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LEVITT GOODMAN ARCHITECTS

**Sunnyside:  
Fire on Water,  
Night Swim,  
Slip, WADE**



Sunnyside (Casey Wong)

+ I am a Toronto-based artist, writer, architect, community activist and interventionist. My practice stems from my research in global bathing cultures.

I create interdisciplinary events, performances and installations that suggest an enriched and expanded use for existing public space; insert provocations for poetic action into daily life; amplify our bodies' relation to our natural and constructed environments; highlight water's sacred and profane aspects in a toxic landscape; relate the individual body to the collective with public bathing as an intersection of private and public; create heightened experiences of the city within everyday life; and express the city's organic infrastructure, which we continually form and forms us. Our retreat from the public bath echoes our retreat from the public sphere, public space, and participation in all kinds of collective activities. The public bath as a foreign or outdated institution can be used as an imaginary foil, an elusive utopia onto which we can fancifully project the potential for collective catharsis.

Bathing itself can be considered an environmental art: immersive, participatory, social, political, and ecological. Bathing architectures bring our bodies into direct contact with bodies of water; with other bodies; with air tuned on the humidity-temperature scales to be just so; with building materials; with normative behaviours that might be based on our age, our gender, our race; with political purpose; with sexual drama. These dynamics are the starting point for most of my projects: the theatre of the city, its gestures and coughs. The four projects described here insert themselves into the life in the City of Toronto. I created Sunnyside: Fire on the Water and Night Swim with THEWAVES, including DJ/music writer Marcus Boon; Slip with Urbanvessel, including composer Juliet Palmer; and WADE with artist Sandra Rechico.

THEWAVES mandate is to create temporal installations and evanescent events celebrating water using sound and light. Connecting to the depths, we explore the historical, ecological and political importance of water in natural and urban environments, in human and non-human communities.

### **Sunnyside: Fire on the Water**

The Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion, built in 1922, is one of the few remnants of Toronto's once-lively waterside pleasure grounds. It was constructed as a public change house for lake bathing with a viewing area above. It was situated amidst dancehalls, roller coasters, boardwalks, and baseball diamonds, and housed cathartic public spectacles such as boat



Sunnyside (Guilio Muratori)

burnings and the city's first beauty pageant. When Gardiner's expressway tore through the area in the 1950's in the name of progress it condemned Sunnyside's amusements, leaving in its wake a city disconnected from the waterfront. The Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion is now run by a food operator, its separated spaces rentable for weddings and photographs. Fire on the Water, reclaimed, for one day and night, the entire Pavilion as a freely accessible public space. It was billed as a public swim-in, dance party, performance, and occupation, and was attended by over two thousand people. The lower courtyards held readings and information about the history and ecology of the waterfront, an audio piece about the history of Sunnyside by Margaret Kraweka, and a snow cone making interactive video machine by Alexandra Gelis. The central upper hall was the main dance space,

featuring acclaimed local, national, and international global bass DJs Venus X, DJRupture, Maga Bo, Poirier, Dos Mundos, Slowed DJs and M.A.M.A. At either end of the loggia were bathing environments I created with river-based sound installations by Juliet Palmer. The eastern temple to the sun was a heated space dedicated to the Don River, featuring a feather bath lounge space. The western temple to the moon was dedicated to the Humber River and featured an ice bath meditation space. A live dance and music performance began to mark the setting of the sun, choreographed by Aimee Dawn Robinson and composed by Juliet Palmer, featuring over a dozen local musicians and dancers. The performance began in the upper loggia, taking the crowd to each end of the pavilion, back down through the courtyards and around to the beach. The dancers offered a

fiery fabric to the spirits of the lake in the form of a glowing canoe, which was then brought back up to the dance space victoriously to the music of Marcatu Mar Aberto, Afro-Brazilian drummers.

