

Showtel: The Stuff Legends Are Made Of

By Gabriel Laszlo

Eight years ago an unknown transplant from Los Angeles named Kara Walker-Tome had the ingenuity and foresight to start an annual art show in West Palm Beach the likes of which South Florida has never seen. Since it's inception, it has taken place at a quaint, once shifty "motor-lodge" which had changed owners and aesthetic to become the super sheik Hotel Biba. The event was called *Showtel*, a clever fusing of what the evening is and where it takes place. In the first few years *Showtel* was an event that created a buzz in the cool "alternative artsy" scene – AKA people "in the know." Artists, art school students and grads, hipsters, and people of that ilk; the kinds of people often found distasteful to the Palm Beach set.

But after seven years of expanding its audience this years Showtel brought those two divergent groups of people together to mingle with one another in a way that's rarely (if ever) seen in this town of such clearly delineated boundaries between the haves and the have-nots.

Even the traditionally uptight and snooty Palm Beach crowd has had to come around and embrace it. Walking around the show was a bizarre clashing of two worlds that never come into contact, making the chasm that separates them a little shallower. With conversations co-mingling and the power of posturing evaporating, *Showtel* conjoined two worlds that would never meet otherwise (unless one was valet parking the car of the other). Showtel has provided a bridge between these two worlds/realities - which is nothing to easily dismiss. This fusing of two entirely different worlds is a study in Socio-Economic divisions and how two people can be brought together despite their obvious differences.

Showtel is set up in a sprawling way that can make seeing the show a kind of treasure hunt. You wander around following makeshift signs and signifiers and a map indicating where there are pieces to be found. The rabble and din of people can be overwhelming and sometimes the pieces themselves can even add to this feeling.

I'm thinking of a few pieces in particular such as Sue Stevens and Nicole Gugliotti's piece called *Microscopic Exploration* which required the viewer to venture into the space which seemed to grow smaller and more restrictive the deeper you went into it. My empirical reaction was that of an anxiety that seemed to grow with my exploration. This was compelling on it's own and I found myself relieved to leave the space even though it meant reentering what seemed to be rapidly growing into a mob. The dichotomy!



Microscopic Exploration (detail of shrunken room)

Another piece that struck me for its ability to evoke strong emotive reactions in me was Carolyn Sickles' piece entitled *Sea Hollow Caverns*. A piece that also enveloped the whole room and felt almost like entering a ride in Disney World with its ethereal glow you almost expected dwarves to jump out and start singing. It was the leaving of the space that struck me. The room was very disorienting and left me off balance like I was walking above the ground and needed to reach an extra few inches with each step to reach down to the concrete walkway.



Sea Hollow Caverns

I also enjoyed Lauren Jacobson and Christina Sierra's *Briefcase Sandwich* room that seemed to evoke without clearly explaining why the hyper-real reality that surrounds us every day. The whole time I spent in the room I found myself thinking of the writings of Guy Debord and his interpretations of contemporary

society and it's hidden and inherently oppressive machinations. Though the piece can easily be written off as a clever one liner it masks a deeper unspoken complexity that seems to reveal itself with each remembering.



Briefcase Sandwich

Laura Atria's *12,458 Cents* was a work of beautiful and meticulous craftsmanship that showed both determination and ability. The piece was striking and was reminiscent of Chris Burden's *The Reason for the Neutron Bomb* (1979). Both used money as object rather than just using it as a signifier for monetary value, though that provided an added layer to the piece. Everything from blankets to rugs was covered in money. These things represent where we are and where we've been in our lives. Human value based on the "things" that surround us.



12,458 Cents (with crowd)

In closing I'm struck by the richness of Showtel's meaning and purpose because not only does Showtel present some of the best and most creative work you're to find south of the Mason/Dixon line but it also proves as a fascinating sociological experiment through art; a side benefit which may not have been intended, but one that is almost as fascinating than the art itself.

We cannot over-praise nor over-admire Showtel's importance, as the show has grown tremendously – both in scope and stature - over the past seven years. Showtel has become an event of legend.

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