



L'Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable's *ATTACK #15* is designed to generate discussion among viewers.

Terrorists launch art attack

> BY ROBIN LAURENCE

The language that Québécois artists Annie Roy and Pierre Allard deploy has an explosive power. *ATTACK #15* is the title of their latest urban intervention, the smouldering remains of a blasted and burned-out SUV, parked in the heart of the city. L'Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable is what they call the activist-art collaborative they formed in 1997, catching us on that barbed oxymoron, the idea that acts of terror might somehow be socially acceptable.

"Terrorism is never acceptable," says Roy, on the phone from Montreal. It's early evening there, and she's at home with Allard and their two young children. "Our name could be Gentle Pirates—but that would be so tacky. It would not speak about what we're living right now." A francophone, she peppers her English with French words and phrases: *exposition* (exhibition), *remorque* (trailer), *mécène* (patron), *l'état d'urgence* (state of emergency)...

Terrorisme, terrorism: Roy lights on the way that simply uttering it has become a taboo in contemporary western culture. "At the same time," she adds, "it is a word that is used to lie to a whole nation, to the American people, telling them they're going to war against terrorism when it's for oil."

ATSA is bringing *ATTACK #15* to Vancouver as part of the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival. Copresented by the grunt gallery, the work will be situated outside the Vancouver Art Gallery at Robson and Hornby from January 25 to 28. The artists will be present from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day (10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on

the final day) to interact with visitors and promote dialogue. As well, Roy will give an artist's talk at Emily Carr Institute on Wednesday, January 24, at 5 p.m. and a workshop at the VAG on January 28 from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

ATTACK #15 addresses a crowd of catastrophes facing the planet—war, greed, global warming, and environmental collapse, to name a few. "It's a very violent object," Roy says of the SUV, a wrecked car that ATSA has modified. Windows and tires blown out, roof and side panels blackened, smoke drifting upwards from its remains, it is a familiar image from news coverage of car bombings in Iraq.

Experiencing such a vehicle firsthand, even though it's a surrogate, makes the ongoing violence in the Middle East far more tangible and troubling. "This is the landscape that some people live every day—two, three, four times a day," says Roy. "This is horror." Other sights and sounds accompany the SUV, including a video she likens to a manifesto. Then she adds, "The point of this art piece is not necessarily to tell people what to think. It's more to generate discussion."

Generating discussion is part of ATSA's mandate, but so is effecting change. When Roy and Allard came together as a couple, in life and in art, they brought complementary talents: she in dance and choreography, he in film and visual art. "Our interests are in public space and how interventions there affect people," Roy explains. Their work has engaged a spectrum of social, political, and environmental issues, from homelessness and human rights to the pollution caused by plastic bags.

ATTACK #15, which has already

been staged at 14 sites across Canada, was a response by Roy and Allard to the American invasion of Iraq. "It became for us extremely urgent that we create this piece," Roy explains. "We were looking at our hyperconsumerism and the reasons for the war. We thought that an SUV was the perfect symbol of our arrogance and opulence in our consuming of oil." It is also, she says, a metaphor for the way our society values power and comfort over a sustainable environment and world peace.

During its August 2005 deployment in Montreal, *ATTACK #15* generated considerable public participation through issuing 10,000 "statements of offence". Roy explains that 350 people took part, leaving the ATSA-produced tickets on the windshields of vehicles they deemed to be contributing to the linked problems of overconsumption, greenhouse gases, war, and terrorism, through excessive size, idling for long periods of time, or improper maintenance. "It's not too strong to say that it's criminal to continue this way," Roy says.

A wall of those statements of offence (carbon copies were left on the offending vehicles, and the originals returned to ATSA) will be on display at the VAG on January 26 during its FUSE event. Unfortunately, Roy says, ATSA wasn't able to secure permission from the City of Vancouver to distribute similar tickets here. Still, she adds with a slightly subversive laugh, those interested can go to the ATSA Web site (www.atsa.qc.ca/) and download a template if they want. "We're really saying to the authorities, you're not doing what you should do, so as citizens we're going to do it for you." ♦