



NEW ART INSTALLATION USES WALLPAPER TO BRING DERELICT SHOPS BACK FROM THE DEAD.

**NEWS**

## This store's a front GUERRILLA ARTISTS RESURRECT FADING FACADES OF LANDMARKS FELLED BY CRANES

BY PAUL TEREFEKNO

Walk down Lisgar south of Queen this week and you'll find an unassuming storefront. You might walk past without thinking much of it or even noticing it's there. Perhaps you just bought a condo next door and hope the place will disappear – for property value's sake.

Well, it doesn't matter, since the shop will be gone in a few weeks. Why? Because it's a fake, a facsimile. Walk inside and you enter a 4,000-square-foot warehouse converted into a ghost town of many lost storefronts by long-time guerrilla artists Dan Bergeron (aka fauxreel) and Gabriel Reese (aka Specter), the centrepiece of their City Renewal Project installation.

The object of this ambitious faux urban streetscape is memory. It's an attempt to document and mourn the landmarks fading rapidly before our eyes. And, yup, you guessed it – the exhibit takes place in a building being converted to condos.

"There's such a vast amount of transformation going on that I thought it was pertinent to do a show [about it]," explains Bergeron, whose postering work has been gracing the city for years in the form of subversive billboard manipulation and street art.

Remember the defaced Stella Artois billboard that became a Shell ad with its altered text "We pass the cost on to you"? Or the Zanta Christmas ad at Dufferin and Queen? Those were Bergeron's. Same for other madcap ad alterations like his Lobotomy advertisements and Donald Trump wedding proposals to Rosie O'Donnell.

Bergeron's been straddling the line between volunteer artistic subversive and corporate-financed official street artist for some time now.

In the spring, he took a controversial gig with Vespa, postering the city with its antler-head ads. Then, for his recent Luminato-paid installation, he affixed ghostly 30-foot-tall images of Regent Park residents on the buildings' walls.

For the Lisgar project, bankrolled by Red Bull's Gallery 381, he recreates storefronts demolished in the name of progress (often synonymous with "condos") with the help of the camera lens. The technique he's pioneered involves blowing up photos to life size and using them as wallpaper to reproduce the lost facades.

Collaborator Reese then recreates the original signage, inserting subtle commentary. Then they both add found objects: hydro meter cages, cabling and street furniture. Yes, even bus stops, billboards and phone booths from T.O.'s streetscape have been "freed" from imminent junking.

"It's about how the city is changing and how we take for granted what we're getting rid of. [People] don't notice these spots because they're decaying, but there's beauty in that decay," explains Bergeron.



ARTISTS USE FOUND OBJECTS TO ILLUSTRATE THE CITY'S CONDO INVASION

The exhibit expands on an earlier project where Reese converted derelict shop signage into his own public message boards. For instance, he adapted a flooring shop's sign to read "Gentrification – Since 1997." Christine's Place Restaurant became Christine's Livelihood Restaurant (a livelihood now up in smoke), and one store's sign just became "Homeless."

"Sometimes the messages are more direct and sometimes more subversive. Usually they're related to the structure of the neighbourhood or the state of the building. Sometimes it's personal – relating to what happened to the business owners," says Reese.

Sometimes it's just a stalker running on a sign on the soon-to-be-lofts opposite CAMH or some teeth in the entrance of a building. Ultimately, it's about pausing.

"Things are happening so fast, we want to encapsulate these moments in time," says Reese. "You create a relationship with these spaces, similar to the one with the person who may have lived around the corner and who used to eat at that restaurant or get their laundry done at that storefront."

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