

THIS IS BOSTON NOT L.A. @ LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

REVIEW BY **JAMES A. NADEAU**

PUBLISHED: DECEMBER 1, 2008

There is a story about the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer that I often think about. It is believed that Schopenhauer was a dour and glum person. He was the eternal pessimist who looked upon life as a series of trials and tribulations meant to test one's belief. It is thought that he thought:

“. . .life was a painful process, relief for which, might be achieved through art or through denial” and that through art one "might lose contact with the turbulent stream of detailed existence around us."

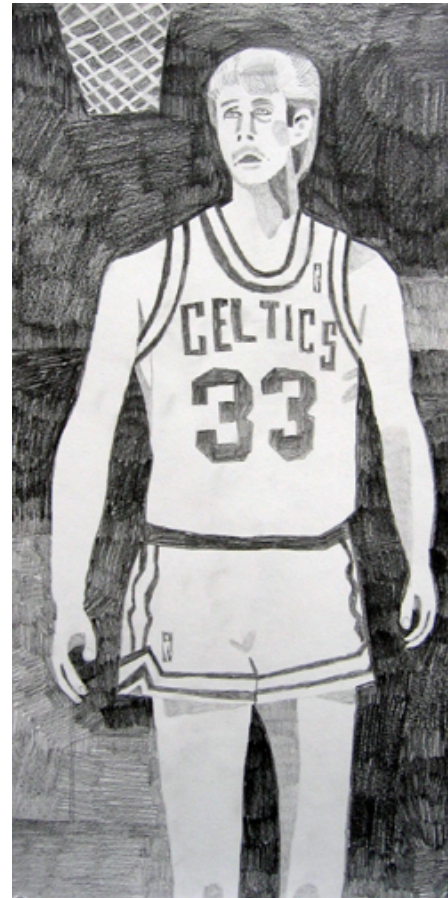
His pessimism was so overwhelming that he was finally banned from his mother's home, as his expositions on uselessness of existence would ruin her dinner parties. It is this story that I reflect upon after I attend a gallery opening. This is not due to any direct effect I have on those around me at these events it is simply that upon leaving an opening I find myself harping upon how annoying the event was and why I seldom attend one.

Last night I attended my first opening at the LaMontagne Gallery. It was the opening for the exhibition *This is Boston, Not L.A.* This is a show inspired by the seminal punk record of the early eighties (and one LP that I stole from my brother and played constantly), which detailed the awesomeness of the Boston punk rock scene. The show set out to present artists without representation in Boston galleries. Much like the LP, this is an attempt to show how exciting and vibrant an art scene Boston can have. This is a sentiment and belief I can get behind. Certainly this is a worthwhile endeavor. I loved the theme and, more importantly, I had a ride to the opening. So off I went.

Now, I do occasionally attend openings. I am trying to be better about this. I put First Fridays on my calendar (despite the fact that this event seems to be increasingly more convoluted in its scheduling) and I make a point of monitoring openings with an eye towards attending. Yet when the moment comes I remind myself of the crowds and the very simple fact that going to an opening means you can forget about seeing the art. Last night was a classic in the genre of art openings that aren't about the art. For the very simple reason that you couldn't even see it unless you were wearing x-ray specs and very good at reading your peripheral vision. There were simply too many people.

This would seem to be an odd complaint. If you had an opening and no one came then that would be a disaster, correct? You really want people to be there. If you are the gallery owner, manager, or artist in the show then the worst thing that could happen was that none of your friends or invitees show up. I completely understand. An opening is successful if everyone you invite (and more) show up. However, sometimes there is such a thing as "too much of a good thing." When the gallery reaches then exceeds fire safety capacity then you know you are in trouble.

This is by no means a criticism of the gallery or the show. The gallery space was fantastic. And there is really no way I can even comment or critique on the art in the show. What I am examining here is the phenomenon of the opening. It seems that we have reached a moment where the art opening is the equivalent of the punk show. In a way this exhibition, in its concept, is reflective



Jonas Wood, *Bird (mini)*, graphite on paper, 2008.

of the very thing it is trying to relate to. When one has to navigate the opening in much the same manner as a punk rock show (slipping and sliding in between groups of people milling about in a space not prepared for such an occurrence) it is easy to see how analogous the local art scene is to a local music scene. It is a scene made up of the people who live and chose to make art here. And boy do they show up at an opening.

Whoops, I am back to complaining. There really were quite a few people there on Saturday night. To the point where a sculpture placed in the room was knocked over several times before finally being dismantled and moved to the wall of the gallery. I silently hoped that it wasn't Joe Zane's, as he already had to overcome the destruction of one of his pieces over at the ICA. It was this moment that made me realize that this wasn't an opening. It wasn't about being there with the art. It was a social moment. What is going on when the art gets in the way at a gallery opening?

I am certainly not foolish enough (or boring enough) to want an opening laden with a hushed silence and lots of whispering. But I do find it pretty shitty when someone knocks over a sculpture trying to navigate their way to the beer bin. It is art opening as frat party or kegger. And I don't mean this ironically. Part of me loves the fact that these events inspire such enthusiasm. I have attending NYC's version of First Friday and it also has a level of excitement that is palpable. That Boston can create this is great. But the fact is I hated being at the New York City events as well. I am not a person who should attend openings. And if you want to experience Schopenhauer-esque relief that only art can provide perhaps you shouldn't either. The opening isn't about the art. It is about celebrating the moment and the community. It is your friends, other artists and art professionals. It is a working event. Sure, those are all great things but I'll try and be self-reflexive enough to understand that I am like Schopenhauer. I'll be the guy standing there bitching about how there are too many people getting in the way of looking at the art and how life sucks, etc, etc. And nobody wants that, least of all my friends. I know better. I am glad to have experienced last night. I'm glad to know that people come out to openings and support the artists. I am glad to see spaces like the LaMontagne Gallery supporting adventurous art. I'll go back there but not at an opening.

LaMontagne Gallery

"This is Boston, Not LA" is on view November 29 - December 27, 2008 at LaMontagne Gallery.

All images are courtesy of the artist and the LaMontagne Gallery website.

James Nadeau is an independent curator, video artist and writer based in Boston. He is editor of *Our Daily RED*, the blog of arts journal *Big RED & Shiny*. He is a graduate of the Comparative Media Studies department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He completed his undergraduate studies at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. His video work has been screened internationally and he has presented papers on media and film at conferences nationally. He has programmed film and video in several festivals throughout New England and is currently co-director of *CineMental*, a queer experimental screening series every third Wednesday at the Brattle Theatre in Harvard Square.