreal's creative juices at the heart of Mont-Royal's parc.



The image of the accursed artist living under bridges can appear to some as belonging to the realm of ancient literary clichés. Meanwhile, some art pieces are sold for millions in international auction rooms. But its no secret that being able to live off one's own creativity remains a challenge for those younger generations of artists and others, in need of making a name.

With this idea, we decided to wander the aisles of the exhibition and discussed what life is like for the common artist with Chromatic founder Philippe Demers, and two exhibited artists: Laurent Craste and FXSTG.

Art as a plus-value

Among all events, this one seemed to be a state-of-the-art answer to a growing trend highlighting the need for the creative touch in business. According to its twenty-something-year-old founder Philippe

Demers, art is a plus-value. It's a sector capable of reuniting plenty of industries, and there are more and more crossings to be done if businesses want to hold on to the successful mix of innovation and creation. Making this Chromatic's *raison d'être*, he tried to push this idea as forward as possible. At the exhibition, established professionals equally rubbed shoulders with younger artists. The interconnectivity in such a project is varied, as it pushes the former to seek renewal and the latter to find inspiration in a mutual way.

He also prioritizes establishing connections with potential sponsors to expand networks. «The contemporary art market is like a board game», said Philippe, however underlining an evolving relationship between sponsors and artists. According to him businessmen nowadays want to develop an exchange of knowledge with the artist, and follow him in his route. Witnessing a market evolution, they seek to get more involved in arts.

«Art should be everywhere and appeal to everyone»

As an unexpected response to Philippe's statement lies *Parade*, a collaboration between the porcelain craftsman Laurent Craste and Studio Département. A couple of old-fashioned vases seem animated by a ballet of shadows emitted by a lamp, which the public can move. Behind the fairy-like impression that all of that is natural actually lies a complex 3D modelisation associated to a spatial recognition software. Department's technology and enhanced means were combined with Craste's artistic and craft know-how in order to be exhibited at Chromatic as part of the established generation. From a European background, the internationally renowned artist has already been exposed in many North-American cities like New York, Miami, Toronto and gained diffusion through contemporary art fairs like Pulse: «The ludic aspect of my work seems to be what appeals to this audience. They often see Walt Disney in it, whereas I've never seen any of his movies».



Parade, by Laurent Craste & Departement.

He did other pieces appealing to the popular American culture, such as a literal melting pot, topped by a baseball bat. But he highlights the fact that the surrealistic and light component of his work are mostly successful in North-America, while in Europe the responsiveness differs : «There, we are surrounded by art objects. When you take a Sunday walk with your family, you go to a castle or a museum and you get much more in touch with decorative objects from the 18th or 19th century». The historical references attached to it allow for another significance of art: the socio-political one. As such, he made an Empire vase whose decoration was revisited by a picture of Auschwitz's camp.

Combining Creativity with Everyday Needs

One particularly fascinating artwork was *Erosion: White Room/Dirty Room* by François Xavier Saint Georges. He wanted to explore the multidimensional craft of understanding space. What happens if you bury a fully-furnished living room for a year ? Not much is left, except for a few objects taken out of the rubble and an opportunity to reflect on photographs witnessing of the decomposed impact of man on earth and of the inhumation of ideas. FXSTG originally intended to bury a whole house, but he had to limit it to one room due to a lack of means. It was his first time at Chromatic, but he has previously exposed his work in Amsterdam and plans to in Paris in the near future. He sees his artistic process as experimental, but he needs to combine it to different jobs in order to finance it. He admits it grounds his possibilities: "I dream that someone tells me one day "Hey, I own an empty warehouse I don't use. Here are the keys. In that case, I would go from 0 to 100." Concerning the connection between art and business, he mentions the importance of creating a bridge between them. "Some have ideas, some have means. Tonight's system is good as well as the ambiance. The presence of businessmen here is a bit of a realization that they are truly interested in investing in it. If they can make money out of it, even better for them. If I can gain exposure out of it, then it helps both sides."



FXSTG, in his White Room/Dirty Room.

Montreal: A stepping-stone for artists

The artists we interviewed all agreed on the fact that Montreal is currently a special place for art. There is a unique creative vibe infused by the cultural diversity and the open-mindedness, that allow

for artists to help each other. Unlike other big cities, there are many empty spaces and accessible workshops. Thus local artists are able to export their work while benefitting from smaller markets.



Carl-Antony Dufault's Improbables Habitats.

Could a festival like Chromatic thus be the perfect equation for a mutually benefiting exchange of services ? Some artists went home after the festival with a dozen of works sold. While Demers admits this year's edition was difficult to render profitable, he sees it rather as an investment. That implies the possibility of losing a bit of money, but the assurance of making plenty of interesting encounters: "Many people have the desire to see it evolve and it creates good repercussions for both the artists and the community in general". No doubt the future editions of Chromatic will greatly enjoy this year's success and so will the artists.

Photo Courtesy of Chromatic.