

Love Letter to a City:

How one urban experimentalist single-handedly changed the image of his hometown

Wednesday, November 9, 2011, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon
OCAD University, 100 McCaul Street (south of Dundas), Toronto

Dear Colleague,

In January 2011 **Newsweek** identified Grand Rapids, Michigan as one of America's **top dying cities**. Twenty-two year old Grand Rapids artist and event organizer **Rob Bliss** took exception to this report and decided **to do something about it**.

Bringing the community together, Bliss created the [Grand Rapids LipDub](#) that went viral with **over 4.2 million internet hits** (and counting).



Come hear **Rob Bliss** speak about how artists, public servants, politicians, community and business leaders, schools, colleges and residents were galvanized to make what film critic **Roger Ebert** called **“the greatest music video of all time.”**

Rob will be joined by panelists **Jesse Hirsh**, **Dré Labre** and **Che Kothari** who will talk about **the creative use of social networking to build communities in Toronto**.

The session will be moderated by **The Globe and Mail’s Advertising and**

Marketing Reporter **Simon Houpt**.

There is no cost to participate in this event. I look forward to seeing you on November 9, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. Seating capacity is limited so **please RSVP to info@icecommittee.org** by no later than October 26, 2011. Feel free to call me directly at 416-348-9935 if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,
Enid Slack, Chair, ICE Committee

Register by **October 26, 2011**
RSVP to info@icecommittee.org
Space is limited

Rob Bliss, Event Organizer and Social Media Expert, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Rob Bliss is a 22 year old creative event organizer in the downtown Grand Rapids area. In the past 2.5 years he has had a combined attendance of over 100,000 people without spending a dollar on advertisement. By creating free, fun, inclusive community events, he has been a key figure in the revitalization in the downtown area. He has been featured and done interviews with countless news organizations in the United States and abroad. His events have brought tens of thousands of dollars of business to the downtown area over the past couple years as well as "the most attention Grand Rapids has seen since the Gerald R. Ford funeral" says the Grand Rapids Press. Rob's work focuses around downtown revitalization, youth retention in West Michigan, and continuing improvement in the image of Grand Rapids, MI.

Jesse Hirsh, Broadcaster, Speaker, Researcher and Strategist

Jesse Hirsh is an internet strategist, researcher, and broadcaster based in Toronto, Canada. He has a weekly nationally syndicated column on CBC radio explaining and analyzing the latest trends and developments in technology using language and examples that are meaningful and relevant to everyday life. He owns and operates two companies: Openflows Networks Ltd., which specializes in using free and open source software for advanced interactive platforms, and Metaviews Media Management Ltd., which focuses on research and consulting around new media business models. Educated at the McLuhan Program at the University of Toronto, his passion is educating people on the potential benefits and perils of technology.

Dré Labre, Creative Director, Rethink

During Dré's 13 years at agencies such as MacLaren McCann, Blast Radius and Tribal DDB, he has built a reputation for understanding exactly how modern forms of communication can captivate and inspire and why the idea must lead the technology. And it's working. If awards are the creative currency, then Labre's pockets are jangling happily. Dré's strategy and artistry have earned him judge positions at awards shows such as the DMAs, CMAs, London International and the Webbys. He is a member of the International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences (IADAS) and is on the board of directors of the Advertising and Design Club of Canada (ADCC). He also routinely speaks at advertising, technology, music and filmmaking conferences, and is known to bust out into impromptu ukulele sessions.

Che Kothari, Executive Director, Manifesto Community Projects

At the young age of twenty-eight Che Kothari has become an established photographer and leader within his community, dedicated to fostering other young artists in his city. Raised in Guelph, Ontario, he moved to Toronto at the age of 17 to pursue an education at Ryerson University for image Arts while immersing himself in the cultural arts the city had to offer. With business partner Ryan Paterson he started up Hightop Studio – a company dedicated to photography, web design, event production and management. The next major step for Che was founding a non-profit organization, Manifesto Community Projects, of which he is currently the Executive Director. Manifesto is a grassroots organization working to unite, energize, support and celebrate Toronto's vibrant and diverse music and arts community, and find innovative ways of working together towards common goals. Che is a founding member and the managing director of one of Canada's leading online music websites, Earwaks.com, founding member and active participant of the Canadian Youth Arts Network and leads various photography and leadership workshops for youth. In 2008 Che also became the 2008 Executive Director for Ignite the Americas Youth Arts Policy Forum.

Simon Houpt, Reporter, The Globe and Mail (moderator)

Advertising and Marketing Reporter Simon Houpt began his career with The Globe in 1999 as the paper's New York arts correspondent, covering the cultural life of that city through Canadian eyes. After 10 years on the beat, including almost six as a weekly columnist, Houpt returned to the Globe's Toronto news room in the summer of 2009 to join the Report on Business as its advertising and marketing reporter. Prior to The Globe, Houpt worked on the CBC-TV new media current affairs show *Undercurrents*. He is the author of *Museum of the Missing: A History of Art Theft*.