



On Now >> Derek Liddington @ Clark & Faria

By Michele Speciale

To not be considered over-the-top, and definitely not a spectacle, could be said to be a Canadian sensibility. Even in conceptual art, where spectacle is welcome, and in which Canada has a strong grounding, we still have a tendency to downplay our role. But by maintaining this modest characteristic are we not inadvertently acting out some bizarre form of dignified self-destruction?



The show currently at Clark & Faria thankfully does not continue this Canadian tradition, but embraces a different kind of self-sacrifice. Theatrical spectacle and visual force *Coup de Grâce*, is emerging Toronto artist Derek Liddington's ode to two working-class fascinations—the lost art of dueling for one's honor and dignity; and the hard-working, blue-collar hero, glorified by the dandy musical personas of Springsteen and Dylan. Liddington's dramatic visual and musical installation features four Victorian rock stars battling it out on two grand pianos, fanatically playing Springsteen's "Born to Run" in sped-up intervals until the score ends in a coup de grâce; a grand finale death blow.

It's this duality of risking one's life for the sake of honor through the art of spectacle, and how the working class are fascinated with romanticizing themselves as heroes, that fascinates Liddington,

who entertainingly merges these strangely consistent past and present ideologies of pop-culture together.

The performance is definitely something you want to check out. It adds that theatrical excitement and unpredictability you can only get from a live show. Although if you're unable to see one of the two shows remaining, the installation is strong on its own. Liddington offers us the feeling of walking onto a stage set with grand framed drawings and narrated stories, music books, beautiful records of the music, and a kickass backdrop: a passionate baroque-red painted wall with a huge tear in it exposing the pink insulation underneath – Liddington's continued nod to Jeff Wall's 1978 *The Destroyed Room*.

A dynamic occurring in art right now is that many artists thought of as Canadian are being represented by other countries. Ironically, this is the only way conceptually-based, Vancouver artists Rodney Graham and Jeff Wall have been able to put on their large-scale spectacles—which is partly why Liddington feels he can reference and mimic them—he's neither from their very specific Vancouver scene, nor from the “outside” like they're from.

Liddington's first solo exhibition follows in the success of his similarly themed and acclaimed works which were showcased at this year's Power Ball and Nuit Blanche. Even with his recent success Liddington relates how this current show is a dream come true for him. He knows all too well the Canadian dynamic of artists seeking representation from outside, in order to be recognized as established artists here, and adds that for conceptual artists like himself, the spectacle only comes out in the way the artists truly envision it because of the support of a high-art market. Liddington says that even with the aid of Canadian funding bodies, “you might get funding for half of your project, so half of your project gets realized. And that happens a lot.”

Liddington jokes that because he's made his show into a visual and musical spectacle, he's got a guaranteed audience for at least eight minutes, but seriously, he doesn't have any reason to downplay his success, or suffer any unnecessary Canadian modesty.

Derek Liddington's Coup de Grâce is exhibiting at Clark & Faria; 55 Mill St, bldg 2, until December 22, 2010

Performances are scheduled for November 18 at 8pm, and December 6 at 8pm

-Speciale, Michele. “Derek Liddington @ Clark & Faria,” ArtSync, November, 2010
<http://www.artsync.ca/on-now-derek-liddington-clark-faria/>