



The Action of Art: You should have been there

MATT MORRIS // APR 9, 2008

When I seek out new recommendations for music from the more knowledgeable, I'm often regaled with accounts of obscure live hybrids of music and art taking place in hip scenes across the world. One might read about an unadvertised performance by Cocorosie in Deitch Projects or gothic performance pieces by Terence Koh in Los Angeles, all frustratingly after the fact: "Oh, you should have been there!"

I haven't been clear on whether or not there were Cincinnati-based equivalents to these rarities. This winter, an exhibition at the Weston Art Gallery called *Hairrier: The Hovering Drone* opened with Jimmy Baker and Nathan Tersteeg's hi-fi/lo-fi performance piece. While presented by more or less local artists, it left the audience alternately bemused, interested, bored and inspired. This weekend, however, the Southgate House hosted FreakFest which, despite its gratuitous title, shone with local performance art brilliance.

Luna Waters and Dwight Endlessness were the second act of "performance art" in the upstairs parlour. The audience had thinned considerably after Jane Carver and her rabble troupe finished her dark opera *Mutter*, but as this duo tripped from one "song" to the next, the room filled again. Beginning by announcing their apparent motto, "It's a *new* New Age!" and overcoming some technical glitches, the two moseyed around through rituals and songs.

Luna, a female performer in a blonde wig copping an effected British accent, kept the pieces moving along with call and response to prerecorded sound pieces: chunky, electronic soundscapes with backup vocals dropped in.

The blend of Eastern chants, Björk-like protest and a 1980s-type blur of art and Rock were excessively supported by DIY costumes, vintage sports gear, novelty boobs and tailored Shamanistic rituals of sage smudging and "anointing" audience members with the red-dot stickers used to mark art pieces as "sold" in galleries.

These two fiddled while Rome burned down, except that they didn't really do much that amounted to fiddling. Instead they instigated a fusion of play and spirituality that was so blasé and deadpan it was an appropriate reaction to our troubled times and the general apathy shown toward repairing or reinforcing our situations.

What they gave the audience couldn't be called "bad," because my sense was that they did exactly what they meant to do. I was left to dwell on the value of being given a performance that was so obviously generous but then so glamorously useless.

With a little persistence, an underlying structure of reason, doubt and startling re-contextualization could be found. Around the fourth number, the continuously playing video backdrop began to feature shots of art galleries, and salons of paintings began to intersperse with what could only be described as corny footage of a denuded baby doll being walked around Eden Park and other Cincinnati landmarks.

If one recognized the band members through their disguises, you'd know that both are local visual artists that approach their work seriously. This segment of video collage that interfiled carefully considered paintings with scenes of neo-absurdist humor conjured an ether of questions about value and the different tacks that could be taken in facing off with grim reality.

It would have been terribly sad if it hadn't been so cheerful. It was so difficult that it was totally loveable. It didn't make any sense and it didn't micromanage.

I for one needed to see this performance. It reassured me that there are still elements of the jarringly unexpected in the Cincinnati art (and music) world.