



by Mark Laliberte
 Interview conducted July 2008



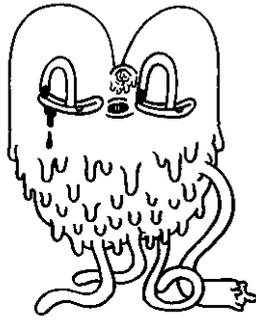
Photo credit: All images courtesy Luke Ramsey

Islands Fold is a home-based artist residency project created and operated by Angela Conley and Luke Ramsey. Established on Pender Island, BC in the spring of 2006, it adds to the rich diversity of residency models that already exist in Canada to service artists in their quest for temporary escape scenarios that allow them time to focus on the research, development and production of new bodies of work.

While most residency programs are built on institutional support structures and offer lengthy stays, well-equipped facilities, travel support, and a large community of peers to interact with, the **Islands Fold** residency offers an alternative approach on a very personal level. Ramsey and Conley invite one artist at a time into their home for a very short visit, and the projects they have supported so far tend to focus on drawing and collaboration, although solo projects are also being supported, and other artistic disciplines are considered. Zines are produced at the close of most visits, and the proceeds from this publishing arm are used to sustain their modest program.

Islands Fold seems to be succeeding as a grass-roots attempt at facilitating a creative residency experience on a micro scale; a successful residency model, after all, is one that works well for its participants. Having serviced nearly 30 artists since its inception only a few years back, it's more than obvious that this particular kind of lo-fi residency offering has its appeal. It will be interesting to see where the project goes from here ...

islandsfold.com/



① Eric Shaw and Luke Ramsey : The Mebemewebe zine, 2007 ▶

You've stated that the idea to start *Islands Fold* came to you after participating in a residency at the Mac Dowell Colony in the USA. What made this such a formative experience for you?
Mac Dowell offered me a private studio to make art; they fed me three quality meals a day and at the end of my five week residency, I didn't have to show a thing for it. To be offered such an opportunity, because my art was appreciated on some level, humbled me to the core. It made me want to give back to an arts community. *Islands Fold* stemmed from wanting to combine my interest in art and my partner Ange's interest in health and nutrition.

Why did you decide on the name *Islands Fold*?
Pender Island has two islands joined by a small bridge. Metaphorically, Ange and I represent one island; the artists we invite represents the other island. The art, food and sharing is the bridge that brings it all together, just like two pages folding into each other. Folding pages is a big part of zine making. The name came about because of all these things.

How long does a residency typically last?
We currently offer one week residencies.

To date, how many participants have visited your home?
By the end of this summer we will have had 27 artists stay with us within two and a half years.

Collaborating and publishing seem to be at the core of this project. The art of collaboration can be a difficult task for many artists, yet you seem to have mastered this subtle art. Explain how you navigate in this creative territory? How do you avoid dominating the process?