### Night Swim

THEWAVES created the project Night Swim for Toronto's 2006 inaugural Nuit Blanche at Trinity Bellwoods Community Centre swimming pool. This all-night swimming event featured hourly sets by national and international sound artists, programmed by Marcus Boon, included Tim Hecker, FM3, Keith Fullerton Whitman, Windy and Carl, Marina Rosenfeld, Raz Mesinai, Sarah Peebles, Sandro Perri, Luis Jacob, Geoff Snack, Andrew Wedman

and Orixasound. Darren Copeland used underwater microphones and speakers to create alternate soundscapes in the building. Different areas and pools had distinct colour, audio and temperature zones inspired by a Roman bath, with the ceiling of the large pool a mirror for slippage into the vertical axis. A projection of the moon created by Rob Cruickshank moved rapidly through its phases, overseeing the scene. The celebration became increasingly bacchanalian as morning approached. A shifting audience continued to reinterpret the space and its possibilities, from the change rooms to the viewing stands to the pools, prompted by various swim toys and inflatable furniture. Night Swim was attended by 12,000 people, including 1,000 swimmers.



Night Swim (Christie Pearson)

### Slip

Between 2005 and 2009, THEWAVES worked with Urbanvessel theatre collective on the project SLIP, which evolved into a series of productions and an experimental film. SLIP brought spectators through the Harrison Baths community pool, Toronto's only free pool to have survived fee-free after the forced amalgamation of the GTA in the 1990s. The Baths and Swimming Pool, established in 1910, are housed in a 1960s building: an urban oasis providing free showers, swimming, washrooms and laundry facilities. In a unique collaboration with the Parks and Recreation department, the change rooms,



WADE (Christie Pearson)

pool, and showers became settings for a series of dramas and tableaux, amplified from the habits and characters of the facility's regular users. The performance led the audience through the labyrinth of the Harrison Baths complex, from the tiled lobby, through the long men's locker and shower rooms, to the majestic pool, and finally, through the series of smaller rooms making up the women's space. The project included writer and actor Anna Chatterton, choreographer Yvonne Ng, and composer Juliet Palmer. The creative team collaborated with jazz singer and improviser Christine Duncan, opera singer Vilma Vitols, Japanese folk singer Aki Takahashi, drummer Jean Martin and dancers Louis Laberge-Côté and Susanne Chui. The music was visceral and vocal, combining body slaps with handheld

percussion and the sounds of the space itself; a grimy, razzmatazz Hollywood chorus line; a sparse and intimate Japanese folk song, and opera echoing off the tiles. Sound, mist, water and light transformed the everyday out of the living dream of this bathing community.

### WADE

There are currently 112 wading pools in Toronto, located in the largest to the smallest parks, spread across the former City of Toronto area. Started in the 1950s, no new pools have been built since the 1970s, while older pools are being steadily transformed into splash pads, which offer water features triggered by buttons and levers. These have no standing water and consequently need no staff; however, they usurp the unstructured play activity of the wading pools.

WADE proposes that wading pools are valuable as landmarks within communities as gathering spaces and to support public play. They are also valuable as a system within the city, linking communities together and celebrating our shared water resources. They deserve more love.

WADE began in 2001 through conversations with artist Sandra Rechico. This bi-annual, week-end-long installation and performance art event in outdoor wading pools throughout downtown parks was produced in association with YYY Artists' Outlet and the City of Toronto's departments of Culture Economics and Tourism and Parks and Recreation. Each season brought about twenty artists to over a dozen pools with temporary programs involving dance, music, sculpture, education, installation and play. Proposals were required to be interactive and formed to some degree by public participation. The project created a temporal urban infrastructure superimposed on the loosely-connected network of parks and pools, drawing attention to underused resources and opening up possibilities for urban inhabitation through the participation of seasoned and young artists from Toronto, Canada and abroad. The project poses questions about public art and its potential agency in day-to-day life. Wading pools typically have a well-defined use, time, and user group that could be expanded, exemplifying the under-use of many of our shared resources. We saw in the wading pools the potential

for temporary projects that would challenge peoples' expectation of these places. The recreational places of the city, places for contemplation and pleasure, are spatial disjunctions within the continuous fabric of the working city: the festival is its temporal counterpart. In WADE, the two are combined, giving a provocative moment in the summer pool season. Unpredictable events link the pools as a networked system in time and space within the city's metabolism. WADE creates a ripple effect of engagement in city spaces, which would travel beyond the pools into the park, the communities they serve, and the city as a whole. The projects are organized so that audiences can tour them on foot or bicycle easily, while offering a tour of the network of city parks and recreation facilities. For a weekend, these temporary events add to the regular community use of the site, reinventing possibilities of use and participation. In all of these projects, my hope is that the erosion of the accepted role of the audience as spectator extends into other public spaces and spheres of activity.