



Power trip

Glasgow-based artist Ben Woodeson profiles the Canadian artist's initiative, Contemporary Art Forum, Kitchener (CAFKA).

THIS YEAR'S CAFKA FESTIVAL, entitled *Power to the people* was selected from open submission. The festival is based round a different theme each year and it aims to take artwork out of the gallery and make it more accessible to the general public. The call for 2002 was based on the centenary of a plan for public ownership of what became the utility company Ontario Hydro and this year's show featured artists from the UK, Mexico, Canada and the USA, with the majority of works being sited in or around the downtown City Hall.

In common with many cities the increase in out-of-town shopping malls has sucked much of the vitality out of the centre; apparent in Kitchener through the large number of vacant shops – the windows of which were appropriated for several works in the exhibition. Southampton's *Boredom Research* (Vicky Isley and Paul Smith) used one to back-project their piece *7960 characters arranged in a dangerous order*, a letter-by-letter presentation of instructions on how to make a hydrogen bomb.

Much of the work had clearly been chosen for its ability to survive outside the neutrality of the white cube. Simon Hamilton's piece, *Concrete poetry*, consisted of poetry spray-painted in blue onto the pavement with each bit of text connected to the next by small arrows, effectively constituting an 'art walk' around the downtown and park areas. Similarly, New York resident Jillian McDonald's work entailed her strolling around in front of City Hall offering passers-by a free temporary *Power tattoo*.

UK artist Otiose (John Dummet) did a week-long performance using placards and marker pens. Another memorable piece was that constructed by Matt, Rob and Susan Gorbet. In a reinterpretation of an illuminated marquee sign above City Hall, they literally presented an opportunity for people power: 125 light bulbs were connected to 125 switches on a pavement stand. Passers-by could spell out short messages or images, something a wide range of people took advantage of. Respect is due to

Andrew Wright, a local artist and also 2002's artistic director, who, when one particularly blunt statement was aimed at the local police, came under intense and aggressive pressure from a local officer to disable the work. However, citing freedom of speech, Wright refused and the crisis was eventually resolved. The festival was, as a whole, remarkable for the openness of the city government. The council debating chamber was the site for a sequential projection work by the UK's Dutton, Peacock and Swindells.

As with all such events funding is an issue. CAFKA pay artists' fees recommended by the national CARFAC organisation – but that barely covers the cost of a flight from the UK, though CAFKA are attempting to raise extra funds for international travel.

In comparison to nearby Toronto, the local art scene is pretty small, but all the artists with whom I came into contact were hugely friendly, helpful and welcoming. To date the biggest challenge has been to raise awareness of the event amongst the general public, though extensive reviews, school trips and publicity all seem to be having a gradual cumulative effect, with each year busier and better than the last.

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For submissions details for this year's CAFKA see *Beyond the UK*.

Mix Magazine

www.mixmagazine.com
Canadian art and culture magazine

Artists:

Boredom Research

www.boredomresearch.net
www.possessed.uk.co

Jillian McDonald

<http://rand.pratt.edu/~mcdonald>
www.chambreblanche.qc.ca/chambre/index_e.html

Top left: Jillian McDonald, *Power tattoo*. Top right: Daniel Olson, *Fifteen seconds*, performance in Civic Square outside Kitchener City Hall. Below right: Matt, Rob and Susan Gorbet, *P2P*, installation in Civic Square outside Kitchener City Hall. Below left: Otiose, *Witness – Power to the people*. All images courtesy: CAFKA