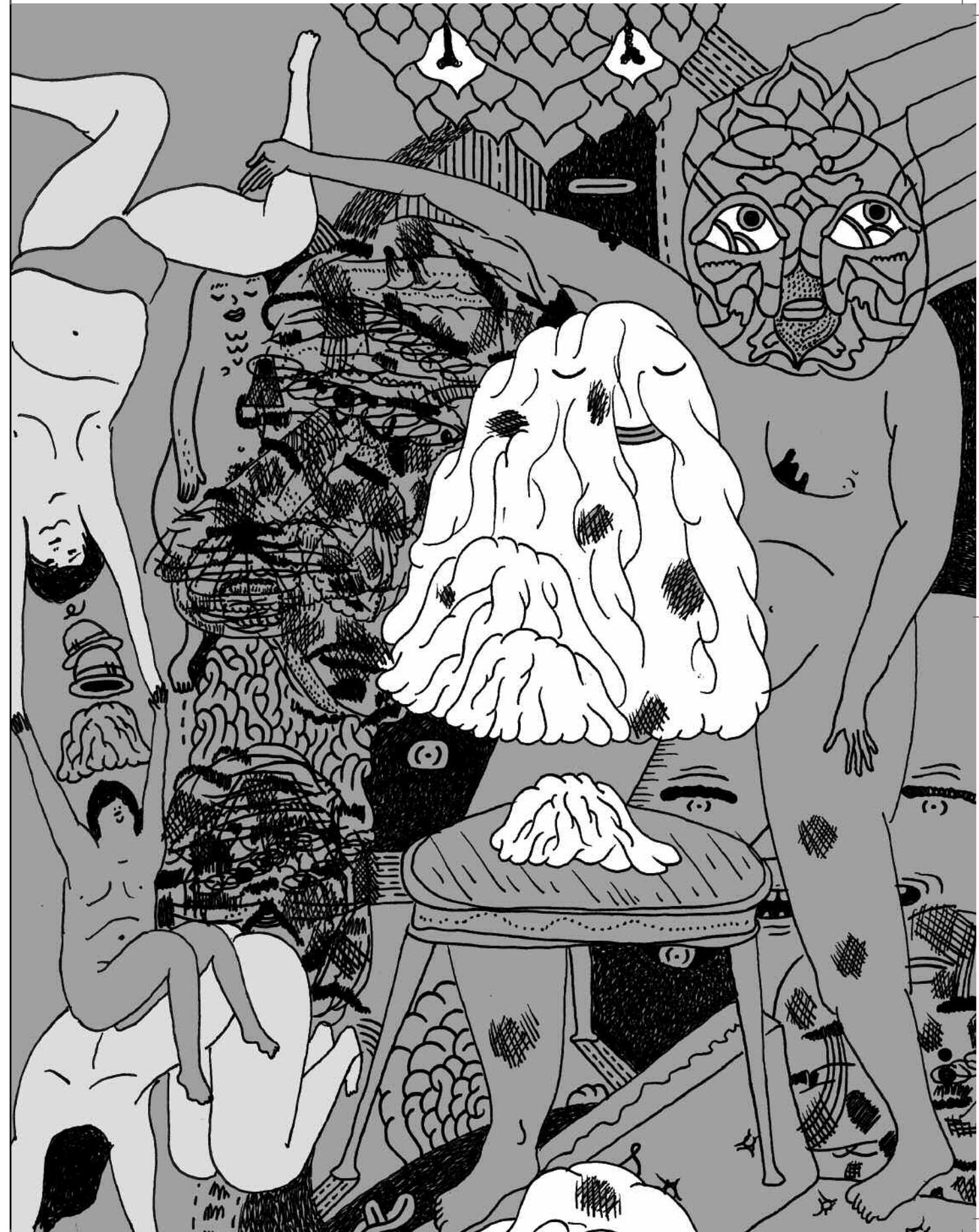
Drawing with artists I admire makes it easy to collaborate. I approach it as a way to try new things. A collaborative piece doesn't necessarily have to be a ying-yang symbol of visual balance, it just has to reflect an honest effort from both artists. I avoid dominating the process by molding my art to the other person's approach and style. I let them lead.

Due to the fact that you are self-funding your program off the by-products created by your artmaking visitors, there must certainly be a desire to develop source material that looks good in print. Do you direct the projects in any way?

I've got my hands in the development of all our products and zines. Sometimes artists kindly assist in the final product.

Vancouver artist Peter Taylor was your first artist-in-residence. In your description of his April 2006 visit, you wrote "... hikes in the forest were had to break-up the long drawing sessions", which sounds like a template for a wonderful experience! How did this initial project take place?

The project took place at our dining room table! We'd draw all day, clear off the table for Ange's tasty dinners and go and explore the island for peaceful inspiration. Previous to Peter's residency, I had met him at art shows and then we contacted each other and it went from there.



① clockwise from upper left — **Howie Tsui**, art-making during his *Islands Fold* residency, 2007; image from **Justin B. Williams'** *A Great Big Stillness*, 2006; *The Mebemewebe* at *Antisocial*, 2007; image from *A Great Big Stillness*, 2006 ▼



① Peter Taylor and Luke Ramsey : In Arms Length, 2006 ▲

Angela Conley, your partner, prepares healthy meals for the residents throughout their stay. This focus on health is another wonderful feature of the residencies you offer. What is Angela's background?

This part of *Islands Fold* is very important. It only gets experienced by the residents who stay here, so it makes it that much more special. Ange has a certificate in nutrition and worked at a health food store for four years. Aside from preparing meals for residents she also sells homemade cookies and wraps at the farmers market once a week.

