

Bringing in the Spring the Five Funerals Way

By Chicago Art Magazine on May 11, 2011

Carrie McGath

“Five Funerals is a series of solemn celebrations that will memorialize five cultural ideas and give them the fanfare they deserve.” But even after a visitor to the website sees this, the mission of all of this is still a bit ominous, as if seen through the sheer black veil of a widow in mourning.

The Five Funerals and all that it mourns is the conception of Jason Dunda and Teena McClelland, also known as The Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators. I asked Dunda what “pentaphilic” meant and he explained that “in the spirit of artspeak, we invented that word: ‘pent’ is a prefix for five and ‘philic’ is an abnormal love. ‘Pentaphilic,’ an abnormal fondness for the number five.” A large cut-out of a number five is fairly prevalent in the first memorial ceremony, the number actually blending in with the large string of mourners.

“Nostalgia and loss, even sadness is a part of this, but like the best of all Wakes, there is also fond memory, rebirth, and joy.”

procession much like a traditional Celtic wake with a bagpiper leading the way while two roller derby gals as pallbearers carried “Multi” and “culturism” respectfully. McClelland continued, “We could think of things we would honor and hold vigils for, but we were curious what ‘things’ other artists would feel compelled to properly commemorate. So Propeller funded our vision and we opened up the venue and idea to others who might want to host a funeral celebration, for things that are quietly slipping away.”

This whole process may remind art history lovers of Dada, of Fluxus, especially when reflecting on the first event of the month. Dunda explained Larry Lee’s “(Un)Timely Death of Multiculturalism” equipped with “a cacophonous eulogy simultaneously translated into eleven languages.”



The Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators.

McClelland explained the significance of the number five, “We have a great love for the number five and base our curatorial/projects on system of 5’s. May is the fifth month for our Five Funerals. Our first event was held approximately 5 years ago sponsored by At the Edge/Gallery 400. It was called Experiment 400/5.”

Every weekend in May there are events memorializing cultural ideas that have fallen by the wayside. The first weekend mourned and celebrated “Multiculturalism,” the funeral

The overall idea of Five Funerals speaks strongly about the state of art, its history, and even its intermittent loss of self (the many deaths of painting, death of performance art now trendy again, and so forth). Dunda said, “There’s an element to many of the Five Funerals events that brings attention to things that are soon to pass into the realm of nostalgia, and nostalgia can breathe new life into things. A handwritten letter sent through the mail is rare and precious thing that probably carries even more sentimental weight than it did in generations past. . . . at least, that’s what I can only assume as I haven’t sent or received one in about twenty years.”

This month is sure to conjure the ideas it mourns through these memorials that are held in a Logan Square funeral home, The Charnel House, at 3421 West Fullerton Avenue. Nostalgia and loss, even sadness is a part of this, but like the best of all Wakes, there is also fond memory, rebirth, and joy.

But there will also be fun at these FUNerals. There are scratch-off postcards around Chicago, but readers may request one by emailing fivefunerals@gmail.com. Like a instant lottery ticket, the silver is scratched off to reveal a symbol that relates to a specific funeral. McClelland said, “Bring the postcard to the funeral on one of the Sundays in May (that specific symbol funeral) and you will win a prize immediately! You will be entered in a raffle for an original Jason Dunda painting.”

These events take place every Sunday in May from 3:00–7:00 at The Charnel House in Logan Square located at 3421 West Fullerton. For more information about specific events on each Sunday this month, visit the Five Funerals website.

Scratch and match the casket icon on your card for a chance to win original

Five Funerals artwork by Jason Dunda



May 1st: The (Un)Timely Death of Multiculturalism



May 8th: The Wake for the West: Race Track Player



May 15th: Technical Difficulties: Public Access Television



May 22nd: Postscript: The Passing of the Letter



May 29th: Painting is Dead, Again

When you bring your card to its matching funeral, you’ll be entered to win the original artwork that appears on our postcard and website. You’ll also receive a special prize just for entering.

Five Funerals Scratch-off Postcard.