KINGSGATE MALL HAPPENINGS

LOCAL ARTIST CASEY WEI PRESENTS A MONTH OF MALL EVENTS THIS JUNE 2014. SHE WILL BE TAKING PHOTOS, VIDEOS, AND REQUESTS AT THE MALL. YOUR ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION IS ENCOURAGED. COMMENTS? QUESTIONS? SUGGESTIONS? REACH HER AT: kingsgatemallhappenings@gmail.com. TAG YOUR PHOTOS #kingsgatemallhappenings

An explanation...

For the month of June, I had programmed a month of happenings at Kingsgate Mall. I was able to do this through the support of the Western Front Artist-Run Centre as their June artist-in-residence. Somewhat adhering to a weekly schedule, the happenings included live music, an ongoing audio talk show, open mic, a community 'Art Flea,' and various other events. Very quickly, what began as a residency turned into a production. The ever-present desire to generate more crossover between visual art and music suddenly became possible, and made so much sense the more I thought about the histories of these two institutions that have both existed since 1973, less than five minutes away from each other. Like many others, Kingsgate is a mall I feel an affinity towards. Built on land owned by the Vancouver School Board, it serves as a public space in which commerce and community intersect in a unique way.

As many know, the month of programming stopped abruptly after the 2nd week, with the cause being (officially) "due to unforeseen circumstances." I have taken the last few weeks to log the footage I collected, and to think how I want to close this project. It was called "Kingsgate Mall Happenings," and I feel it appropriate to explain what happened at the mall from my perspective. In a conversation with Caitlin after the end, she repeated something that was once said to her worth reflecting on: "It's important to allow for failure."

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From the get-go, Leyda Molnar, the property manager of Kingsgate was 100% on board. She understood how important it was to have art in the community and wanted to be supportive of young artists in any way she and the mall could. But despite that enthusiasm, she had a job to do, and very quickly had to set up a three-strike rule with the project.

To all the musicians who participated in *Kingsgate Waste* and the *Mallzak Series*: Thank you. Most of it was great. I, and the mall, enjoyed so much of it. Being a musician, I understand the desire to play loud. I had sent an email to all the bands explaining that music had to be mall appropriate volume. What that meant exactly wasn't clear to me at first, but I did specify no full drum kits. The first music event, the Kingsgate Waste Pre-Show Open Mic was a great success, but on the following Friday night, the bands were too loud. Although I had told the bands to play at mall volume, I wasn't hard lined enough in the moment. It was my mistake for programming the night without fully understanding what 'mall appropriate' meant, and therefore that wasn't clearly communicated to the bands.

It was *Mallzak Friday the 13th*, when one of the bands that played was again, too loud. This was after I thought I had gotten my point clearly across to the bands about what mall appropriate noise meant, sending several preemptive emails that explained the situation, and the very thin ice the project was on. After they played, the manager at Ardene's, Jeanie, came out and was very upset at how loud it was. "I'm going to crank it!" she threatened, meaning that she was going to blast her own music from the store. Only a couple of days earlier, an artist-talk gone haywire had left another bad impression not just with Ardene's, but with all of the businesses for their disrespectful behavior, and what I see as misplaced irreverence. After apologizing the best I could right before my own band was to perform, I went to talk to the next band, The Great Speckled Fritillary, who were to go on after. They had just loaded in very massive sound gear and I wanted to make absolutely sure they understood how sensitive the situation was. Members of the band were standing within earshot of the conversation Jeanie and I just had so I thought they would be sympathetic. I explain to the band leader, a tall guy in what seemed to be a red, crushed velvet marching jacket, that they had to be 20% quieter than that last band or else the evening, and the whole project would be over. He would not compromise

and insisted I reimburse them for their transportation.