It seems like many of the residents you've worked with have West Coast roots, although you've had some international guests come over to play as well — Nicolas Burrows and Jim Stoten (both from the UK) come to mind. How has geography impacted on the residency series?

We really appreciate the effort artists make to travel here. *Islands Fold* is an international artist community operated on a local level. Half of the residents have been from the west coast from LA up to Vancouver, the other half have travelled from the east coast of Canada/USA and internationally. We feel very fortunate to live where we do, because it's a beautiful place to share with people.



Howie Tsui (who is located in Ottawa) managed to get a travel grant to help fund his visit. This seems like a minor coup — I would have assumed that your project might not be institutional enough for the Canada Council for the Arts to fund. It's good to see the C/C supporting a private residency model. Do you have any information about this?

Your assumptions might be accurate with regards to us not being institutional enough. I don't know if the C/C recognizes us as a residency model to support. Other artists have applied for travel grants through the C/C with no success. We are a non-profit organization, but we are not registered as one. We don't have a board of directors or a president, it's just the two of us guiding it. I think that some people who visit our web site perceive us as being a bigger operation than we actually are. It really comes down to having an Internet connection, a spare bedroom, a fridge full of food, and new artists to work with. We rely heavily on public support and all the previous *Islands Fold* artists to help promote what we are doing. It's not easy for us to keep this going, but we keep at it because it's a labour of love.

How has distance and geography impacted on your practice and your approach to art making? How important has the Internet been to your art practice and the development of community?

I love connecting with people on a geographic level. It excites me to mail a zine to Argentina or make a zine with an artist from Italy. It's moving to introduce artists to each other through *Islands Fold*. The Internet is a huge part of what we do. When I first started showing my art locally, I didn't own a computer. I'd be getting my friends to scan art for me to send to publications, etc. With some resistance, I finally cracked and bought a computer when we started *Islands Fold*. I spend more time on the computer than I'd like to, but being surrounded by nature helps me

get away from my desk. It's the tool that allows me to meet most of the artists we work with, so in the end I'm grateful for it. The Internet is a popular topic with our residents — we always discuss the blessings and curses of it.

Very early on in the project you dabbled with offset printing. Your second *Islands Fold* release, *A Great Big Stillness*, is a gorgeous little book that you fielded out to a printer in China, twenty full-colour pages of collaborative works with Justin B. Williams. Why did this format prove to be ineffective for your needs?

Thanks for the compliment on the book. I think this format was effective as a way to introduce people to *Islands Fold's* ambition. Our choice to print this way had a lot to do with the work being in colour. We printed 1100 copies of *A Great Big Stillness*. It allowed us to distribute to many retailers around the globe and give away promotional copies. However, to do offset, one needs to print at least 1000 copies to make it worth while. With the amount of titles we release, it would be too much of an overhead to print offset every time. Any money we have has to go towards the residencies and rising food expenses. Art production comes second. If I had the money and someone else handling distribution, then maybe I'd produce more offset titles. My sore wrists and paper-cut hands would be grateful, but at the same time I think I'd be taking myself away from the simplicity I enjoy.

The pieces documented in the book seem well-developed, there are quite a few amazing works here. How long was Justin's May 2006 residency? What scale are these gouche and watercolour pieces?

All these pieces were done on 9" x 12" pieces of watercolour paper. We were insane. We did all that work in three days. I thought I was fast at collaborating, until I worked with Justin. He's a natural. We later

did a huge 32 ft installation mural at A/V Space in Rochester, NY, 2006. Justin has been a huge influence on my approach to art making.

After this 2nd release, you began releasing nicely designed photocopied zines in small runs (between 60-200 copies). Many of the books feature die-cut elements. Can you speak a bit about how you decide on format and print run for each book?

