

Calling to mind the tone of vernacular architecture in the southern US, *A Burning Bag as a Smoke-Grey Lotus* feels unapologetically nostalgic. A romantic and careful tale unfolds, veering close to preciousness – a whimsy in line with the visual motif of Wes Anderson’s *Moonrise Kingdom*. I feel the pull of an alternative narrative, an idiosyncratic mythology carrying a bevy of hidden stories. It treads closely to Americana folklore and the allure of solitary adventure – a manifest destiny of sorts. And yet, the character of the instruments continues to compel. Even when devoid of human performers and visitors, there is an electric hum to the space’s near soundlessness.

Beginning in the late 1960s, a nascent academic field began to study the soundscapes of human environments. Founded by R. Murray Schafer and his team at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, the field of acoustic ecology studies hoped to envision ecologically balanced soundscapes where the relationship between the human community and its sonic environment would be in harmony. This idea of soundscapes encapsulates both the so-called natural acoustic environment, including animal vocalizations and the sounds of weather and other natural elements, and environmental sounds created by humans, through musical composition, and other ordinary human activities, including conversation, work and those resulting from the development and use of industrial technology. This research attempted to foreground an understanding of the shared aural condition of inter-species life, which leads me to wonder if sound and music could be seen as a phenomenon of inherent inter-species sociality. In one of the Homeric Hymns, Hermes is said to have invented the lyre when he discovered that the shell of a tortoise, used as a resonant body, produced sound. But it is precisely in the void of the shell’s life from which its newfound animation derives. The potentiality of its animation and the violence of its seemingly deadened state become a paradox of human engagement with our social and environmental milieu. While this quandary is not likely resolvable via rational thought, it is certainly deserving of our attention and of Moore’s continuing, quiet interrogation.

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**Duty Free: Feminist  
Land Art Retreat  
Studio For Propositional  
Cinema, Dusseldorf, Germany,  
Sept. 4 — Oct. 4, 2015  
by Tiziana La Melia**

On September 1, I am making my way to *Duty Free*, the Feminist Land Art Retreat’s (now going by the rubric FLAR) first solo exhibition, with the Studio for Propositional Cinema, in Dusseldorf, Germany. FLAR got together in 2010, in Vancouver, formed out of a desire by, and for, young women artists to create an oral space, for fluids of thought to flow freely, to drink together.

I remember the first FLAR poster, tacked above the toilet at Exercise Projects, Vancouver, printed on cheap, yellow tabloid-format office paper. It invited anyone who noticed it to “the retreat.” Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), copy pasted and doubled under the title, connects the micro and macro, reading both as the iconic work, but also like a giant intrauterine device. Initially, FLAR expressed itself through the making of one poster a year. The simplicity of the design gives it a retro feel somehow, and contributes to a sense of fiction surrounding the project. *Is the retreat happening? If yes, how do I attend?* Many people who left the washroom expressed curiosity and desire.

Back in Dusseldorf, I am two days early, an escape from the routine of my own life, with no intention to report on the project. I arrive imagining myself as the first guest at the inaugural retreat. Jet-lagged, I nap on Styrofoam, which I later break up into popcorn-sized bits that get sprinkled between a layer of concrete, later poured into derelict desk drawers, at times interrupted by pipes, or poured into plastic basins. This work consists of a champagne fountain built in the centre of the gallery, which is set within the former studio of Swiss artist and writer Daniel Spoerri, whose name, still scrawled over the door in red paint, adds to the mythos and excitement surrounding the fountain’s unveiling.

