Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Trying to Measure Success

Chiwan Choi · Thursday, October 25th, 2012

Today I have these two things in my mind:
• Saturday night's Writ Large Press book release event was a huge success.
• So what?

***

On Saturday night, the event we've been planning for since even before the summer began finally happened. It was the night we released our fifth title, *History of Butoh*, the debut poetry collection from poet/activist/dancer Khadija Anderson. It was held at Billy's Coffee Shop, an old community space on the edge of skid row that has long stopped being a coffee shop. It's a space used for comedy nights and AA meetings and crazy shows with pop-guns and jazz sessions. So of course, it was the perfect location for us.

The night was everything we'd hoped it would be, a poetry event like none other I've seen. Khadija read from her book in two short sets that bracketed an electric Butoh performance by Yuki Hayashi Hammel and Todd Ivers. I think it's safe to say that most people in the audience had never seen a live Butoh performances. It was definitely my first time. Between the dancing and the poetry and the exhibit of the woodcut prints by Melora Walters that we'd set up in the lounge area, the night was a perfect balance.
From a publisher's standpoint, these are the things we were happy about, happy enough that we could call night successful.
• The author seemed very happy. We haven't had a chance to sit down with her and debrief yet, but all evidence seems to point to a satisfied writer.
• We sold as many books as we'd anticipated. In addition, Melora sold some of her artwork.
• Phantom Street Artist came out to take photos and document the event. If you don't know Phantom, he's most famous for this Rage Against the Machine record cover. And if you've been in LA for any amount of time, I'm sure you've seen his graffiti around.
• Everything we'd planned for the event – the books, the art, the dancers, the DJ – went smoothly. In addition, one thing that didn't happen is that we didn't have to use the secret escape route for the cashbox in case, I don't know, police and/or fire marshall had raided us and found what one may call not-so-legal activities going on.

• People from the neighborhood showed up to support us and the book. This is essential to us – to be a literary press that connects to the community around us and not just to colleagues or specific alumni or specific ethnic groups or academic elites. One of our main goals from day one was to become part of the fabric of our city. We are succeeding in this.
• This may be the most important thing – we felt completely confident of our ability to put together unique events for our authors that put the spotlight not only on their books, but who they are as artists, while at the same time continuing to build our own reputation as a small press that pushes the boundaries of what a small press should be.
So there you have it. Saturday was definitely a great day. Unfortunately, it is no longer Saturday.

***

A new week has begun. We are all recovering from the hard work and hard celebrating. And the question I've been asking myself today is – So what?
So what if we had a great event? It is done and gone now. It is part of our past. So what? We have a new deadline right up against our butts and the same stress creeping in. Do we have enough time? Should we postpone? Are there corners we can cut? Can we afford to release books in consecutive months? Who's going to wash all these dirty dishes in the sink?
This is a challenging week. We have to make quick decisions on what we're going to do with the book we're due to put out next month, Billy Burgos's *Eulogy to an Unknown Tree.* And we have to make decisions not based on euphoria or fatigue or anxiety. It's tough to do this though when we each have to get our minds and bodies tuned back to our day job, the cold reality on us that Saturday night didn't make anybody rich enough to abandon our paid jobs. Making sales calls and teaching classes and hustling from gig to gig to make rent.
We will have to sit down in the next day or two and find a way to meet our goals or accept that we'll have to adjust them.
This is a rough week. Some messed up combination of feeling ready to take on the world and being terrified that we have a built up a momentum we might not be able to sustain.
Stay tuned…
Photos by Phantom Street Artist

This entry was posted on Thursday, October 25th, 2012 at 3:30 am and is filed under Fiction
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.