

NETHERMIND

Tom Dean John Dickson Catherine Heard Greg Hefford
Mary Catherine Newcomb Reinhard Reitzenstein Lyla Rye Max Streicher

Mirabilia **St. Anne's Church, Toronto** **Oct 14-20, 2012**

NetherMind's four exhibitions between 1991 and 1995 took place during hard times. The economy was terrible in those years. Friends lost their jobs, some lost their homes. Just two years after the burst of optimism that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Gulf War had been declared. During the winter of 1991 I watched, on my little black and white TV, the nightly images of guided missiles hitting their targets. In the southern hemisphere a hole in the ozone layer was reported to be growing ever larger. Daily there were reminders that there seemed to be no end in sight to the AIDS epidemic.

Visual Art, what I had studied, began to have no taste in my mouth. I was distracted, bored, my attention began to drift as I searched for something more emotionally resonant. Critical theory, which had at one time seemed to explain so much about art, began to explain nothing at all. For a time I was consumed by opera, its artifice being an escape from an unpleasant reality, its high emotional register and stories of tragically wasted youth beginning to make sense to me for the first time. I wanted to feel something and it did the trick.

In 1993 I saw my first NetherMind exhibition. I remember the entrance down the narrow the old staircase to the basement of the Liberty Street building, the low lighting, the warren of connecting rooms and the trepidation followed by surprise around each dark corner. Today, with site specific extravaganzas like Nuit Blanche it's easy to forget how much artists and audiences used to rely on the convention of the empty white gallery space as a frame for art work. When one stepped across the threshold into the white space, one's senses became heightened and the entire visible field was understood as meaningful. But the "white cubes" also began to signify sterility, preciousness and a predictable convention. NetherMind made no effort to emulate the cube or "tart up" the rough, warehouse basement with a coat of paint. They embraced the gloom.

Some would call it making a virtue out of a necessity, and it was that too. Nobody was opening a new commercial gallery in Toronto in those days and the major contemporary art galleries – Isaacs, Carmen Lamanna and S.L. Simpson – galleries that had historically supported new art in Toronto, were closing or thinking about it. For artists relatively fresh out of school it was pretty much a question of do-it-yourself: form an artists' collective, rent a space, install a show and print the invitations.

