

In Our DNA

Gillian Dykeman

My first experience walking into the DNA artspace was one of musty air, dusty carpet, peeling wallpaper, and wonder. What was this place? I was given a tour by an excited Thea Yabut. She explained the top floor had been a shoe factory with some offices in the front, the main floor a showroom and shoe store, and the basement a former storage space. We descended into the basement. The walls to the rear were lined with custom wooden shelving, and the floors inexplicably half carpeted, half cement flooring. At various points on the walls strips of green masking tape were scrawled with the names of local artists whom had claimed some vaguely delineated area as their own. This was a crazy place, it was perfect; heavy with potential and asserting a strange in-between of what it was and what it could be. Ripe.

We made our way upstairs past the showroom (mostly all claimed at this point), and onto the manufacturing floor. There was a skylight above huge wooden worktables and sockets sprung from the floor. More storage, and then through to the offices at the front of the building. This is where I got really excited. Thea opened the door to what for some would look like a cigarette-tar infused post-capitalist shell of a head office; the blinds wallpapered to match the peeling wallpaper, suspicious stains on the carpet, and lighter-toned silhouettes where there had been furniture and bulletin boards. I couldn't have been more delighted; I saw my future head office. I had a project in mind that was only wanting in that it needed a time and place - I often work in installation and performance, and frequently participatory performance at that. I proposed to install and perform my work Human Service Inc. for the night of the opening.

Over the course of the subsequent month or so everyone took the time to respond to the space in their own way: Kelly Jazvac re-purposed the wallpaper, Parker Branch reduced and complicated the leather storage room, Brad Isaacs brought the olfactory to the old factory in the secondary stairwell, Tegan Moore interveined with the basement light fixtures, Patrick Howlett reiterated the custom shelving in a giant painting, Giles Whitaker and Chris Myhr animated the kitchen with a haunted electronics installation. All told thirty-six artists in all participated. A lot of the pieces spoke to and played off each other in their investment in site-specificity. Like me, Jenna Faye Powell couldn't help but further her work investigating corporate culture. Jenna's installation included fake plant sculptures and loose-leaf strewn on the floor: imaginary detritus from a hastily-abandoned office.

I accumulated, gathered, made and installed everything needed to open the corporate headquarters for Human Services Inc., setting the stage for Gillian Dykeman, C.E.O.. A giant unwieldy spider plant found its way onto my window ledge. My desk was huge, glossy and black with gold trim befitting the gravitas the C.E.O. sought to personify. I made posters, postcards, business cards, and magnets depicting the corporate messaging and identity of Human Services Inc. We're all about creative office space design and the integration of creativity in the workplace in order to streamline worker productivity, loyalty, and efficiency. The night of the No Boys With Frogs opening came, and Gillian Dykeman C.E.O. was ready with

her hot red pumps, power suit, and earnest pitches. Attendance was great; I ran out of business cards.

No Boys With Frogs beautifully hosted a survey of the exciting art and artists that call London, ON home. The work being produced here is always deeply committed to contemporary dialogue, plugged in to the broader art world, and yet enriched by our local context and art community. It is an exciting time to be making work in London, and the DNA Artspace contains a promise to contribute to and foster the vibrancy of this community.