

The Electronic Wake

it's all of us



ART AS A LIVING SPACE



Situated on Montreal's renowned Sainte Catherine Street is the Parc de l'Espoir - Quebec's monument to the memory of those who have died of AIDS. This summer, as part of the Parc's legacy, the Electronic Wake presents a sculptural multimedia installation that offers members of the public an opportunity to view and record video testimonials about what it means to live in an era of HIV/AIDS. The visual impact of the installation, with its unique 'wild flowers' constructed from recycled shoes, is but a small part of the Electronic Wake's living legacy. Playing within the heart of the 12 flowers are the testimonials of an entire community affected by HIV/AIDS. These videos are our inheritance - contributed by artists, speakers, and volunteers wanting to start a new dialogue and create a new understanding of the pandemic. The Electronic Wake is the moment when actual personal experience is recorded; it is the moment when we pay homage to those we have lost; and it is the moment when we can affirm and share our own lives and concern with a larger community.



The Electronic Wake is an artistic and social reaction chamber which explores current perceptions of HIV/AIDS, and supports a process of reflection for all populations affected, infected, or at risk for the disease. At the heart of this initiative is the empathetic motor of our machine, something we call "collective intimacy." Staying true to the concept of reflection, collective intimacy encourages understanding and a concern for others; it supports a feeling of belonging and engagement with the larger community – everyone has something to contribute to and learn from the community.

As treatment efficacy increases and media attention dwindles, HIV has disappeared from the national consciousness. Even though we would like to forget, problems arise in trying to push the issue away. In fact, this reflex, increases stigmatization and fosters secrecy and ignorance, and undermines prevention efforts. The Electronic Wake endeavours to remain engaged with and dedicated to the cause of sharing the community's experience as HIV continues to have an impact on individuals and society as a whole, especially with rates of youth infection on the rise. Now is not the time to be silent.



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What is the contemporary reality of HIV positive and negative individuals? The Electronic Wake allows everyone the opportunity to express the dismay, fears and hopes that we so often keep silent. By opening up a channel of discussion, we want to support unconscious realizations about the phenomena of rejection, exclusion/inclusion and the negation of reality as it currently exists. The Electronic Wake provides a space where the public can explore and reflect upon the ways HIV/AIDS impacts everyday life, regardless of proximity to the disease. Given the strong commitment shown by our 2008 contributors, we believe that this project can make an innovative contribution – however modest – in achieving progress on multiple levels. Our hope is to enhance awareness of self-image, identity and belonging. Through art, we hope to live better and thrive together.

Visual Art + Media Art + Outsider Art = Citizen Art

2008 Edition:

- 12 sculptures: metal, worn plastics, shoes, vinyl, DVD
- 84 testimonials; 1484 total minutes (in 2008)
- 30 days of expo-intervention during the summer
- 47 volunteers
- 1925 hours of volunteer help
- 17 community agencies
- 21 partners from the business community
- 4649 visitors (counted during the last 23 days only)
- Innumerable hours of listening and reflection
- Reaffirmation of the legacy of a commemorative park

Projects Under Development:

- **4th edition of The Electronic Wake in the Parc de l'Espoir** (June 18 to September 6, 2009)
- **InterKom:** partnership to bring the project within community organizations and meeting places
- **Dynamic Website** allowing users to view and manage their testimonials, send and receive messages, other interactivity
- **Listening stations:** adapted modules for special locations
- **Dynamic digital mausoleum** in the Parc de l'Espoir, a monumental fresco. Living respect to the memory of those lost. Citizen interaction over the Web
- **Select events:** participation in various activities
- **Others**



Artist-Coordinator: Louis Dionne is an artist committed to social change through innovative approaches to communication: “dynamic community art”. He has initiated numerous socially oriented projects in the spirit of The Electronic Wake, and has volunteered his expertise to projects dealing with HIV, cancer, palliative care, and many others. Shunning the media spotlight, he prefers to work under the radar, reaching out to the collective unconscious and acting as an alchemist of the social factor and intimacy in art. Some of his films – including “*Comment vous dirais-je?*” nominee for best video at rendez-vous du cinéma québécois, “*Le bain de M. Soleil*”, “*Le Sida n’est pas une maladie honteuse, n’est-ce pas?*” -- have been well received at festivals around the world. During the past few years, he has been working on the project “*Derrière la fenêtre*” with support from the Canada Council for the Arts.