Long rods of hand-bent and welded rebar appear to impale the brutalist forms, spelling out the acronym/logo *F - L - A - R*. The rebar letters function as both a formal declaration and a weapon-like, piercing gesture that resonates with Pipilotti Rist’s swing of a flower stem in *Ever is Over All* (1997), the two-channel video

1 Linguistic professors say that these types of inflection reveal empathy, serving as a kind of tool for building relationships between people. (See Douglas Querqua, "They're, Like, Way Ahead of the Linguistic Currrrrve", in the *New York Times*, February 28, 2012: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/science/young-women-of-ten-trendsetters-in-vocal-patterns.html>)

where she skips down the street in a blue dress, breaking car windows with a flower. Water hyacinths float amidst the islands of concrete, brutalist blocks, at times interrupted by PVC pipes that reference Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1976). If the fountain is a metaphor for the body, then the artists are the fountain-keepers. The fountain spits into the pentagram-shaped base that collects the drool, or you could also call it jizz. This fountain is tasteful yet subtly crass. It was made through the process of working together. I even help myself, in my half-asleep state.

Two new posters were made for the exhibition (a display of the full suite of FLAR ephemera was on display in a studio across from the gallery). The one poster accompanying *Duty Free* depicts an aerial map of Dusseldorf, with an  $x$  plotting the site of the fountain. In addition to airports, the exhibition title also speaks (by its absence of speech) to the fact that this, along with all of FLAR's endeavours, so far insists on the refrain, allowing the project to form its identities slowly, thereby allowing itself to be open to negotiation and to be in conversation with others. It provides no answers.

It is in its restraint that *Duty Free* opens up a space for me to fantasize about what a retreat might look like. About what it might feel like to be free, as any marginalized group or individual might struggle to be spared from — of justifying itself. This, of course, comes from the position that cis-women, for instance, are not only asked to explain, they also often become overly preoccupied by expectations to explain. FLAR has taken up, with the plainness of explaining, the elegance of the office, with a corporate or militant black and white aesthetic. And this has been done from an off-kilter "secretary's" point of view, wearing makeup. Furthermore, there seems to be a preoccupation with the artworks and personas coming out of canonized conceptual, minimal, and land art. I am a bit wary of the endeavour to destabilize these legacies now, mainly because I would rather not encounter, yet again, the legacies and blind spots that canonical artists enact or represent. For example, what does the subtle gesture of adding a lipstick stain to a glass in a restaged Ian Wallace picture (composed for an earlier poster) say? Is it a reminder that there was a lady in the house (the whole time)?

The second poster for the show promotes FLAR's first performance, on Sunday, September 6, titled *Throw Your Voice*. This took place at the Dan Graham Pavilion outside of K21, organized by *Seira's*, another anonymous collective. In this one, inky cursive writing is splayed out like a spider's web over a picture of the artist taking a picture with her iPhone of the deep gash in the mirrored glass of the pavilion. Minute evidence of cosmetic entropy is evident through details such as the photographer's chipped nail polish.

During the performance, viewers huddle around a FLAR member who controls the volume from an amp in the middle of the pavilion, while a second person monitors a computer from the other side. Recordings of a mother and a sister's adaptation of Dan Graham's *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1975) exercise recorded in their homes play. Their voices, distinguished by what linguists call "vocal fry," hint at a proprioceptive description of the boundary between their bodies and the environment. The artists approximate, vocal/genetic doubles, use an inflection, grain and rhythm that exemplifies voices negatively interpreted as "insecure, emotional or even stupid" in the media and by the general public over the past year, usurping "up speak" as the most annoying vocal trend (I do both).<sup>1</sup>

The performance ends with a B-52's song, *Hero Worship*, which Graham wrote about in his essay "New Wave Rock and the Feminine" (1980–4). The sound gets louder as a shovel is passed over the pavilion's wall while another hand passes over an apple tree. I find the gesture of planting a tree deeply tender, despite my initial reaction to it as cheesy. It is a way of tending to the structure, planting something that will continue giving: hopefully sustenance, shade, comfort. This gesture brings care to a thing active within its own state of entropy. If it's allowed to grow there, I look forward to returning to the apple tree some day in the future to see its unkempt branches pushing over the pavilion's cracked mirrors.

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Installation view from *Duty Free*, Feminist Land Art Retreat at Studio for Propositional Cinema, Düsseldorf. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS