

June 16, 2006
Family Fare

A Brush With Magic, Courtesy of Magritte

By LAUREL GRAEBER

In 1928-29 the Belgian artist René Magritte painted "The Treachery of Images," a canvas depicting a man's pipe. On it he wrote the French phrase "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." ("This is not a pipe.") Was the statement just a gentle poke in the ribs? A reminder that a picture is not the same as what it represents? An assertion of the ultimate mysteriousness of the painter's intention? A warning that labels can obscure the truth of what we see?

Perhaps all of the above, Barry Kornhauser suggests in his play "This Is Not a Pipe Dream." But if the life of a Surrealist painter seems like a peculiar subject for young audiences, you should be aware of one of the many achievements of "This Is Not a Pipe Dream": this is not an art history lesson.

This charming and extraordinary hourlong show, presented by the Paddywack Players, takes audiences inside the imagination of Magritte as a boy. Directed by Tracy Bersley, the actors portray figures in his life, from his devoted mother (Isabel Steuble-Johnson) and disapproving father (Alex Pierce) to the swathed lovers and men in bowler hats of his work. René (David Brown), as he is called throughout, sees art as a form of magic.

Theatergoers come to share his point of view, partly through Jeff Van Velsor's fantastical set — chairs and an apple dangling from the ceiling, slides of Magritte's artwork — and partly through Mr. Kornhauser's deft writing, which underscores the parallels between a painterly creation and a theatrical one.

Characters called the interlocutor (Wali Collins) and the stage manager (Cherry Lou Sy) help engineer the action, which includes slapstick, vaudevillian routines, intriguing incidental music (by Gil Talmi) and touches of audience participation.

Parts of the show's title serve multiple duty: as an expression of René's father's sternness ("If I say this is not a pipe, then this is not a pipe!"), as a pun ("I said not a peep!"), as an illustration of theatrical illusion ("This is not a pipe," in reference to a foam-rubber "pipe") and ultimately the idea that the desire to create does not have to be a pipe dream. That it all hangs together as fun — but quite serious fun — is part of the appeal.

Audiences will leave with an appreciation not just for Magritte but also for the power of art to transform the ordinary into the wonderful: sometimes a pipe is not just a pipe.

"This Is Not a Pipe Dream," through June 25 at the Richmond Shepard Theater, 309 East 26th Street, Manhattan, (212) 358-5089. Saturdays and Sundays at noon. Also this Monday at 7 p.m. \$12.

A Summer Experiment

You can bump into a great many people at a typical New York City street fair, but it's safe to say that Einstein won't be among them.

This weekend, however, visitors to two separate blocks will rub shoulders with that genius, in more than one sense. The Graduate Center of the City of New York is presenting the Amazing, First Ever, New York City Science Street Fair, which will offer not only demonstrations of some principles Einstein elucidated, but also a chance to pose with him — or rather a look-alike — for pictures.

"When you go to a street fair, you expect to see kielbasa and tube socks," said Brian Schwartz, a professor of physics at the center and the fair's organizer. "We want people to be surprised."

Among the 12 booths' surprises will be a [Rutgers University](#) scientist lying on a bed of nails (his comfort depends on physics), the dissection of a cow's eye by staff members of the New York Hall of Science, an opportunity to view sunspots through solar telescopes from the Amateur Astronomers Association (weather permitting) and what you could call "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Physics": members of a Brooklyn dojo illustrating why martial arts work.

"We also have a science magician," Mr. Schwartz said. "He'll do things like pour water into a Styrofoam cup, then turn it upside down, and nothing will come out." (To learn why, visit the display.)

And because the event will be part of two ordinary street fairs, you can get your kielbasa and tube socks too.

The Amazing, First Ever, New York City Science Street Fair, tomorrow on Third Avenue, between 12th and 13th Streets, and Sunday on Lexington Avenue, between 37th and 38th Streets. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Free. Information: web.gc.cuny.edu/sciart/sciart.htm#streetfair.

Walk on the Wild Side

Pitching a tent in the backyard isn't an option for most Manhattan youngsters. But tomorrow the Department of Parks and Recreation will try to make at least part of the borough seem more like Yellowstone than like the land of the yellow cab.

The occasion is the second annual "Adventures NYC," which will turn a wide swath of Central Park into a huge campground. (Other city parks will also sponsor their own events.) Base camp is the Bandshell, with nearby sites like the Adrenaline Tent — a place for families to sign up for kayaking and orienteering — and a children's area, Camp Kids.

"We're going to have the site set up with tents so kids can feel what it's like to camp out," said Rebecca Smith, a marketing associate for the parks department. Other attractions there will include a rock climbing wall, an obstacle course and relay area, arts and crafts and tours devoted to park plants and wildlife by the group Mohr's Explorers.

And what would camp be without scary stories? "We'll have a ghost tales tent," Ms. Smith said. "We'll have computers set up, and kids can write their own stories." As for sharing them, go to that great digital campfire: the works will be published later on nyc.gov/parks and backpacker.com.

"Adventures NYC," tomorrow from noon to 4 p.m. at the Central Park Bandshell, midpark at 70th Street. Free. Information: 311.

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