

There are two foggy myths about Kansas City. The first fog being that Kansas City is the primary distribution point for the American Drug Trade. Grey routes. The second myth is that most of this country's nuclear warheads are located deeply underground there. Grey roots. It would make sense: Kansas City lies in a perfect geographical position. It's a place where outsiders stay no longer than it takes to throw down a tray of large fries and a strawberry shake; the city being safely tucked into the breast pocket of the U.S.A. Heartland. Oddly, such makes fecund soil for such developing timber as the pink-blossomed band SSION and the blessed avant-venue of Your Face.

"The Midwest breeds subcultures, really weird ones," Cody Critcheloë relates, lead singer for SSION. Cody was raised in Kentucky, in a town known for being adjacent to Owensboro. Owensboro is the hometown of John Brennan of the "Real World." John was the only one who could believably wear a cowboy hat. He's also the one who sat on the couch channel-surfing, sipping soft drinks all day, everyday. Forgive the goose-chase: it's a map of the terrain. In essence, SSION is its own weird subculture. It is the rebel fruit that overcomes not only the Midwest's strictly maintained Status Quo but it is something that gives back. SSION has something to

prove and it's beautiful.

When Cody Critcheloë came to Kansas City to go to art school he brought the band, (or at least its name), he co-formed in his home state at sixteen with him. They are either pony-prancing in colorful ragamuffin outfits, strutting vocals or writhing on the floor among the remnants of the group's theatrics. Behind them are Cody's animations projected with the occasional key lyrics synced to SSION's pre-recorded music. They are a veritable D.I.Y. karaoke band, discarding formalities for more important things, like smashing an effigy of Tori Amos. It is almost evangelical. Flanked by a female vocal back-up that seems equally psyched to fuck shit up, Cody wags his best Pussy Galore.

Your Face rides a cultural wrecking ball, aimed at overcoming those cultural stigmas that persistently contaminate the Kansas City reservoir of Vision. Your Face is run by six people: Jaime Warren, Lindsay Barras, Stephanie Smith, John Dretzka, Sean Ward and Seth Johnson. I spoke with Seth, who like Cody, came from the Midwest (Omaha) and arrived in Kansas City for its art school. Despite the many large, vacated buildings and low rent, the cultural life of a Kansas City artist strays towards the small, conservative and hermetic. The result is narrow, safe artwork where experimentation is eschewed for public acceptance. So go the daring down the pipes of brain drain, pulled by the glow of the Eastern cities, the tanned sirens of the West and/or Grad school. But, to the eyes of the Your Face alchemists such soot-layered conditions shine golden. SSION is planning to record a live show for their record-release party there soon. As Cody states, "it's the only place in town we can get away with all our shit."

Since September of 2002, the Your Face team has been host to a handful of music shows. Black Dice played there with Pixel Panda. Wolf Eyes played there in the Spring. Even so, they are not looking to become the youthful alternative to a music club. For one, they are

choosy, gleaning only from the shows they have interest in presenting; thereby, events become a monthly rather than nightly occurrence. Second, no profit is turned: a P.A. must be rented, bands must be paid, posters need to be hand-printed. As Seth puts it, "we hope people view our loss of money, for their entertainment, as a noble gesture."

Your Face strives to become a phenomenon unique to Kansas City. This means sailing beyond the foray of music; instead, becoming a safe harbor for showing "anything we can think of." Such criteria includes: "art shows of all natures, including pranks, fashion shows, informal critiques, the putting-out of records, simple paint shows, complex paint shows and video shows."

It's a conceptual endeavor that is bridging the Kansas City castes, classes and cliques. For example, Neil Burke's solo project "Sinking Body" will be playing two consecutive nights among his own, hung art work; the difference between the two bills will be one of tempo. The first night Sinking Body will play with two other bands: imagine reckless youth. The following night Neil will play during the local Kansas City "art crawl:" imagine neck-ties. The goal of the two nights is to create a crossover of sorts, uniting the "cheese-eating crowd" with the (otherwise considered) "punk kids." As Seth points out, "we just want to put stuff in front of people's faces."

Kansas City seems to be more than its cheap rent, the magnetism of its art school and those foggy murmurings of greyness, both of above and below. As the result of a handful of people, a new cultural buffalo is born unique to that city on the Plains. Rather than wallow in the deficiencies of their locale, SSION and Your Face have tapped a spring of resourcefulness. Created is a flow capable of shrugging Kansas City's image of "sleepy cow town" off map quest, or at best, tossing that stale image over the river into Kansas City, Kansas. **Sk**