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Guys in Caves: The art of defence at the Diefenbunker

Written by [diane](#) on Sunday, August 29, 2010.



Inferno. Courtesy of the artist.

I'm sitting in the studio of multi-media artist Edwin Janzen in the Visual Arts Department at the University of Ottawa. Currently completing a Master's in Fine Arts degree, Janzen has invited me into his workspace to talk about his thesis exhibition, [Guys in Caves](#), currently on view at the [Diefenbunker](#).

Surrounded by piles of video and audio equipment (and resisting the urge to play with the remote-control helicopter sitting in the corner), we spend some time talking about the Diefenbunker as an exhibition space and the militarization of art, language, and culture - from the Cold War to present day.

D: Thanks for having me here, Edwin. First off, I'd love to know how you landed the Diefenbunker as a site for your show, [Guys in Caves](#). How did that come about?

E: It was a fortuitous string of events. I was TAing for a museum studies course where the professor invited local curators and directors of various institutions to come and give talks to the students. One of the speakers was Alexandra Badzak, who used to be the director at the Diefenbunker and now she's director of the Ottawa Art Gallery. I asked her whether the

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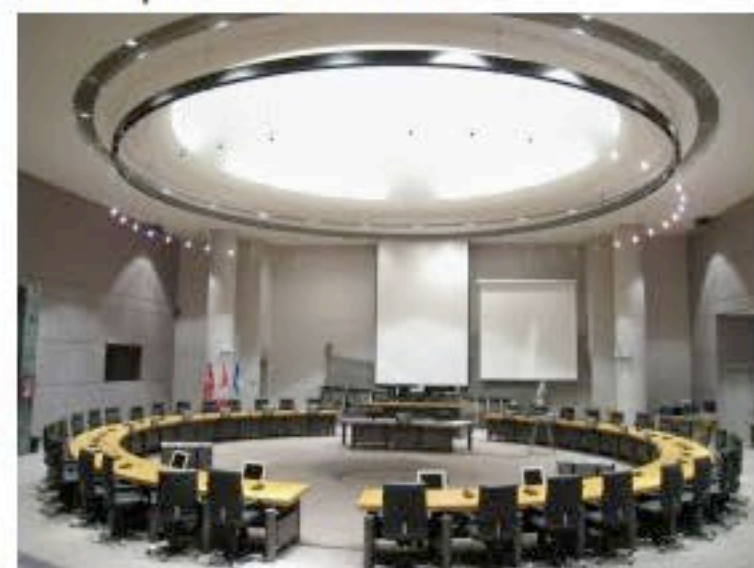


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Diefenbunker might be available to have an art show and she came for a studio visit, was intrigued by the work, and agreed to hold it there. The work has since changed a lot since what I had initially showed her, but many of the themes are still the same.

D: For someone who hasn't seen your work how would you describe it?

E: In terms of the media that I'm using - it's all over the place. There are video and audio components, an olfactory component, neon signage and plastic signage (door-name plates). There are four installations in this exhibition that cross over these different media.

D: What are some of the major themes running through your work?

E: Thematically, I am interested in the idea of society in a defensive posture. The Diefenbunker dates from the Cold War when society was in a defensive posture - at all levels, in all sectors - and after the fall of the Berlin wall there was a period where everybody was wondering how the world was going to shape up. After 9/11 we seem to be back in this defensive mind set with identifying enemies everywhere, militarizing the language, and militarizing the world. I think the Diefenbunker is a good place to begin to get into topics like that.

D: How does the Diefenbunker function as a site to exhibit your installations?

E: The Diefenbunker is a complicated space and it evokes all kinds of emotional responses. The exhibition is called Guys in Caves - right off the bat you have the gendered element of militarism, the bunker as a site of war... The Diefenbunker is a cave, in a way, and during the Cold War we were prepared to allow ourselves to be chased down into a cave and that led me to think of the cave as a metaphor for the human mind and for the mind in a defensive posture. As a result I've created this descent into the underworld. You could make cultural links too - Dante's Inferno, the myth of Orpheus. I'm sure every culture has it's own myth of descent into the underworld where you go into the dark place and are hemmed in by thousands of tons of rock and you confront something and emerge transformed from it. So I'm mixing that with the descent into the human mind. The Diefenbunker is a great space because as you go deeper and deeper into the earth you come to some pretty remarkable places.



Gauntlet. Courtesy of the artist.

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D: Could you talk a little bit about one of the installations, Inferno?

E: It's located in a room on the 300-level located in the department of Health and Welfare in a small room with a desk, chair, and ashtray. Suspended from the ceiling is a red neon sign that says Inferno. When you walk into the space it's already a bit of a hellish, baleful room and there's the olfactory component - the smell of stale cigarette butts and whiskey. I'm hoping the neon signage and cigarette/whiskey smells will evoke a kind of macho office culture of the fifties and sixties - when men were men. One could draw all sorts of conclusions out of it but when it comes down to it people have to go in there and experience it for themselves.

Come to the grand opening of the show on Tuesday, August 31 from 5-8pm. *Guys in Caves* runs from August 13-September 30 at the Diefenbunker ([3911 Carp Road](#)).

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Ta Bolay

 Monday, August 30, 2010 at 11:54 am



they'll get the care they need until a year or 2 after the war...then the ones who sent them there will whine that they're abusing the system like welfare mothers and take all the benefits away

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