I didn't see what happened because I was playing, but right when my band finished, Jeanie stormed up to me and was livid. According to her, the band leader walked into Ardene's on his way out, called her a "slut", made some other threats and knocked some merchandise over. I walked with Jeanie outside and talked with her for half an hour, apologizing as best I could for circumstances beyond my control. At one point I broke down and cried, and maybe that humanized me to her. Now funnily enough, she was calming me down. She said that she had given it some thought, cooled down, and was just going to keep the incident between her and I because project was good for the mall, and for the community.

Monday morning, I got a call from the Western Front, who had just received an email from Leyda at the mall, and the first words were, "Sorry, Casey but it's done. The project is over."

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My biggest sadness about how the project ended was that 90% of it was good. The installation of the space was comfy and inviting. Every so often I would notice a new zine or CD added to the library rack. Someone left an anonymous request for a chess table, so the next day I set up a chess table. People stopped and watched what was playing on the cube monitors. The project was becoming accepted and integrated into the mall ecosystem. Initially, I had planned to make a film about the mall which would include these happenings, but after the first day I spent sitting at a fold-out table with my sketchbook watching people run their mall errands, I knew that the mall didn't need a film to be made about it. I considered the ethics of representation and what I really wanted to achieve, and realized more than anything that I wanted to create a situation where visual art, music, and the everyday could co-exist, outside of the 'scene,' because there is a difference between a 'scene' and a 'community.' It wasn't about 'giving something back,' it was about participation and changing something that I felt was lacking. I didn't think that is a naïve or unrealistic goal, but now looking back, it is easier to make sense of what I was still figuring out in the process of the project unfolding.

This brings me back to what Caitlin said, about giving art and music a chance for failure. Before this project happened, I saw an interview with Christoph Schlingensief in which he said, “Directing is a question of how much I can stand in a transformative entity." It was at his retrospective show at MoMa PS1 where I was confronted by his prolific oeuvre that was greatly collaborative and very politicized. He was a film and theater director, a politician, a talk show host, an opera director, a visual artist. That quote really hit me, and I thought about it in my approach towards Kingsgate. I understood and respected the "transformative entity” but in hindsight, I didn’t respond to its transformation quickly enough. Kingsgate was completely immersive, participatory, and taught me now what it means to be a director. I thought the key in the quote was the “transformative entity”, but now I understand that the “I” plays just as much importance - *it is the relationship between the entity and I that was transformative.*

This was also the first time I worked with an institution, and in hindsight, I should have been comfortable asking more from it right from the beginning. It was a very tricky shift, to so quickly turn a residency into a production that involved so many people. It was amazing that it went ahead as smoothly as it did, as I scrambled to program the events with less than a month’s notice. I am a planner, very organized, and am used to working self-directed, but much of this project was improvisational and collaborative. It was easy to overlook things because there was so much going on. The hardest part of the project was the constant renegotiation between what was planned and what was actually happening. In an art context (i.e. the studio) there is room for that tension to play out, but in a public space of commerce, even one as community friendly as Kingsgate, there are rules, regulations, and expectations that add extra obstacles and pressures. Again in hindsight, I should have hired an assistant.

As the Happenings moved through the first week, everyday posed a new task, a new obstacle, a new unknown. Every day was a chance for failure. I went in to the mall unsure about how to represent the mall, because it was everyday life happening unaware, and that was the beauty of it. Like I said, so much of it was great. Whatever focus I decide to give to it now, whatever footage I use, asks the question of intent, and it is not my intention to make claims to what Kingsgate Mall is in this historical

moment that valorizes, romanticizes, or critiques systems in which we are all implicated. What resulted is a Tumblr, photographs, Instagram posts hashtagged under #kingsgatemallhappenings, a bunch of audio recordings yet to be sorted out, and hours of great documentation footage of the music and open mic events. Great times.

4 years ago

#kingsgatemallhappenings *#explanation* *#deareveryone*

18 notes


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If this is TL;DR for anyone, my takeaway is similar to what I experience on a weekly basis as a karaoke host:...



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From Casey Wei Click through to read her full text.



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What an excellent rundown! Thank you for sharing!



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