



This is what a quarter-life crisis looks like.



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SOCIETY

The Power Ball, an art party in crisis

Angst reigns as The Power Plant's annual art jam celebrates its 25th birthday.

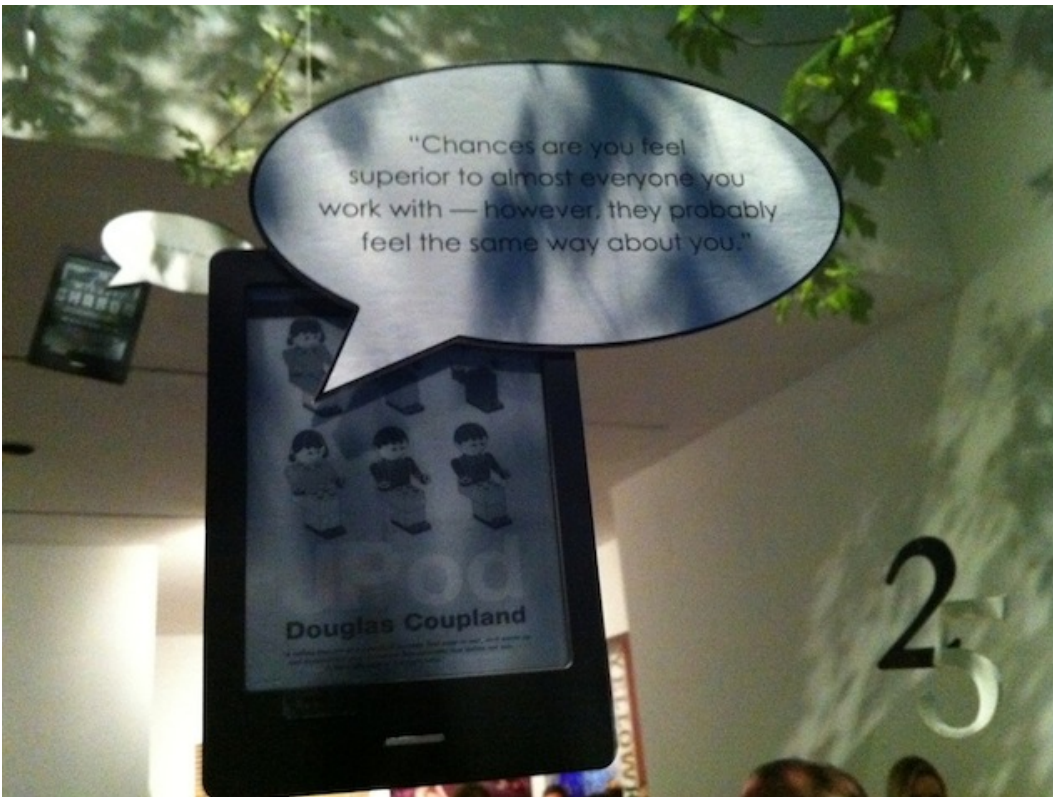
BY: PAUL AGUIRRE-LIVINGSTON

"Tiers within tiers," said an artist friend who looked as happy as a pig in shit with free wine and meat on a stick during last night's Power Ball. The annual fundraiser for The Power Plant gallery is like nothing I can bother to compare it to—it's *that* singular and hyped. Perched lakeside off Queens Quay, the space is a hub for (the most elite of) Canada's contemporary art scene, and currently in the midst of running celebrations for its silver milestone. What I'd been trying to stop dreading in the name of fun was the physical reaction that this year's Power Ball theme—"Quarter-Life Crisis"—might induce. Like I'd have to watch the whole thing through fingers pressed ever so slightly against my face to catch my eyes should they decide to pop out of my head and leave without me.



In the main hall, surrounded by animations from *Jesi the Elder*, the bar sits under an altar of roses. When I remark how gorgeous it is, how I want to cut them all and place them in everyone's hair, I'm reminded that it's supposed to be "edgy, not pretty," and I laugh because it's probably as daring as Lana Del Rey's stylist at a photo shoot for *Nylon*. Pretty, sure, because there's not a thorn in sight. All the dudes look the same; confused, excited, in suits. Girls are playing Street Style Olympics. Do you think they found god in the flashbulbs of those pretty cameras?

There's a giant tree across from the beds of roses, with a sole swing hanging down like a recreation of 12-year-old girl's dreamiest dream. I wonder if it's the Garden of Eden. It's meant to represent the anxieties of quarter-life as reflected in literature. Sponsored by Kobo. E-readers are strung from branches alongside thought bubbles containing quotes from novels penned by Douglas Coupland et al. In the background, *Jesi's* animations are playing on loop. One of them features a girl who shoves a sword down her throat and retracts her heart, only to stab herself with it like Juliet after she lost the one thing she ever cared about. (Perhaps in this case, it's her childhood.) And a remix of The Fugees is playing in the background, as I think about how badly I want to read that sole Tumblr entry from Lauryn Hill as a spoken word piece right here, right now.



