

ONE COOL WEEKEND

WATCHING THE BEATS

by k.d. self

Small town though it is, Bloomington is often graced with diverse artistic and musical gatherings, even on non-Lotus weekends. The first weekend in August was exemplary. August 4th (chilly) first Friday gallery walk revealed a wide range of visual art. Some highlights? At Pictura Gallery, Elizabeth Stone's *Negative/Positive* photographic abstractions were breathtaking. Stone's striking images were constructed using analog photo objects photographed on a light box. At the BlueLine Gallery, the late Annemarie Mahler's memorial painting retrospective showed haunting self-portraiture. At the Convention Center, "Quilters without Borders" hung intricate, beautiful textiles. At the Waldron, the Bloomington Photography Club and the Local Clay Potters Guild displayed fine photography and lovely ceramics. And, at By Hand Gallery, works on paper by Mary Uthuppuru rendered delicate, 'quiet observations.'

Downwind at Player's Pub the same evening, not quiet for a minute were the STP Allstars. Veteran and accomplished RnB musicians David Baas, Jim Bracken, Piney Woods, and Rex Miller (along with a great horn section) brought a fun survival party to the Pub after a recent tax crisis nearly shut the place. This band rocked. Their rendition of Johnny Cash's *Folsom Prison Blues* especially summoned dancers to the floor and got cold feet tapping hot.

Meanwhile, the I Fell Gallery (at Fourth and Rogers) hosted "it's so easy (the mechanism of power)," a video art installation and performance piece. This event's beautifully disturbing performance recurred during the Middle Coast Film Festival and also on Saturday evening, August 5. Filmmaker (and IU Communication and Culture Ph.D. grad) Russell Sheaffer teamed with IU School of Music graduate, composer Aaron Michael Smith—along with percussionist Sean Gill—to create electronic apprehension using evocative images and primal rhythms. Numerous old CRT TVs were piled up around the I Fell's suitably industrial space; each TV had video loops running. Many of the installation's

Percussionist Sean Gill, composer Aaron Michael Smith, and filmmaker Russell Sheaffer— collaborators on "it's so easy (the mechanism of power)."

video and primary audio tracks related to a car crash and ensuing court case faced by Sheaffer. He says, "this is about creating an anxiety-producing Panopticon-inspired experience."

Sheaffer is also concerned with watching the watchers—"trying to reclaim ownership" of surveillance images taken during the crash by showing these and other meta-images (while simultaneously surveilling gallery audiences). Inherent queries arise surrounding our media-laden world—*Who is watching whom? Why do different people interpret the same watched events in different ways? What are 'alternative facts'?* Created by Aaron Michael Smith, the installation's audio loops echoed relentless modern unease even before Smith's harrowing composition was performed by Sean Gill. Percussionist Gill used the TVs, computer keyboards, and a printer as instruments, obtaining amazing tones from CRTs (struck with well-placed mallets and hands). In performance, as Gill coaxed both tonal and alarming sounds from unusual objects, Sheaffer and Smith synthesized additional audio and video imagery. Most ominous? Car crash photos of first responders were differentially colorized, shifting between horrific representation and beautiful abstraction.

On an entirely different note, the same cool first weekend in August got plenty hot on Sunday when Louisiana native Lucinda Williams returned to the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. Sixty-four year-old Williams' numerous Bloomington concerts (beginning in 1988) are legendary. On this night, Buick 6 (her backup band) opened with incredible instrumentals; guitarist Stuart Mathis kicked ass all night long. When Lucinda came to stage she seemed a bit nervous, but by the time she hit "Jackson," she found her cryptic truthsayer, Southern blues rocker stride. An acclaimed and gifted songwriter, Williams' tunes—past and present—are concerned with human universals: Love, loss, family, addiction, god, individual responsibility, equity.

This cool evening, Williams played both older and newer material, delighting the audience with 1988's "Big Red Sun Blues"; 1998's "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road"; and the sassy "Joy" ("you took my joy, I want it back"). Toward the end of her nearly two-hour concert, Lucinda sang an especially resonant mantra for individual and social justice: "I need protection from the enemy of love; I need protection from the enemy of kindness; I need protection from the enemy of peace." Don't we all?

"The 'it's so easy' video installation was beautifully disturbing.... Who is watching whom?"

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