

GEORGIA STRAIGHT
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Faux Pas Prefers Puppets, Poultry

BY JANET SMITH

To understand the work of the Human Faux Pas, it's important to know that there are, despite all appearances, ideas so extreme that the troupe has ruled them out.

**Live at the
End
of the Century**

One such plan involved Adad Hannah walking on stilts while Clay Hastings chopped them shorter and shorter with a chain saw.

"I was going to be yelling 'Help me, help me, somebody fucking help me!'" Hannah says, raising his voice in a mock scream that draws the attention of the lunch crowd at a Kits diner.

Settling back into his vinyl bench, he adds calmly: "We have tons of props we haven't used."

For a performance-art cabaret on Friday night (October 1) at the Vogue, the troupe will content itself with turning headless, plucked chickens into puppets and exploding a mystery device they refer to only as an "art bomb". Hastings and Hannah are particularly elated today. They have just learned they will be able to set something on fire during the Vogue show—the kickoff event for the Live at the End of the Century performance-art festival. "All we need is a guy with a fire extinguisher to be on-stage," says Hannah.

Hannah and Hastings have coined an irreverent, silly, and wildly visual brand of performance art that's as unique as their respective backgrounds. Hannah, a well-known-about-town visual artist, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design grad, and curator for the



Clay Hastings (left) and Adad Hannah rail against the establishment.

Havana Gallery, was raised by parents who travelled throughout Europe as professional clowns. Meanwhile, here in B.C., Hastings's parents were touring the province's stages with their vaudeville act. Hastings is now a trained actor—but he stresses his Human Faux Pas work is different than theatre.

"There's a stigma that goes with the term *performance art*," he admits. "A lot of people in the theatre community run the other direction when they hear the term. Calling it performance art frees you up a lot more."

Their brand of performance may draw on vaudeville, the circus, and theatre, but when Hannah and Hastings sit down to plan the small vignettes, they always start with Hannah drawing pictures.

"We have tons of ideas or impressions of scenes," says Hastings.

"A lot of them are juvenile and involve burning things down," adds Hannah with a laugh.

Hannah traces the Human Faux

Pas back to an arts camp he attended in California when he was a teenager. There, he first experimented with physical theatre with a few other students. Since then, he's used the name for an ever-changing group of people who have performed everywhere from Illuminares to the Fringe Festival. But since 1994, when Hannah received a Canada Council grant for the Human Faux Pas, he's been creating the work with Hastings (although several others usually join them on-stage).

"When we did our first show with the grant, there was all this pressure to do something serious, and in the end, we did what came into our heads and what we felt like doing—what we thought was funny or smart or poignant," says Hannah.

In the past, the result has included some disturbing visions, such as Hannah rolling backward in a wheelchair with two long tubes stretched across the stage and up his nose. And there have been ridiculous visions, such as a giant, headless, plucked-chicken costume and plucked-chicken marionettes.

But the Human Faux Pas does not limit its work to the stage. Just as Hannah and Hastings believe you can find performance art almost everywhere in modern culture—especially in music videos—they believe it can be *performed* anywhere. Says Hannah: "We've done stuff like we all dressed up as rockers and went to the White Spot and ordered Kokanees."

Despite the appearance of chaos, Hannah and Hastings cite a common purpose behind all of the Human Faux Pas's mayhem, from plucked chickens to art bombs to rocker costumes. "We basically like to rail against the establishment," Hastings says. ■