

**MILE END MAPPING – A map with back alleys**  
**by Edith Brunette**

On a warm Saturday afternoon in September, we sit in articule’s storefront window surrounded in coloured stamps and ink pads, and trace our paths across the neighbourhood on large and small maps with no names and no streets. Passers-by with the sun in their eyes stop to look; some come in, some stay to chat. Coco, the centre’s Outreach Coordinator, tells me about the origins of this re-mapping of “arty” Mile End by those in the know and shows me the previous year’s Mile End Art Map, a sober quadrille of blue and green streets, punctuated with circles and stars to indicate places that represent the neighbourhood’s artistic life. Coco’s own initial question on first seeing it had been, “where are the alleys?” And then, “why does this artist-run centre, that gallery, or this shop get a white circle, and not this other place, for example, where kids’ drawing workshops are held?” In short, where is the very essence of what makes a neighbourhood – one that is organic, lived in, invested in – and where is the art?

We began talking about the art that isn’t shown. Queer art, activist art, art by immigrants, by minorities in general. Art that has its enclaves, preferably on the periphery, private, elsewhere. Sometimes these enclaves are huge, spectacular even – an exhibition on contemporary Chinese art at the Museum of Fine Arts, for example. Prestigious exhibitions that group artists together according to their country, sex, or social class, reducing the depth and breadth of an artist’s work to its simplest, most obvious aspect, material for new “exotica” at \$15 a ticket. And while this same museum, an accepted temple of high art, unashamedly expands to include the worlds of fashion, design, popular music, or cinema, numerous artists, patrons, and critics make sure to exclude from their vocabulary and their practices anything relating to folk art, community, social activism, or politics even.

How has art come to be defined in this way, whereby certain places appear on the Mile End Art Map while others don’t, and why? How can it be redefined, and what about art’s audience: who is it, who is being excluded, and where are they? In the back alleys, perhaps. They surely don’t consult the map of Mile End artist-run centres even if they happen to live there. No doubt they don’t frequent them either, though these centres are intended to be places for local people to come together in their own communities, away from museum elitism.

We live in an era of “democratized art” but it would be more accurate to say that it is the “cultural experience” that has been democratized. Such democratization often means a broadening of the definition of culture, to include things such as stampedes, the Olympic Torch relay, and any event that can fill a large public space where security is tight and cheap beer is sold at \$6 a cup. In a climate where democracy has been confused with populism, the notion of art has fast become diluted into very sellable cultural events of this kind – political cure-alls that obscure the still-existent problem of art’s democratization. The problem remains, and is perpetuated by new requirements made by funding agencies and limitations imposed by faceless entities – by individuals high up in the art world hierarchy, in a bright and nebulous cluster of stars, by boards of directors for museums and biennales, by all-powerful galleries and reigning critics. As Coco points out, the vast majority of these people are rich white males. Their interests are at least as economic and political as they are artistic, but even the most idealistic artists with no agenda soon come to understand where their

interests lie and what is expected of them. More often than not, they conform. Today, limitations imposed from on high are no longer to do with form (any is permitted) nor with location (again, all are allowed); they are to do with artistic disciplines. I thought I had come up against some resistance when I tried broaching the subject of politics in art, but try initiating discourse about community art or art that is produced by non-artists, and not just visited, decorated or “coloured in” by them!

Politics is inextricable from art. And art can absorb, and reabsorb, conflict in its own space-time. It is that which escapes art that causes fear: community, activism, and folk art are perhaps too likely to raise immediate questions about the here and now, to touch upon everyday society and economics and the way they are structured. Even questions about art world elitism and its relationship with the public are taboo. Issues surrounding the author as producer are far from resolved and interventions in public spaces are not going to change anything. The exclusion exists elsewhere: it persists in the ways in which artists organize themselves both with one another and with the outside world.

And so we arrive back at the inevitable question: how can the public actively participate in the contemporary art world, not only in the reception of art, but in its production, in its pleasures, and in its freedom? Charlotte, a young urban planner who also came along to play with ink stamps, took the question a step further: how can citizens become involved in the political process, in debates and discussions? In short, how can we blur the lines in a compartmentalized world and foster communication that runs in all directions and not just from the top down? How can we make a map comprised of little rectangles and the usual reference points more mutable so that it reflects real life and doesn't just refer to a list of establishments recognized by ministries?

Translated from French by Sarah Knight

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This text is part of a writing series by members of the gallery, reflecting on the works, research and projects presented during article's 2011-2012 programming season. Edith Brunette's text has been produced for the project *Mile End Mapping* presented at article from September to October 2011, and is also available as a pdf on the gallery's website.

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