

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

DTLAB: Bit of Perspective

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, August 27th, 2014

I am in Pittsburgh this week, helping Judeth settle into her new apartment in Pittsburgh (in a neighborhood called Squirrel Hill) during her first week of school. It's nice here. She has nothing in her apartment yet, save for a futon mattress on the floor that we've been sleeping on.

The apartment is really nice and the neighborhood too. She was worried that it was too quiet and too neighborhood-like, meaning there wasn't a bar within walking distance. But we found one! Right by the bus stop! And I saw that it was open by noon! So there.



where Judeth will be creating magic

I've been walking around the Carnegie Mellon campus, going inside buildings like the gorgeous Fine Arts building, in which I sat for a while and listened to opera students practicing their arias. I also got a chance to sit in on a thesis defense by a 5th (6th?) year PhD candidate in the department that Judeth will be working. It was interesting, gave me a lot to think about.

Being away for a few days from the ongoing DTLAB has really given me perspective on things—our summer, the #90for90 project, on community, on publishing, on the arts, on disruption, on people.

I think back on the night before I left for Pittsburgh. This past Saturday (August 23rd), DTLAB hosted Dirty Laundry Lit. As you may remember, Writ Large Press has already been involved with DLL before so it was a true pleasure to schedule them into our August line-up. We all knew it would be a great show even before Natasha Deón told me the readers she'd put together—



my reaction to Natasha's email telling me the DLL at DTLAB line-up

Jillian Lauren, Claire Bidwell Smith, Charles W. Hamilton, Kate Maruyama, Denise McIver, Stephanie Janis, Fredericka Meek. And Natasha Deón, who was not only going to curate, but read.

But what transpired was more. Much more.

It wasn't just a packed house. It was a packed house plus 60–70 people standing *outside* the bar for the entire event, listening to each reader with such focus and joy. In fact, it felt like we were having a big old party inside Union Station.



the overflowing crowd at DTLAB during Dirty Laundry Lit: Dangerous Women

And that wasn't even what impressed me the most.

Going back to WLP's initial involvement with DLL, [we came together because Natashia and I shared a mission](#), that being to find a way to bring diversity to literary events. Not just in putting together a diverse group of *readers*, although that needs help too, but to find a way to bring together a diverse *audience*, which has been a whole different and more elusive challenge. I mean, I've been to Literary Death Match events where, in a room of a 150 people, I could count the people of color in one damn hand.

Well, on Saturday night, it felt like the year or thereabouts that DLL and WLP have been loosely working together paid off. It's as mixed an audience I've ever seen at a literary event.

That is what we are doing.

Of course, most of the credit has to go to the great Natashia Deón, who opens her heart up without sacrificing her focus and vision, and whose approach to putting together a group of writers is unlike any I've come across (she and Zöe Ruiz and Naomi Hirahara are three of my current favorite curators). I've also been always impressed at how Michelle Meyering of PEN USA (and editor of Rattling Wall) supports Natashia and DLL. Between those two (and the genius host that is Jeff Eyres), it's no wonder Dirty Laundry Lit packed the house on Saturday night.

So I was saying—perspective. Yeah.

I am for once not afraid to say that the work that Jessica Ceballos and Peter Woods (HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PETER!) and Judeth Oden Choi and I have been doing over the summer with #90for90, even if it doesn't seem that way because we're always having such a good time with it, is not only historic, but *revolutionary*.

To say, no matter what is happening in the world, in our lives, there will be a point in each and every day where we will present art and whether it's a hundred people or one person who shows up, we will be there.

This is not just about tooting our own horns because what we understand, and what I'm becoming clearer about being out here at CMU, is that we can be revolutionary *only* because we are part of a bigger thing: our community.

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