



CAPTIONS: Photo: Sal Randolph was a pawn who captured a white knight, Steve Duncan, yesterday at Ludlow and Rivington Streets on the Lower East Side, in a human chess game controlled via instructions over cellphones. The game was part of the PsyGeoConflux festival's fourth and final day. (Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times)

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Lower Manhattan Journal; Street Artists, Fighting Over Gentrified Streets

By **COREY KILGANNON (NYT)** 926 words

Marc Schiller, a tour leader, did not seem to notice the well-dressed crowds of Mother's Day celebrators streaming into trendy SoHo restaurants yesterday.

Mr. Schiller had a more socially significant task: to educate 60 art hipsters about the insider world of what Mr. Schiller sees as overlooked masterpieces that are pasted, stenciled and scrawled all over the grimy downtown streetscape. The medium for this guerrilla art ranged from stickers to stencils to posters to graffiti. Much of it drips with hostility for mainstream culture.

On Crosby Street, Mr. Schiller pointed out a sidewalk stencil of Gandhi, a derisive wheat-paste poster of Michael Jackson and a drawing of Jesus strutting with two boom boxes, all original artwork.

The owner of a marketing company in Manhattan, he said that many street artists simply want to reclaim the public space from what he characterized as the capital and cultural imperialists who have gentrified blocks in the city's downtown.

"Everything's been bought up," he said. "They just want to reclaim a small piece for themselves."

Mr. Schiller's tour, however offbeat, compared with, say, a walking tour of Museum Mile, was one of the more conventional offerings of the PsyGeoConflux, a four-day festival in and around the Lower East Side that ended yesterday.

A group of walkers traipsed through the streets in a pattern based on repeating algorithms. Others dialed into an 800 line to receive walking directions

based on their emotional states. There was a tour of surveillance cameras in the city, and even a play staged in front of one camera.

And there was the human chess game, one played out by living pieces dashing from one intersection to another on a board enlarged over the street grid, the intersections corresponding to squares on the board.

The 16 black pieces lined up along East Houston Street and Stanton Street between Clinton and Eldridge Streets, and the white side lined up along Delancey and Broome Streets.

Two expert chess players faced off on a normal-sized board in the courtyard of ABC No Rio, the cultural center on Rivington Street serving as the festival's base.

Their moves were transmitted via cell phone to the human pieces on the streets.

They then moved from one "square" -- or corresponding intersection -- to another. Some high-mileage pieces (bishops, rooks, knights, queens) took to skates or bicycles during the two-hour game. Kings and pawns walked, if they moved at all.

One white pawn, represented by Colette Meacher, a festival lecturer, did not move once during the game.

Ms. Meacher, a philosophy graduate student from London, started out standing at the corner of Eldridge and Delancey Streets outside a second-hand store, and finally sunk into one of the chairs for sale on the sidewalk.

On Saturday, Ms. Meacher had run a walking tour based on Immanuel Kant's theory of the sublime. She too advocated for more street art.

"From his writings on surrealism and situationism," she said of Kant, "you can tell he felt that art should be taken out of the traditional format of galleries, hung for an elite group of viewers, and taken out into the street to engage people walking around."

Gabby O'Neill, a 34-year-old art director from Los Angeles, walked the streets guided by an automated voice on her cellphone.

A special phone line offered menu options based on subjective perceptions. ("If you are moving from one ambient zone to another, press one.") The walk was a psychographic revelation, Ms. O'Neill said.

"It's all about how much you're willing to interact with your surroundings," she told the tour's creator, Kate Armstrong, afterward.

Ms. Armstrong explained that her phone-guided tour was based on principles explored by the Situationists, a Paris school of philosophers in the 1960's.

"It's also a Baudelairean thing, almost," said Ms. Armstrong, 31, a conceptual artist from Vancouver.

"I don't know who that is," Ms. O'Neill said, laughing.

In an unscheduled crossing of paths, hundreds of believers in Falun Dafa meditation, in yellow Mao suits banged drums and cymbals as they marched across Rivington Street during various festival tours.

The "Day Tripper" tour was canceled because of the dreary weather.

The event's program promised that the tour would visit ordinary street sites that would "inadvertently produce the effect of altering the observer's brain waves toward a meditative or hyper-alert state. through photic (light) stimulation."

Back with Mr. Schiller, the hipsters examined sculptures fastened to No Parking signs and then proceeded past snazzy art galleries and vagrants' bedrolls. Passing a Starbucks, several tour members grabbed free ice cream samples.

The crowd peered at dirty graffiti walls as Mr. Schiller pointed with his umbrella and spoke with a professorial air, which brought a chuckle to one local resident, Chuck Jugans, 29, an actor.

"You want a tour?" he shouted to the group, exhaling cigarette smoke. "I'll show the homes of the stars. Five bucks, right now."