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Peckham, London

Art Licks Weekend: Peckham Tour



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Art Licks Weekend: Peckham Tour

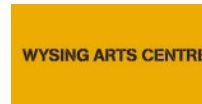
Peckham, London

Sunday 6 October 2013

Review by Rachel Guthrie

In Peckham, down an alley shooting off gumptious Rye Lane, is an art café that hosts drinkers until 6am. On the Lane itself, beat boxes boom from market stalls, and the infectious chatter of ladies having their weaves put in, catches on. It's never quiet.

From platform one of Peckham Rye station - where the tour began - the rooftops of the gallery The Sunday Painter are at eye level. The first stop is a performance piece delivered from this point; a DJ spinning a spry set. It dominates everything in its



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earshot, but most of the station's users - locals - don't blink an eye. This quickly gets me thinking. Back down on street level and walking to the second site - Peckham Springs (previously the Sassoon Gallery) - I notice there's a Cash and Carry causing as much of a scene as the performance piece above, and yet again this attracts just as little attention from those accustomed locals.

Will Marriott - one part of Millington & Marriott - made a point of it when showing the group around our third venue, Weekends (the formal name for Sean Millington's flat, which they regularly use as a curated space), and this only furthers my conviction. Not long before the Art Licks weekend, Weekender projected a film of a sunrise shifting to sunset. In Will's eyes, this signified the ephemeral against a backdrop of its antonym: Peckham, which on the street below bustled, bustled, bustled.

Artist-curator Alexander Page had something to say about this as well. When we reached the warehouse the Ballad of Peckham Rye had filled with the curiously named show 'Like A Monkey Puzzle Tree' (stop four on the tour), I listened as he described the challenges of opening a show up on Sunday, when your building is backing onto a Pentecostal church's meeting hall, whose Sunday morning service runs throughout the day, their songs rising up and over Ilona Sagar's video 'Human Factors'. The circumstances seemed to deny the possibility the show could be anything other than site-specific, but fortunately the Ballad of Peckham Rye had no differing plans for it.

A tour of Peckham's contemporary art scene is not a tour of its art but of its art in its surroundings. What you notice about Peckham is that it's not yet been made for the purpose of art. The art scene is scattered in enclaves across the central streets. Peckham hovers in this precious state, where it's not designed as an art destination, but art sits amongst the multifaceted, multi-fragranced and multi-functional place, and actively contributes to its vibrancy.

The art scene is vibrant here because it's responding to its context, and because its artists, curators, and art-space owners are thinking about creative curatorial solutions for that context: from the reclaimed Network Rail arches of Peckham Springs, to a balcony installation by Tom Railton at 38b.

Each venue that Art Licks had laid out had something distinct to say about the direction in which contemporary art is heading, and particularly art in Peckham. Paulina Michnowska's dark-humoured ceramic work at FoodFace was an effective rebranding of glazed sculpture that teamed sugary-looking abstract pieces with miniature men with death wishes. Gabor Gyory and Nick Jensen at Twelve Around One presented 'Salient' - a sound, video and painting installation combining the input of seven artists in a work based upon the modulation of spatial imagery.

At 38b, the owner Luke Drozd explained how he and Eva Rowson operate. They don't curate the work he says, but curate (select) the artist, who makes art to fit into the space (patches of wall around the furniture in the living room). Tom Railton's solution was 'Augury', a direct response to the flat's pigeon infestation. The show comprised of one practical response and three object-based historic quotations around the theme.

Around the decking on the back of the flat, Railton attached his hand-made pigeon guard: a set of spiked wooden rails designed to keep the pigeons from landing and

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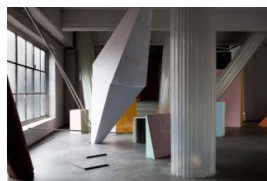
nesting. On the TV Railton showed a watercolour painted by William Blake to illustrate a poem called 'Auguries of Innocence', which ties in with Peckham - because it was on Peckham Rye that Blake had a vision of a winged angel - and the Roman tradition of Augury where priests would make prophetic judgements based upon the behaviour of birds. This combined subject matter, curatorial setting and approach, for me summarises the interaction of people in and outside the art scene in Peckham, and the paired residential nature of this part of London with the creative curatorial approaches of the artists who reside here.

Published on 15 October 2013

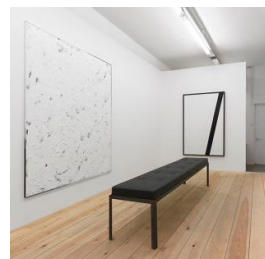
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