Espace Art actuel

**Peace of Mind : Contemporary Art Forum, Kitchener and Area**

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Peace of Mind
Contemporary Art Forum, Kitchener and Area

Situated in downtown Kitchener, the Contemporary Art Forum, Kitchener and Area, or CAFKA for short, is an example of the positive synergy that can occur when artists are granted access to public spaces and supported by their municipality. CAFKA was launched in 2000 as an ambitious attempt to site contemporary art in the troubled downtown core, using the centralized location of Kitchener City Hall as a focus. From the beginning, CAFKA set out to exhibit artists from across the region side-by-side with visiting artists from overseas. This year brought to fruition this potent mix of local and international interests in a diverse program that touched upon some of the strengths and weaknesses inherent to this kind of event.

"Peace of Mind," was the theme chosen as a conceptual guideline for CAFKA. An allusion — and possibly even a corrective — to our perceptions in a post-9/11 world. What struck me were the enormous complexities this theme suggested, a subject fraught with so much potential anxiety that it did little to promote the sense of harmony suggested by the title. Ultimately, the project was coloured by this sense of uneasiness, with many of the artists exhibiting an instinctive tendency toward apprehension, but many others seized the opportunity to address the themes.

"Peace of Mind," was subsumed by concrete towers rising rapidly out of the ground. When the towers subsequently reached their peak, they in turn transformed it into dandelions. The projected green space created our direct impact upon the urban alternative to a day at the beach. The accidental audience was then engaged by the artists, who humbly served drinking water and provided towels to dry wet feet.

The simplicity and generosity of this gesture did not go unappreciated. As I sat talking with a colleague, feet dangling in the cool waters, children frolicked, people wandered barefoot on concrete, and a pair of locals took full advantage of the unseasonably warm weather to sunbathe. Here the democratizing ideals of CAFKA were perhaps most fully realized as the artists reclaimed their shoes off, wade into the water and relax on the recliners as an urban oasis for the enjoyment and contemplation of the people. A pair of locals took full advantage of the unseasonably warm weather to sunbathe. Here the democratizing ideals of CAFKA were perhaps most fully realized as the artists reclaimed this ubiquitous municipal plaza and transformed it into a temporary urban oasis for the enjoyment and contemplation of the people.