

VANCOUVER IS AWESOME

The Opening: Sean Weisgerber of 304 Days

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Like every other emerging artist in Vancouver, **Sean Weisgerber** has noticed and lamented the lack of spaces for artists to show and build experience here. Unlike other emerging artists, he has been successful, if temporarily, in trying to do something about it. Weisgerber is the brains (and brawn) behind **304 Days** on 436 Columbia St, an artist-run gallery space in Chinatown open for only 304 days.

Not only is it a gallery space, but 304 Days is also Weisgerber's home. That was always his vision in the years he was looking for an appropriate venue. He began looking before he even graduated from Emily Carr in 2009, but it was difficult to find a commercial space that he could also live in, or that someone would guarantee would be okay for the duration of the lease. As he puts it, "it's sketchy when you're applying for a lease that's three years long and they could at any moment say you're not allowed to live there anymore!" Eventually he gave up and focused on other things, moving to Calgary for a while and working long hours in commercial property.

Until one day he got a call from Maysa Kaczowski, the Director of Shudder Gallery at 433 Columbia. The space across the street from Shudder had come up for lease. She knew he had been interested in a gallery space similar to her own, and she knew the previous tenants of 436 (across the street) had been living there while operating a shop. So Weisgerber called the owners of 436 right away, put up some of the cash he had saved in Calgary as a deposit, and came back to Vancouver to begin renovations.



Jasmine Reimer 'Slump' from October 16-November 6, 2010

Luckily, his work in commercial property in Calgary really came in handy in the transformation of the space. He took out some unnecessary plumbing and made electrical upgrades. Like any renovation, there were unanticipated bits of work resulting from aesthetic upgrades – taking out a cupboard revealed a hole in the floor, necessitating the replacement of some of the planks in the floor. He has also had to make some sacrifices while living in the space, like showering in a utility sink; he chuckles when I bring that up: “Everyday when I go in there I just laugh for a little bit because it is hilarious.” In reality, showering in a utility sink was a cheaper alternative to adding a raised shower to accommodate major plumbing that he couldn’t change, according to his lease.

So that’s how 304 Days came together physically. In terms of what would be shown, how to choose? Weisgerber initiated a submission process. He wanted the focus to be on solo shows as much as possible, with interspersed group shows. Any artist would have to be an honest person; deeply conceptual or not, their work couldn’t feel contrived. In the end, “there’s no real formula, it’s more or less a gut feeling, whether I trust that that person is going to come through.” He is quick to note that he doesn’t purport to be a curator, having too much

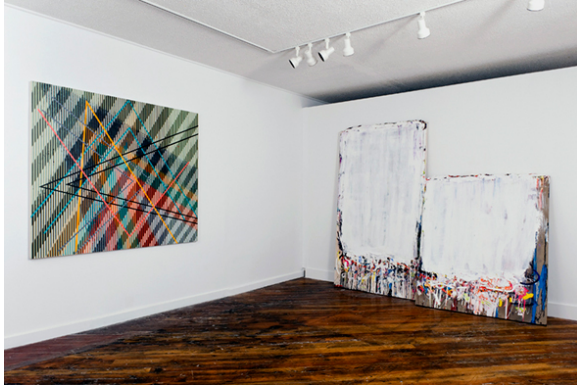
respect for the kind of study and work most curators do before they legitimately become one themselves.



Adam Gandy 'Famous Last Words – An Exhibition in Two Parts – Act Two: Too Late For Fruit, Too Soon For Flowers' from February 5-19, 2011

So I suppose you could say that Weisgerber is an artist facilitating other artists. The guy really doesn't sleep much, spending four days-a-week crating at Denbigh Fine Art Services, putting approximately 40 hours a week into 304 Days, and still managing to make his own art, somewhere in there. Part of the space also includes a studio for his multi-disciplinary production, from painting to collage to light boxes. At first he wasn't sure that 304 Days was a part of that practice, but now he really feels it is. He feels that art can be a narcissistic thing, and the gallery provides him a bit of balance and a way to give back.

Like anything, there are great advantages and disadvantages to the entire endeavor. He certainly hasn't created as much of his own work as he would like in the last year. The model he chose was expensive also; he could have gotten grants but that method seemed to be failing everyone around town, so what was the point? The advantages seem to far outweigh those comparatively trivial things though – he has found great satisfaction in giving others a place to have their first solo show or their tenth solo show; basically, a place to share their hard work and passion with the city they live in. He loves having created a place where people can see and talk about art, and also interviewing the exhibiting artists and listening to what they have to say. As he puts it, “an intimate grounds for art-making and art-looking.”



Andrew Dadson & Jonathan Syme 'Orbiculus' from February 26 – March 19, 2011. Photo: Scott Massey

So would Weisgerber do it again? He has been asked to collaborate on similar spaces, but feels that too many directors and leaders would dilute the possibilities of any given space. If anything, he'd like to be involved in any way he can for someone doing a similar space – donating any extra money he has at the end of each month, labour, anything, "All I care about is art," and he would happily give any way he could.

"Western Eyes: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly; or Fetish?" with Jen Aiken, Ryan Amadore, and Jeremy Green is on until April 16. The final show, with Matthew Brown is from April 30-May 14. Weisgerber is also planning a final catalogue release on April 30 featuring artist interviews and new writing about some of the 304 Days exhibitions. More information is available at 304days.com.