

Fail again. Fail better.

Lauren Weinberg

One night, an opening reception for a Seripop exhibition got a little too rowdy. Seripop's Montréal-based artists, Yannick Desranleau and Chloe Lum (both Canadian, b. 1978), have seen a lot—they also cofounded the noise-rock band AIDS Wolf, which performed from 2003 to 2012—but they became aghast as inebriated arts administrators manhandled their installation.

“Now that we have distance—space and time away from that,” Lum mused several months later, “we’re like, ‘How can we set things up that are going to *tempt* people to fuck with the stuff?’”

Such nonchalance isn't surprising if you remember that Seripop's motto is, “We are interested in all types of failure.” While most of the art in *Simultaneous* isn't meant to be touched, it embodies Lum and Desranleau's willingness to give up control over their materials. The artists have courted entropy and the unexpected since they first collaborated, as musicians, almost fifteen years ago. “We like to be surprised by what we're going to do,” explains Lum. “Every time something goes wrong, it's always new potential for different modes of research and production.”

When I interviewed Desranleau and Lum at their studio in September 2014, they made it clear their careers haven't progressed from an art world-approved point A to point B. “I was kind of a bad kid. I dropped out of high school in grade 10, and I would sit and read Henry Miller or Kathy Acker in the woods,” said Lum as she and Desranleau graciously offered me tea and cookies. (Seripop are badass, but they're still Canadian.)

Within a few months of meeting and deciding to play music together, the couple started making concert posters—a genre that also became a Sonnenzimmer speciality. Like Sonnenzimmer's Nick Butcher (American, b. 1980) and Nadine Nakanishi (American/Swiss, b. 1976), Lum and Desranleau brought a fearless, experimental approach to poster design that was informed by their personal involvement in the music scene. But unlike their Chicago peers, they were fascinated by how their posters changed upon exposure to an urban environment, where they were eroded by the elements or vandalized. This tendency toward deterioration, which Seripop call the “performative aspect of materials,” influenced the more ambitious screen printed installations the pair created out of cheap paper obtained from Montréal's industrial zones.

Finding a foothold in the contemporary art world was difficult. “We were really these nobodies. Doing noise-rock posters—we might as well have been doing ad campaigns for McDonald's,” recalled Lum. Still, as Seripop strove to evolve their practice, they enjoyed advantages unique to Canadian artists: a plethora of artist-run and nonprofit spaces that allow work to flourish free from market pressures and funding for education that is generous by American standards. (Desranleau is

pursuing an MFA, and Lum, a degree in art history, at Concordia University.) Montréal's low cost of living has given them additional freedom. While Sonnenzimmer maintain a design and print studio, Seripop gave up commissioned projects. Aided by Montréal's ample supply of studio space, the duo has focused instead on complex mixed-media installations, which now incorporate polyurethane foam, vinyl, fabric, wood, metal, and found objects.

A couple of years ago, Lum and Desranleau decided to preserve the traces of use and time on their materials by recycling them into new work. Though they always kept their artistic and musical practices separate, the two believe this technique emerged from their experiences in bands: AIDS Wolf cut up and recombined its own music into new compositions, and on tour, they learned how to make the most of meager resources.

"When you're doing DIY music, you're the only one who's investing in it," said Lum. "No one else gives a shit, so *you* do it, or it doesn't exist. You [develop] all these habits of making something from nothing, and making things happen." When Seripop could not afford the cast objects they wanted in an installation, they simply substituted couch cushions they found in a Dumpster—and have since reused them at least five times.

Desranleau and Lum are no longer bandmates, but collaboration remains as crucial to Seripop's practice as it is to Sonnenzimmer's. Being a duo "fuels the work," emphasized Desranleau. He and Lum often take on different tasks to complete a project, but they consider their complementary skills less important than their never-ending dialogue, as they constantly exchange—and argue about—ideas.

It's hard to imagine Seripop outside Montréal—just as Sonnenzimmer seem inseparable from Chicago's cultural community. Yet Lum and Desranleau expect to leave once they graduate from Concordia, and are unfazed by the prospect of continuing their educations somewhere else. Ever philosophical, Lum told me they're trying to be open to change, "not only embracing chance and contingency in the gallery, but in our own life."