



LIVE ART: BLAST THEORY BLESS PRACTICE | CANNED CULTURE

by Bella Todd, Dec 14, 2011

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Live arts correspondent **Bella Todd** on the hottest happenings in the global cultural calendar this week, including a timely retrospective from theatrical urban gaming pioneers **Blast Theory**.

The Main Event: Blast Theory Bless Practice

Last month the BBC and Arts Council England announced a **4.5million digital media service** aimed at transforming the way we create, connect with and experience art. Running from May to October next year to capitalize on the **London 2012 Cultural Olympiad**, and with celebrities lined up to curate, The Space will be all about boosting the rep of digital arts in the UK and challenging both big and up-and-coming artists to engage and experiment with technology. If the Beeb and Arts Council England get there way, for artists 2012 will be the year of the PC, the mobile device, the tablet and the TV.

Which is very cool an' all. But if The Space wanted to simplify its message to artists, and inject some soul into the inevitably empty-sounding jargon about 'strategic digital innovation' and 'digital media platforms', they could always just point at the work of **Blast Theory**, and go: "yeh, do that".

Currently the subject of a retrospective at Exeter's **Spacex gallery**, this Brighton-based group of interactive theatre and urban gaming pioneers have been ploughing a techie furrow for twenty years, mixing audiences across the internet, live performance and digital broadcasting with always exhilarating and often unsettling results.

1998's **Kidnap**, for example, was a theatrical abduction using real volunteers and broadcast live via interactive CCTV cameras over 48 hours. Meanwhile 2003's **Can You See Me Now?**, which won the Prix Ars Electronica, involved an audience of online players directing real runners in a cat-and-mouse street chase through the German city of Oldenburg. And we've **already blogged** about their latest touring work **A Machine To See With**, a piece of 'locative cinema' that allows audience members to star in their own heist movie.

The latter was originally a commission from the Sundance Film Festival. Other work has been shown at London's Tate Britain and the Royal Opera House and in galleries from Tokyo to Sydney. Along the way Blast Theory have picked up four Bafta nominations while perhaps doing more than any other group to flip the link between – or at least test our assumptions about – gaming and social responsibility.

Running until February, the Spacex retrospective Blast Theory Bless Practice will showcase five works from their archive using photo documentation and video footage. Included is their debut piece **Stampede**, a promenade exploration of crowds and control performed in theatres and nightclubs, which asked, 'what would make you take to the streets?' **Stampede** dates back to 1994 and yet, in subject, form and sensibility, it'd be hard to think of a more fitting piece to herald London 2012.