Instead, I get lost to Sarah Febbraro's installation "Future Talk," "a new reality/talk show that will be a platform for partygoers to publicly probe their anxieties about the future and how their lives may or may not have shaped up to what they imagined when they were 25." There's a robot rapping, "Lower your expectations" during the unscripted segment I walk in on. And instead of Paul Schaffer, Febbraro is backed by an Ali G. look-a-like. I decide she reminds me of Whitney Cummings.

"Are you an artist?" Febbraro asks the next "guest," a boy.

"I'm trying," he laughs. "But no one cares about what I do yet."

"Did you go to school?"

"I studied photography at Ryerson. I could live a hole and make my art and no one would care."

He's 25 years old. And all the neurosis on display makes me cover my face. All the non-20-somethings seem to be enjoying this public display of depression the most because, well, hah, it's not *their* hell. Tonight's Power Ball aims "to animate the most joyful and tumultuous aspects of turning 25... [to] capture the spirit of life at a turning point and encapsulate the naivety and reality of life in its first quarter century." I want to say it feels like a stretch. Maybe 15 per cent—*maybe*—of the people here are within a year of quarter-life. I am one of them. The idea of a "crisis" feels like an excuse that only a few people can afford (like how "eccentric" is reserved for the rich). Unless there's now just a general crisis and mid-life means nothing more than excuse to buy a Porsche or bang your secretary because—ahh!—your life is too self-complicated and controlled by consumerism. (We're all probably headed there anyway, on credit.) It's like, yeah, you know, there are real problems facing our future generations and youth right now, but there's this chick in a velvet dress that must be stoned because she's ruthlessly eating meat off a bone—Chef Marc Thuet is back this year spit-roasting a bison—like it's a KFC drumstick. Everything is probably right with the world. (Or am I really that self-involved for thinking that being 25 in 1998 was probably "easier" than it is to be 25 in right now.)



It's only 11:30 p.m., but I feel like I've been 25 for 25 more years, probably because I just returned from Febbraro's un-friendly future that might as well be *Prometheus*. I'm pulled outside by my favourite pocket philosopher professor—Air! Reality!—and end up in a bison-adjacent corner with that questionably familiar smell of another type of green and piñatas hanging down in the shapes of unicorns and Elmo. Eventually they're all ripped open and candy crashes onto the floor. Oh no, we've made a mess. "I could walk around with a unicorn with its head torn off, or hanging down—that's very 'quarter-life'," I say. Oh wait—was this...art? *Run*.

The art at this year's Power Ball really did seem to be the best yet. The most thoughtful. The most interesting. The most ignored or un-got. The sanest was Marisa Hoicka, a rising star fresh off projects at MOCCA who is just about as young as I am. Her theme within the theme was escapism. (For me, that's literature, but, well...see the Kobo tree.) Hoicka closed herself off in a room where you could only interact with her via buzzers or doorbells or something only she could hear to let her know what to do: read, come to the window, eat, dance, etc. "Select my method of escape," she asks you. But there is no escape from reality.



In the adjacent room, I end up in dance pit of surrounded by day-glo cones. Maybe this is the escape route. Just don't look up. Philippe Blanchard is responsible for this wonderful madness that actually looks the way my head feels. Shades of blue, red, green. (No grey.) He's created "multi-colored (RGB) prints lit by LED strobe lights, the effect is akin to 'walking through an animated GIF.'" Expanded animation is what they called it. (I hope they ask *Sheroes* pro Lorna Mills to participate next year.) Zoe, a Drake Hotel marketing gal, has neon polish that I want to roll around in. There's a guy wearing a tank top that says, "Not a t-shirt." And there's Rick Mercer. Are those dudes actually voguing to Chris Brown? Did someone actually play that Madonna/M.I.A./Nicki Minaj song? Still, local Diego Armand can do no wrong on the decks, and besides, I think that's L.A.'s DJ Alex Merrell—who spins for Taio Cruz and is, I guess, tonight's headliner—fucking up my song.

Through the gallery's Clerestory, on route to the actual escape exit, Jesse Harris created a series of text-based banners of "adolescent desires": Intercourse the system, my parents had no children, reality chews." I trip on a death trap of dinner forks that have been mangled and shape-shifted by a drag queen and her troupes. One of them catches me: "Be careful, it's a dangerous world out there."

Are we supposed to be in on the joke? Who cares. It was so much fucking fun.

TAGS art, Power Ball, Quarter-Life Crisis, The Power Plant

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Gotta say...

All the other papers posted pictures of people I don't care about and this actually talked about the art. Crisis indeed when even partygoers miss the point

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10:02 pm on June 15, 2012

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