

High Diving

Video Art flies

by Alison Pletch
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Jumping out of a plane, free falling through the atmosphere from thousands of feet above the earth can be violent and overpowering in a good way. For Paul Litherland and Bertrand Cloutier, two artists and avid skydivers who've just recently introduced their new installation TurningPoint at Optica Gallery on Ste-Catherine, it's an experience that neither can get enough of.

Their video installation features two synchronized video projections on huge screens covering perpendicular walls, showing the two men on one of their thousands of skydives. With loud windy sound-effects filling the small room tucked in the back corner of the gallery, it's easy to be engulfed by the huge images.

Paul Litherland, an artist living in Montreal, has been sky diving since 1979. He's completed over 1,500 jumps from airplanes as well as 15 BASE jumps from fixed objects like bridges or buildings. "At first, it was scary," he says, "I don't know why I did it actually, I've just always had a need to conquer my fears," he laughs. His statement is reminiscent of a little inscription written at the bottom of his half of the installation: "Goldfinches have been known to hesitate before flying across water. This jump is dedicated to overcoming fear." When questioned about the inscription, he smiles and says, "Before I started skydiving, my biggest fear was of looking stupid, of being negatively judged by others and knowing it." Litherland continues, "Skydiving was a way to give my fear life, a tangible way to experience feeling vulnerable and out of place, which gives me a chance to physically conquer my fear of looking stupid."

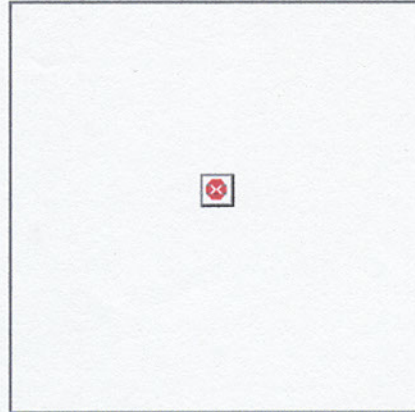
The fear of being judged is a fear even greater than death for Litherland, since he was willing to risk his life to overcome it. Unlike his first jumps, jumping is now almost a meditative experience, a chance to focus rather than be distracted by what's going on around him, and to simply do what's important to him.

Bertrand Cloutier was driven to skydive by a passion for anything aerial. From planes to para-gliders to birds, Cloutier's appetite for flying has affected his life in many ways. "It makes me feel closer to nature," he says, "more a part of the big scheme of things and it gives me a strong appreciation for life," he explains.

The dive featured in the installation was a tribute to a small red cardinal whose death was a loss that hit home for Cloutier. He decided, he mentions, "To make this jump in memory of that red cardinal and her last flight," in hopes of opening other people's eyes to the value of life. He believes that everyone should skydive at least once, as he explains, "It's an important way to learn about oneself and to appreciate nature and the life that it gives."

Although some may find other ways to overcome fears and pursue self-discovery, skydiving for Cloutier and Litherland is an integral part of their lives, a part that they're excited to share through this installation in hopes of reaching an interested audience.

TurningPoint is at Optica, 372 Ste.Catherine O., until October 19th, Tuesdays through Saturdays from 12 pm to 5 pm.



-An artist is borne.

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