



2009-2010

Photo : Idra Labrie

Loser

For the 2009-2010 season, we examined the idea of the “loser” by questioning the social constructs of success. In a world dominated by economic discourse, where success can be reduced to accumulating wealth, everyone who doesn’t get rich is considered a loser. In the same way, the mentally ill, poor and marginalized are the ultimate losers in a system that has no mercy for those who “fail.”

This phenomenon is apparent in the arts as well, a sort of hinterland between the mainstream and the margins where many artists compete and face perpetual uncertainty. Driven by passion and the need to express themselves, artists drawn to the bright lights may find themselves chewed up and spat out. The losers of the arts world, ignored poets and forgotten denizens of the underground can end up in dire straits. But they also bring us new forms and ask critical questions that undermine social complacency.

Literature abounds in characters branded as losers, from Don Quixote, laughingstock of everyone around him, to the dark characters celebrated by Jack Kerouac in *The Dharma Bums* to the mythical Kateri Tekakwitha in Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers*. The art world also has a thousand losers for every winner, from the pianists condemned to live in Glen Gould’s immense shadow, to Salieri whose talent was dwarfed by Mozart’s. But what does the word, “loser,” really mean? A dead end, social ineptitude, exclusion? Do losers exclude themselves voluntarily or are they ostracized because of a series of unusual and unfortunate choices? Hero one day, pariah the next, the loser leads a life of extremes as a *persona non grata* alienated from the entire system. This system of global consensus regulates all of us according to the implacable law of conditioning, but cannot swallow up every dissenter. Magnified in the art world, albeit negatively, the artistic loser still has a name.

The anonymous losers, however, are legion and occupy a grey zone in society. But in both cases, losers face a tough road paved with their own suffering.

If we look beyond the one-size-fits-all models of success, which exclude more people than they include, is there joy in being a loser? Can we be losers, and be happy? In this kind of withdrawal from the surrounding world, the loser just might embody an extreme tendency toward freedom. Folie/Culture wanted to put the difference into perspective and reveal the singular beauty of the loser.

We invited you to a three-day event which explored the concept of the loser. Because the term is harsh and invasive, we needed to develop a strategy to explore it. We wanted each perception and every concept to magnify the loser, to elucidate its nuances and reintroduce it into a dynamic existence. We threw the doors wide open for three days of exploring the subject in every way imaginable: reflections, writings, performances, public actions, meetings, debates, urban occupations, wild movements and many more. The final shape of the event was in the public's hands; the event placed *your* ideas on centre stage.