

# BIG RED & SHINY

PUBLISHED IN BIG RED & SHINY ISSUE #44 | © 2010

## THE PRESENT TENSE @ THE MIDWAY STUDIOS

REVIEW BY **MARK SNYDER**

PUBLISHED: JUNE 18, 2006

I am really excited to see that there is a growing performance art scene in Boston. *The Present Tense* is the latest effort to gather together artists, garner space and get the word out to a performance hungry audience. The more this happens, the better the art scene in Boston will get and I look forward to seeing much more (good and bad).

I arrived on the second night of performances and the show got off to a late start. The first work was from Cynthia Norton called "Polishing Machine". In work that might best be described as Tennessee Williams meets Fluxus in an Appalachian Mountain cabin, Norton produces a character of cornbread charms and junkyard ingenuity. A cohesive work involving audience manipulation, singing, video and linear theatrical development, I was most impressed with the physical objects that Norton crafts that served as tools for her character Ninnie Nowhere. A video tape of a horse training devise spinning four square dancing dresses in unison was poetic and just one such object Norton is able to draw upon to make her statements.

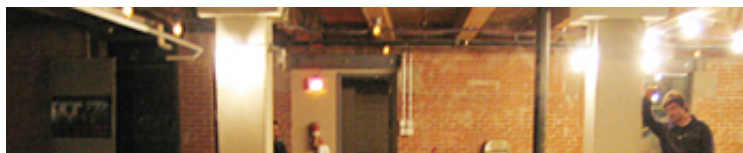
Sean Smith and Earnest Truly followed Norton's work with "Love's Circuit". Billed as a "shadowy ceremony and religious spectacle"



from *The Present Tense*



from *The Present Tense*



involving the animation of the artists body by electricity. This work never really gets past seventh grade science class and the effects of electricity on the human body. With all the elements of an eager audience, a noisy hand cranked generator, a charismatic Ringmaster in a lab coat, a semi-nude male body suspended, and two females from the audience willing to send volts of electricity through him, it was hard to believe this work just wouldn't take off. But it never does. In a time where the intersection of science, religion and personal choices are being fervently discussed in the headlines and the courts the work had an opportunity to reach out and make a statement, but ultimately failed to make any.



from *The Present Tense*

Travis McCoy Fuller's work "Tick Tick Tick Tick Tick..." was an exploratory look into what the artist calls "the perpetuation of death cycles". While there were definitely moments of laughter garnered from both the audience and the performer, the over all tone of the work was nihilistic. With a dying evergreen screaming out for water and hugs, the artist admonished anyone who actually tried to relieve the tree's agony. In the end, with the tree destroyed, the artist having given birth to a ghost and an audience member (as the ghost) bound up in primer cord while a doom's day countdown blares on, the artist has certainly exploited the death cycle theme. He also quashed the hopes of rebirth and redemption through his actions in the work. In a role as man the destroyer of the now and yet to come, Fuller may have left too little room in his "hopes to inspire action".

Fourth in the night's line up, Paul Waddell was utterly fun to watch perform. The work is best described as a trip inside the mind of a dissociative person, one not quite connected to the outside world. Yet Waddell had great enough presence to get the audience actively involved against all odds and with very few cues from him. Working often in complete darkness, he got people to read from a book, lay in a pile on the floor and carry his limp naked body around the room. Audience members seemed compelled to assist, comply and help in any way they saw fit, while the artist treated them more as props for his own wandering mind. In the end it all worked wonderfully and was an absolute delight to watch and participate in.

The final piece I saw was Rueben's "Princesses are Pissing Too". Riddled with the language of Sado-Masochism, bondage, branding and humiliation, I found the work interesting yet ultimately unclear. Bound, then freed, the two women join together in a branding scene where one woman heats the iron that the other brands herself with. The brunette is mic'd and her breathing is amplified through speakers, though she says nothing through out the performance. The blonde begins to laugh at seeing the brunette struggle with the ropes and the laughter never ends. She continues to laugh throughout the branding and one cannot rationalize whether this is a taunting laughter now or celebratory. In the end, the two women spit volumes of glitter at each other. Again lending to confusion, spitting suggests disdain while the glitter suggests celebration. I've analyzed the relationship of the two women presented in the performance in different ways, and probably will continue to do so. However, to date I feel something was missing from the performance that would have better clarified their roles and symbolisms.

### The Midway Studios

*"The Present Tense: Seconds" was on view Friday, May 12th and Saturday, May 13th at the Midway Studios in Fort Point.*

*All images are courtesy of the artists and the author.*

**Mark Snyder** is an artist and writer living in Boston, MA. He received his BFA from Alfred University, has exhibited his work at the Mills Gallery, Pyramid Arts Center and the Lynn Art Center. He is a new contributor to Big, Red & Shiny.