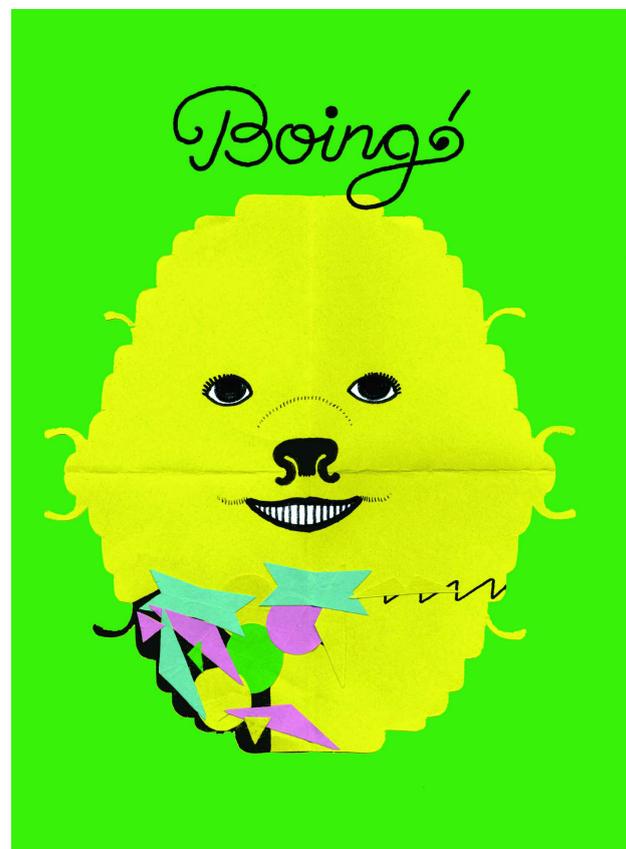
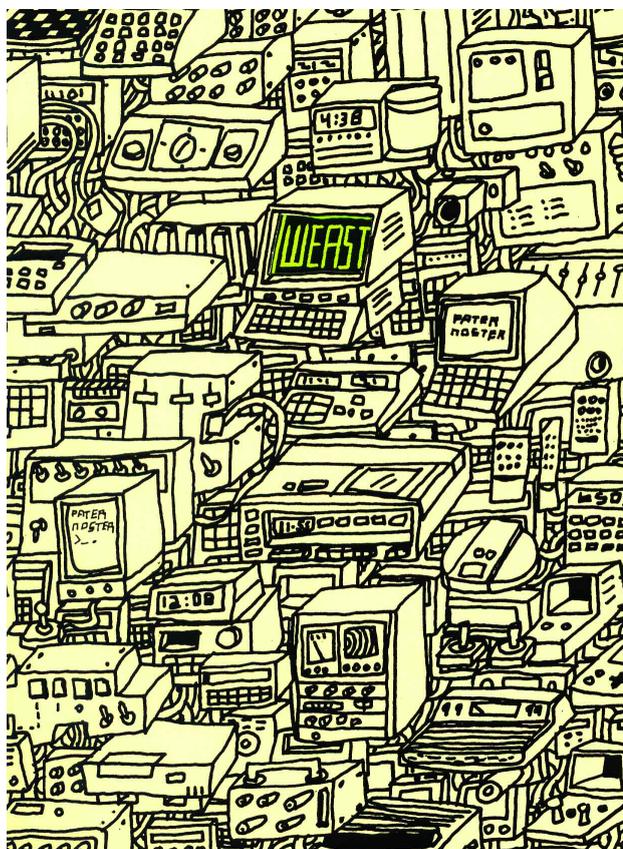
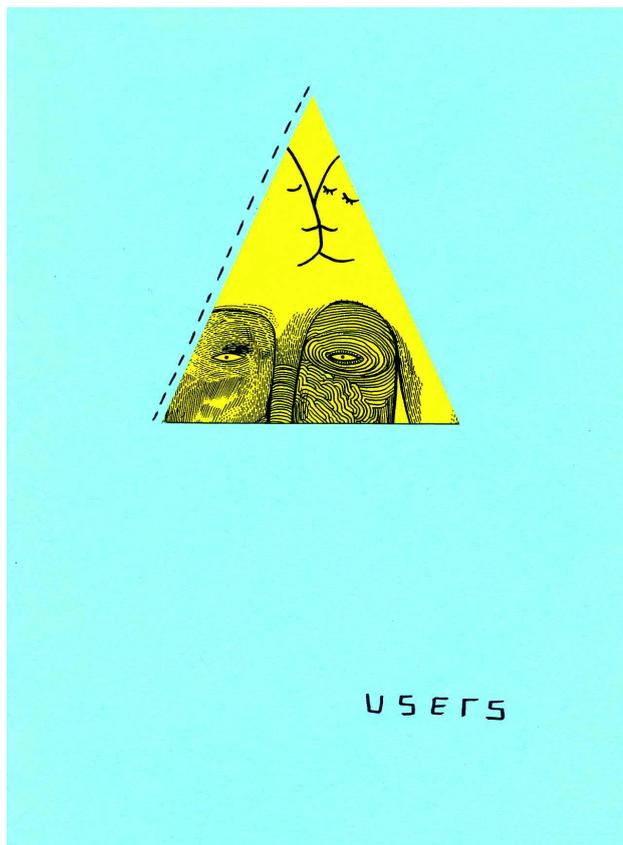
It's a mixed bag really. The print run has to do with finances or it's based on how much time it takes to make each zine. I like to do black and white zines, because reproduction stays close to the originals and it's less expensive than colour. There's something rewarding about choosing different coloured paper, going down to the local photocopier, coming home and making die-cut covers to be folded around black and white drawings. If the art inside is interesting and the presentation is crisp, then I'm happy to share it with people.

