



HOT ARTIST:

JAMES FOWLER & THE 10X10 PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

by Jeff Harrison

Last year during Pride, “a little art show that could”—the 10X10 Photography Project—became the kind of instant success that had people lined up down the street waiting to get into a small sweatbox gallery space at 277.5 Augusta avenue, in Kensington Market. The brainiac behind it, James Fowler, used two simple ideas to make a big splash: the desire to celebrate fellow queers, who were making an often unsung contribution to the arts, and the simple formula of exponentials.

“Pride was coming up,” says Fowler, “so I thought, why don’t I do something with photography for it? I guess the impetus for the project was threefold: First, I found that the larger institutions in the city, while they would take the pink dollar, they weren’t actually doing any programming to represent queer images, or queers artists, or queer history and I thought that was really sad.”

The second impetus behind 10X10 was spurred on by Fowler recently turning 40. “I’d been to the parties at Pride and had fun at them, but I wanted to do something else,” he recalls. “I wanted to create a space where

people who are queer in the arts could go. There are so many people who are queer who make *amazing* things happen. I thought, why not honour these people? These are our unsung heroes and nobody knows who they are. Like Mathieu Maslard, who works for the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, who pushes paper around and goes to all these meetings and decides who gets money across Ontario. Francisco Alvarez is another person who works really hard on things like what's coming for World Pride 2014 and doing the programming at places like ICC at the ROM. I would love to curate something at the ROM! So I wanted to find that common ground—the nexus of the queer community and the art community. Who are these people? Let's put our lens there and celebrate them."

The final initiative for 10X10 was Fowler's desire to give something back. "I was in touch with The People Project," he says "which is an arts initiative for queer and trans youth in Toronto. I thought, why not turn my idea into a fundraising event as well? And so, every year we sell books [featuring the portraits] for \$40 and the proceeds from that go towards The People Project. Specifically what they do is teach youth early grant writing skills. So instead of throwing them out to the Toronto Arts Council, we do something internal, give them funding twice a year, so that they can learn how to do



grant writing and then we have a panel of people who decide what projects to back. I find this can be really validating for young artists."

As the three contributing factors gathered momentum, Fowler saw how huge this event could become. "When I started this I thought let's just do some portraits and let's celebrate some queer people," he says. "After thinking about it for a week though, I decided why do one person's photography of 10 people? Why not do 10 people's photography of 10 people and have 100 portraits? Let's make this a big thing! What I learned from that was the power of exponentials. So, you have 10 photographers and they are photographing 10 people each—that's 110 people involved. If those people each invite 10 people to the show—that's over 1,000 people—and instantly you have a successful party!"

"Last year was just word of mouth and extending it to people I knew. It was really nice to have people close to my life over the years involved," he says, humbly. "I really appreciated that. This year we put out a call for submissions and ended up with some really talented photographers that I might have not been otherwise able to reach, and that was thanks to Kim Fullerton at Akimbo. I'm also very grateful to the Gladstone, for hosting."

Success does not come

without its challenges, and like most artists who want to see their project become spectacular, money can be a big obstacle. "Every project needs funding. Last year I got a bit of money from the White House Studio Project.

Not being someone who has a background in grant writing or fundraising, I've been very lucky to have people come forward to help. My partner Rick has been amazing. Joey Bruni, a very talented designer, did the book last year and will be doing it again this year. Tania Anderson has come on board to take care of the installation. Sonja Scharf and Kelly Kyle from Akasha Art Projects are helping us with the framing and Circuit Gallery is helping us with the printing."

Diversity is vital for Fowler. "We have someone who is young and 21 who does fashion photography, we have someone in their 50s, someone who's done the Prime Minister's portrait and we have amateur artists who have a really good eye. I never wanted 10X10 to have gatekeepers who kept out people who are emerging—what about these young promising queer artists? The same goes for the subjects." Among the photographers exhibiting this year will be JJ Levine from Montréal who is trans, newcomer Adamo de Pax, former PPM "Hot Artist" Sonja Scharf, celebrated



photographers Sue Lloyd, John Monteith, Guntar Kravis and triple-threat creative impresario R. Kelly Clipperton.

Anyone can become a part of the 10X10 Photography Project. The only stipulations Fowler put in place are:

you must be queer, your main medium must be photography and you must be Canadian. "I think part of the success of the show is that it's really inclusive and it's really accessible," he states. "My biggest surprise has been how incredibly positive the feedback has been and I love how it put smiles on people's faces. Celebrating people by saying: 'Look at you—you're doing an awesome job!' That makes me feel good."

The 2012 10X10 exhibition runs from June 28 to July 15 at the Gladstone Hotel (1214 Queen Street West, 2nd Floor), with the opening reception and book launch Thursday June 28th, 7-11pm. This year there's a whole slew of programming around the event, so be sure to visit 10x10photographyproject.com/the-event for all the details.

Jeff Harrison is editor-in-chief of PinkPlayMags.

Photo credits: Pg. 39, background: Adamo de Pax; Page 40, background: Alex Nursall; top: R. Kelly Clipperton; middle: Alex Nursall; bottom: Sue Lloyd; Page 41, background: Allyson Scott; top: JJ Levine; middle: Guntar Kravis; bottom: Sonja Scharf.

