

Trés Noire: the last of an endangered faeces



ART IN ACTION: Award-winning artist Trés Noire demonstrates his highly-acclaimed 'Banana and Yogurt.'

By RITCHIE CUNNINGHAM
(Now back from Greenland)

The winner of the 1987 Mavor Moore award for performance art, Trés Noire, was at the awards ceremony this week to explain his prize-winning work, 'Banana and Yogurt.' "I believe in theatre for the massive," explained Noire, "there are many people who are fat because they eat too much. 'Banana and Yogurt' is a message for them, and it is also a comment on the free trade issue as well as nuclear war."

Noire, who has his roots on Queen Street, is best known for his last work 'Shit on a Shingle,' which was produced 20 years ago. On July 27, 1967, Noire defecated on a shingle he had ripped from his mother's roof in a fit of rage. The 20-year-old Noire made his creation even more spectacular by performing the act at the corner of Bay and Bloor during rush hour. "I have taken many shits in my life," said Noire, "but I have only taken one shit on a shingle. There is a reason for this."

Trés Noire is a fighter. Even from his beginnings Noire has battled conventional and established norms in the artistic world. His greatest battle has been against the idea that if a person is to be considered an artist that they must consistently produce works of art. 'Banana and Yogurt' is the first piece of work that Trés Noire has produced since 1967.

His beliefs would not allow him to

create during this 20-year interim. "That would be conforming," exclaimed Noire, "and I will never do that, never. What would they say at the 'By the Way Café.'"

Noire worked as cook at the 'By the Way' for five years before emerging as one of Canada's premiere performance artists. It was there that he discovered socialism. Noire says that both of his works reflect his Marxist philosophy. He is tired of the more peaceful, half-hearted attempts at social change made by less militant socialists. Said Noire, "There are a lot of people out there who don't think the way I do. It is my duty to do them the service of making them believe what I think is right. Yes it's a weighty responsibility, but if I must, I must."

'Banana and Yogurt' was inspired by a vision Noire had while masturbating in a public washroom at Wilson Station. As he manipulated himself, it occurred to Noire that he had eaten neither a banana nor a yogurt on that day. Suddenly, an enormous banana appeared to Noire. It began scolding a pregnant cow which was watching 'Three's Company' reruns while knitting sweaters for the now folded Montreal Allouettes.

According to Noire, the bridge between 'Life' and 'Banana and Yogurt' lies in the fact that bananas and Yogurt are not threatening to humanlife when used conventionally, but when used in unorthodox ways they can be harmful to human

life. "Like nuclear bombs," explained Noire, "if I shove a whole banana down your throat with the peel on, you may die. Similarly if there is a nuclear war you stand a good chance of getting hurt."

Trés Noire is concerned with nuclear arms issues. Says Noire, "I was the first person to be concerned with nuclear war, and to listen to U2."

Noire is closely linked with a Toronto-based group, started in Los Angeles, People for the Disarmament of Nuclear Whales (PDNW). PDNW fight the battle against the arming of Baltic Sea Blue whales with sea to land missiles. According to PDNW, these whales are rigged up with enough explosives to destroy an entire suburb in Kiev. Noire dismisses suggestions that this would be too costly for the American government, and not possible scientifically. "Of course they are going to deny it," shouts Noire. "Do you believe everything you read! Right now as we speak our fellow mammals are bearing the burden of our destruction."

Trés Noire says that an even greater problem than nuclear war is the sanctity of artists. He explains that because artists must make money in order to live, they have three major constraints placed upon them that prevent them from making true art. The three constraints according to Noire are 1) The pressure to produce art. 2) Pressure to involve the general public in the viewing of art. 3) The general public being too stupid to understand 'true art.' "Most people have never seen any of my work," Noire exclaimed. "How the hell would they know what 'true art' looks like?"

Close friend Voidance Dejection, Queen Street singer/writer/songstress/poet/dancer, clarifies the distinction between Noire, herself, and 'commercial sellout pigs.' "In a world of cosmic turbulence it is the muse that is the true voice of the creator, and therefore closest to the creator. Our brothers and sisters, the public, are lost in a sea of television and kinetic confusion. Art cannot serve these lost souls, it must matter to the artist alone. The mark of a bad artist is popularity among the masses."

"This is my movement!" shouted

Trés Noire seconds after he had created 'Shit on a Shingle' on that busy downtown intersection. Although he has aged and gained financial affluence through investments made in the stockmarket in 1986, Trés Noire is the same man. Noire defends the contradictions between his political beliefs and personal wealth. "In order to fight capitalism you need money, lots of it. You must look like a capitalist, and you must act like one. You must eat in their restaurants, and buy their clothes in order to infiltrate their system. That is why I drive a Porsche. I resent people who call me a champagne socialist, and I hope they all die."

Trés Noire sits stoically behind his fifth cup of coffee, and inhales deeply on a Camel, his eyes lit up

with fire and determination. His eyes lift up, and scan the environment of the York campus he is visiting. "You've got a nice campus here," Noire whispers in a soft voice. "Very pretty." In a moment of inspiration, Noire's face contorts painfully, his hands shake, and sweat bleeds from his facial pores. "And yet," he adds, "I feel sad. So much beauty, and yet so much of the world is without beauty. It would be nice if, even for a day, all the world could be as beautiful as this."

When can we expect Noire's next work? "Twenty or 30 years," he answers. For Trés Noire there are new roads to follow. "I enjoy being creative but what I would really like to do is teach. I've paid my dues, and now it's time to share what I've learned with others."



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