

## Sky Magic



Duke Riley, "Pigeons" (Photo by Tod Seelie. Courtesy of Creative Time.)

By JAN CASTRO, JUNE 2016

Duke Riley's "Fly by Night" Creative Time at Brooklyn Navy Yard May 7 – June 19, 2016

<http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/duke-riley-sky-magic/3445>

*Fly by Night* was Creative Time's salute to art, pigeons, Brooklyn nights, and the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The free tickets were hard-to-get. The poster for the event displayed Duke Riley's love of ships, birds, and adult humor: a flying pigeon holds an overly large light as a battle ship shows pigeons at attention on small cannons — with two birds smoking cigarettes. The program notes that pigeon breeds in the show include the Homer, Egyptian Swift, Syrian Damascene, German Beauty, Roller/Tumbler, Russian High Flyer, and Tippler. A related overview assures us that these birds have their own veterinarian, get regular baths and medical checkups, and wear specially-designed LED leg-band lights only for performances.

The most important part of the set-up is the water and the Baylander IX-514, a Vietnam-era naval ship now painted gray, decorated with painted and real flags, and lined with specially-built, brightly-lit pigeon condominiums. "Their individual lofts allow for movement and socialization" and are well ventilated, I'm told. The redesigned naval ship is a signature Duke Riley art work.



Duke Riley, "Fly by Night" (2016), birds, ship, flags. (Photo Jan Castro)

After viewers have settled in on the tarmac, in the bleachers, and on a rooftop viewing area, dusk approaches. Microphone-enhanced pigeon sounds and whistles signal that the show is starting. As three men wave flags, the pigeons on the ship deck loft into the sky. For thirty minutes, Fantails, Satinetts, Homers, German Beauties, and more circle in different formations. As they swoop over the water and bleachers, their LED lights shine like clusters of stars amid pink and blue puffy clouds. As the sky darkens, some of us lie prone, letting the light show in the sky fill us with peace and wonder. The sight, and even the act of looking up, takes us away from daily life; we enter space in a visual, moving way. The performance ends as it began, with noises, whistles, flags, and music. The pigeons land in stages, settling onto the ship and entering dozens of lit arching grey wood doors.



Duke Riley, "Pigeons" (Photos by Tod Seelie, Courtesy of Creative Time.)



Duke Riley

(Photo by Will Star, courtesy of Creative Time)

Katie Hollander, the Executive Director of Creative Time, offered some personal background information about this huge production: "Duke Riley is an artist Creative Time has worked with in the past. His work has been included in group exhibitions and we did a residency program that he participated in. We've often discussed doing a larger scale commission with him and when he came to us with this idea we just feel in love with it immediately and knew it had all the elements of a truly unique Creative Time project.

"And for me personally I immediately connected to the project. As a child growing up in Brooklyn I remember often seeing pigeon keepers flying their birds from rooftops. It was a regular occurrence that fascinated me and kept me mesmerized as I often saw them on the F-train overpass pass between Gowanus and Park Slope. So when Duke told me about the project I was taken back to those memories of a my childhood and knew it was an experience that would captivate the city.

"As an organization when we commit to a commission we're all in and we work with the artist in all aspect to help realize their dreams."

Meredith Johnson is Curator of *Fly by Night*, and the entire Creative Time staff, site staff, production crew, and interns seemed well-coordinated. The avian leg bands were designed by Marcel Botha and his team at 10XBeta. Volunteers shoed us out of the Navy Yard with waves of their light wands.

For Duke Riley, *Fly by Night* is only one phase of his ongoing projects as a pigeon keeper. The artist related, "One of my favorite aspects of *Fly by Night* is all of the people that have reached out and have been involved that have expressed legitimate interest in starting their own new pigeon coops in New York City, ready to continue the city's rich tradition." **WM**



Duke Riley

(Photo by Will Star. Courtesy of Creative Time.)



**Jan Castro** [Jan Garden Castro](#) is a contributing editor for *Sculpture Magazine* (17 cover stories) and blogs at [sculpture.org](http://sculpture.org). She has curated exhibitions for IAA (International Arts & Artists), Jane V. Zimmerli Museum, JAMA (Japan Association of Art Museums), and ICPNA (Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano – Lima). Her books include *The Art & Life of Georgia O’Keeffe*, *Sonia Delaunay: La Moderne*, and *The Last Frontier*. Her work has appeared in *The Nation*, *American Poetry Review*, and *American Book Review*.