

Up to the Hour

Force Majeure @ Le Centre Clark



"Nervous" and "excited" must be a part of the same emotional continuum. Same with "terror" and "bliss." As a control freak, I have this thought occur to me often. Remember when that giant slab of concrete broke away from a downtown highrise and crushed a guy's wife during their anniversary sushi dinner?! I mean Holy Jesus! It also hits me when I do new or shit-my-pants-scary things - like say, fly or scuba diving. (Personally, I don't reassure myself with science/stats but rather with the knowledge that only a few generations ago humans didn't experience either flying or scuba diving, and that we now experience death-defying, even counter-natural, feats! Hecks ya!)

Paul Litherland's latest art show at Gallery Clark reveals his passion/hobby for skydiving and explores the vulnerable nature of the jump (both in the literal and metaphorical sense). You know the moment: Do you do it? Do you risk being vulnerable even if you might lose control? [what's the engine of your fate?]. Of course, the process of falling/failing/losing has wider implications - in actual fact it defines us: our goals, fears and selves. It's especially relevant when you concede that we only ever have a tenuous/illusory grip on control.

To get at these questions, *Force Majeure* takes us into a dark side room in Centre Clark. Visitors are invited to lie down in lawn chairs or on the ground (more art shows should feature the resting position!), and once comfortably prostrate, you face towards the ceiling/sky where fluffy clouds are projected from 5 hanging TVs. Soon, a sequence begins to play on the monitors and a playful series of human "drops" (when skydivers fall through the sky) is set to a soundtrack by local sound artist Nancy Tobin.

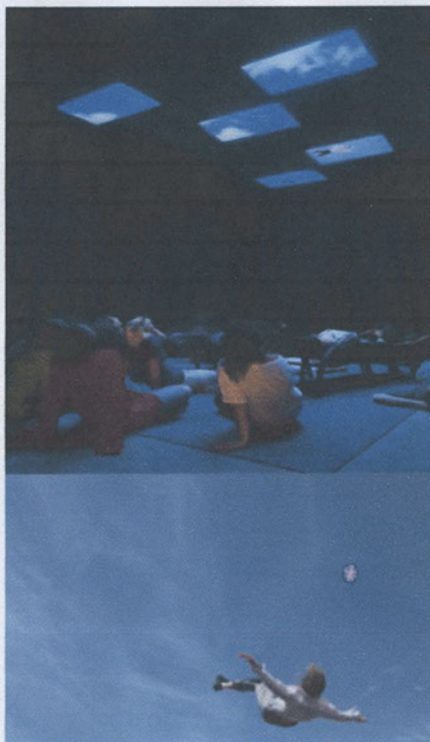
"This project is about the fear of falling and the dream of flying," says Litherland, lying next to me on a lawn chair. "I wanted to explore the moment of risk-taking, what triggers it and how we react to it. I'm interested in vulnerability and its relation to risk. The order in our lives is always so tenuous. Although in the end, I think it turned out to be more about wind!"

Litherland shot his material at L'Aerodium, a Montreal wind tunnel that simulates the experience of skydiving. His subjects (friends, many of whom don't have skydiving experience) are in "regular" clothes and often in the process of doing (or trying to do) regular activities like apply makeup or shave. Some characters fall through the TV frame towards us - some struggle, others less so. Tobin's soundtrack courts the meditative videos, featuring ambient noises like wind and static, but also bursts of music and poetry that add poignancy and humour to the interrupted image.

Until Oct. 9, the gallery also features Catherine Bodmer's *Duo*, a series of photographs that feature spaces (a frozen pond, vacant lots, roads, an electrical outlet) that have uncertain uses or functions. These diptychs feature what seem like mirror images - but they aren't quite - and it's in this process of the not-quite that they mess with your sense of narrative and cohesion.

Also on offer is an audio piece by Normal Ones, Colorado-based duo Norm A and Norma Lones (better known as Nathan Jantz and Jahnavi Stenflo), who work on immersive sound performances in experimental sound design and have made several appearances at Communikee festival. I wasn't able to tell which of the two soundtracks was working, but the piece travels from the manipulated rhythm of the ocean into the belly (or guts) of a computerized monster (and somehow this is all very pleasant). Their melding of nature and techno leads to some magical places, as frog calls hail the dawn of new form of dub. In their sound, nature is unnatural, yet real, stretched through tinkering and technology, into mystical new realms and sonic playgrounds.

Force Majeure, at [Le Centre Clark](#) (5455 de Gaspé, Room 114), to Oct. 9



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