By your 6th release, you adopted the ISBN system. Why did you choose to formalize the zines in such a way?

It's just smoke and mirrors to me. Makes people think they're getting something dignified, something that's recognized in the system. Just kidding ... I guess I just like having a record of each title.

How many books do you plan to put out in 2008? How do you see the series developing over time ... any more offset editions in the works?

We'll have about 12-14 titles for 2008. I want to partner with another publisher and distribute a heavy duty offset full-colour book that archives three years of work for *Islands Fold*. I'd like to see something released in 2010 — we'll see?



① various Islands Fold zine covers ◀

As a young artist, you seem to be aware of the importance of progress and change — thoughts on this in relation to your practice?

Change is very important to me. I always try to incorporate my previous work into the new stuff, but treat new developments as chapters in an ongoing story. I'm inspired by artists who are never totally satisfied with their work, but don't discredit their journey because of it, the ones who strive to take it to a new level and then move on when it's complete. I also recognize the risk with this approach, because it can take one's focus away from the moment. It really has to be a fine balance of acceptance and ambition. I used to be envious of artists that had discipline with consistency, but now I don't pay attention to it as much. I'd rather look at a tree blowing in the wind.

'Be Kind' is a motto that I see again and again coming up in your work — is it a philosophical call to arms?

For me it's spiritual, not philosophical. I'm not a religious person and I don't wear a label of spirituality. I just believe in having an open heart and mind. Anteism is publishing a comic I spent two years on, titled *Finding Joy*. This book is a spiritual call to arms. It documents a four year chapter of my work.

Evolution



Zine Checklist!

2006

- 01: *In Arms Length* by Peter Taylor + Luke Ramsey
- 02: *A Great Big Stillness* by Justin B. Williams + LR
- 03: *Galactic Milkshake* by Daniel Gonzalez + LR
- 04: *Text Me Away* by Andy Rementer + Dem
- 05: *Farm Sized Adventures* by Jonny P. + LR
- 06: *Spirit Soup* by Kinoko + LR
- 07: *Wwww* by Andrew Jeffrey Wright + LR
- 08: *Face Flip Lips* by Darcy Paterson + LR

2007

- 09: *The Pawn's Queen* by C.C. Walton + LR
- 10: *Boing! One* by A.J. Purdy, Luke Ramsey, Andy Rementer, Jim Stoten
- 11: *Soul Searching* by Marco Zamora + LR
- 12: *You Only Know My Name Because Somebody Told You* by Lucas James
- 13: *The Diamond* by Jim Stoten
- 14: *Evolution* by Ben Jacques + LR
- 15: *WEAST One* feat/ fourteen artists
- 16: *Platitude* by Tracy Maurice, Luke Ramsey, Michelle Sterling
- 17: *Sweetnsour Pie* by Carol Es
- 18: *Mebemewebe* by Luke Ramsey and 66 collaborators

2008

- 19: *Portraits of Broken Hearted Women* by Irana Douer
- 20: *Boing! Two* by Matt Furie, Ben Jacques, A.J. Purdy, Luke Ramsey, Andy Rementer, Jim Stoten
- 21: *USERS* by Useless Idea + LR
- 22: *In The House* by Eric Shaw
- 23: *Too Much Is Not Enough* by Owen Plummer + LR
- 24: *PARAPPA* by Bang
- 25: *Eyes and Trees* by Emanuele Kabu
- 26: *Discourse* by Andrew Neyer + LR