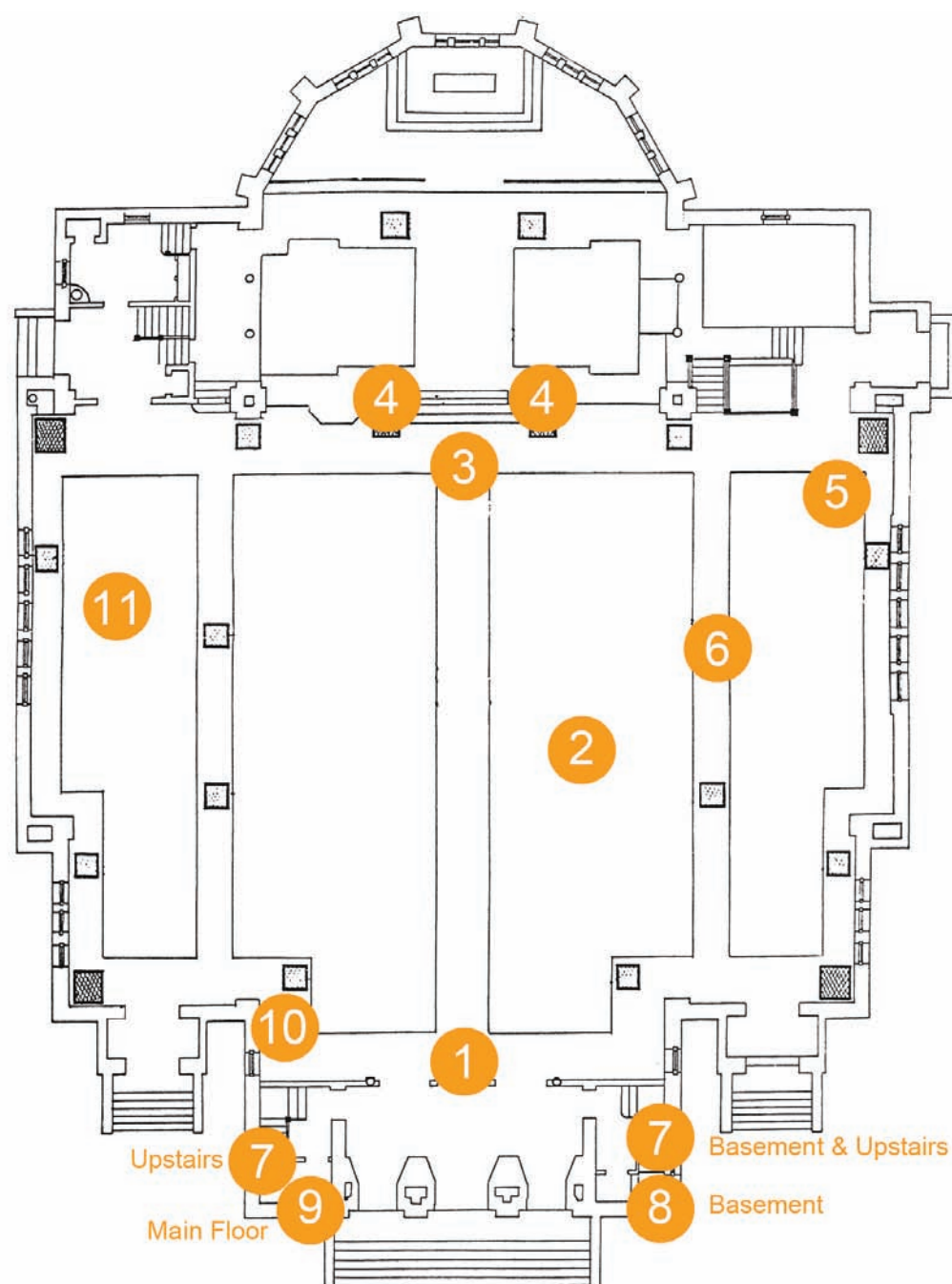
Canadian art of the 1990s was dominated by artist collectives. Artists gathered into groups loosely defined by the art schools they had attended or their perceived shared interests. In 1990 Lyla Rye and John Dickson, both recent graduates of the York University Fine Art program, began to talk about forming a collective. Among those that they invited to participate was fellow York alumnus Max (Larry) Streicher. They invited Tom Dean and Reinhard Reitzenstein, established artists, who been active and exhibiting work since the 1970s. Other core members of the 1989/90 graduating cohort were Greg Hefford (joined 1992) and Mary Catherine Newcomb (joined 1993) from York, and Catherine Heard, from the Ontario College of Art and Design (joined 1993).¹

What united these artists was a sculptural sensibility that engaged the emotions. The art in NetherMind exhibitions had punch – you felt it directly, in the pit of your stomach. There developed a carnival sideshow character to the exhibitions, as though the viewers were being invited to step up and explore their own morbid curiosities, their fears, their secret delights. These exhibitions caused sensations – they were sensations. They caused me feel things and to reflect on my own reactions. What did I feel? Why did I feel this? Why did I react this way?

The NetherMind exhibitions and the subsequent careers of the members of the collective changed my expectations of what an exhibition of art could or should be. They helped me make it through a dark patch. I can't imagine Canadian art without the them.

¹ Other artists exhibiting with NetherMind were Miki McCarty (1991-93), Carl Skelton (1993-95), Anastasia Tzekas (1991-95), Manrico Venere (1991).

MIRABILIA



- 1 Tom Dean
- 2 Mary Catherine Newcomb
- 3 Tom Dean
- 4 Catherine Heard
- 5 Max Streicher & Garnet Willis
- 6 Greg Hefford
- 7 John Dickson
- 8 Max Streicher
- 9 Reinhard Reitzenstein
- 10 Greg Hefford
- 11 Lyla Rye

- The Ten Commandments* 1999 layered etched glass
- Osiris' Advance (10,000 Soldiers)* 2012 wheat installation
- Mercy Benches* 2009 wood with text
- Votive* 2012 gilded busts
- Tree Organ* 2012 inflatable sound installation
- The Farmhouse* 2012 video installation
- Diptych* 2012 live feed video - upstairs & basement
- Quadriga* 2007 inflatable installation - basement
- Hanna's Cabinet* 2012 olfactory installation
- The Story* 2012 digital photo
- Sanctuary* 2012 tarpaulin installation - please sit inside