

ARTS

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

ART ACTIVISTS ATSA CELEBRATE SHMATA AT THE MAIN MADNESS STREET FAIR

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ATSA is a venerable artists' collective. How often can you say that? What sets them above the rest, morally speaking, is that they have the world's greater good at heart. They are artists and activists at once, bypassing the creative ego in an effort to protest, make homage to, draw attention to, or otherwise treat subjects of social import.

In the past, ATSA have made wide-scale installations out of tree trunks on Mount Royal to question contemporary environmental attitudes. They've recounted the history of Montreal's underbelly, its red-light district of yore, by building a circuit of installations designed to educate. In 2004, when they were first approached by the Société de développement du boulevard St-Laurent, they launched *Frag*, the series of panels you have undoubtedly seen posted on myriad buildings along the Main between Sherbrooke and Mont-Royal, which tell the little-person stories behind the buildings we take for granted. Now, just in time for Main Madness, ATSA turn their attention to the rag trade.

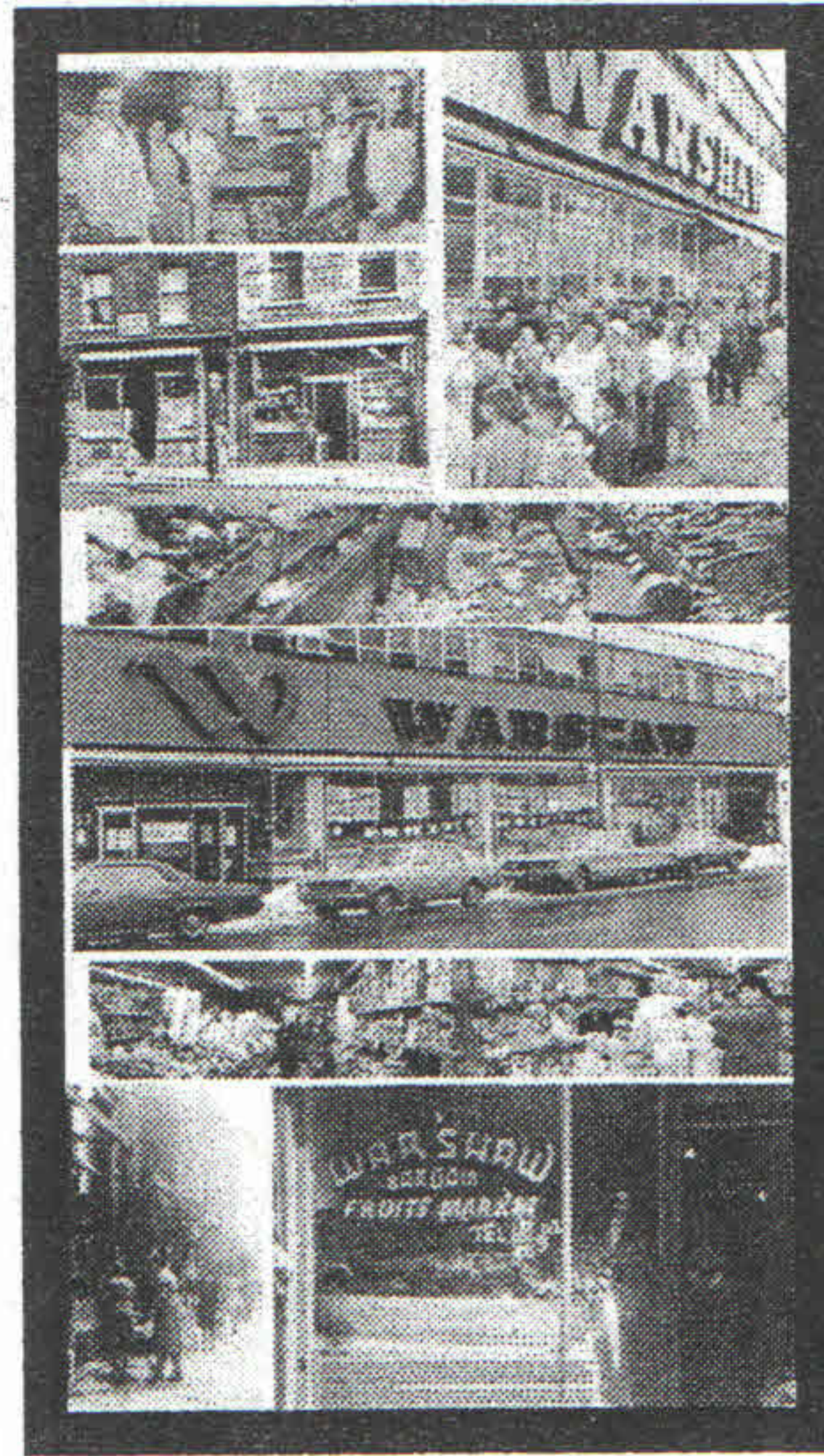
"It's great," boasts ATSA member Annie Roy, "because it's smack bang in the middle of a sidewalk sale, where boy, do people buy rags! There's masses of 'made in China' all over St-Laurent during that weekend, so it's the perfect opportunity for us to address the subject directly."

Shmata, meaning "rag" in Yiddish, will be a massive installation right on the corner of Prince-Arthur and St-Laurent, in front of the Balfour building, where passersby will be invited to enter big containers – the likes of which transport clothes to us today, from various places around the globe – filled with an industrial soundtrack, antique sewing machines, and archive photographs of the inside of the Balfour at the turn of the century, in the trade's heyday.

"It gives us the opportunity to make reference to stories like that of Léa Roback, the Grève des Midinettes, how people started to get organized into unions – but it also allows us to continue our exploration of sweatshops, which still exist here in Montreal, and which either way are just getting pushed to other continents. Not that long ago, though, the cheap labour was us!"

Shmata also marks the launch of a whole new breed of *Frag*s. The *Frag* trajectory has been expanded to incorporate the stretch from Viger, downtown, to Mozart, up in Little Italy, and boasts bigger panels, an updated look, a new numbering system that corresponds to the civic addresses, and new texts created in collaboration with historians Pierre Anctil, Bernard Vallée, Catherine Browne and Susan D. Bronson. Those texts are all available as podcasts, set to music by Luc Raymond, if you want to do the trajectory with audio, or they are all available online at www.atsa.qc.ca. The idea was to expand the series into a more user-friendly, informative and educational package – to the extent that, starting this fall, schools around town will be invited to incorporate the *Frag* circuit into their history syllabuses.

"Life moves really fast," sighs Roy. "We're constantly being solicited by publicity, but here we're proposing a different sort of solicitation, so that we can all learn a little about our city through its different eras. There are some really fascinating things to discover."



WARSHAW, AS HISTORICIZED BY FRAG

SHMATA

On the Main, corner Prince-Arthur, Aug. 24-27

FRAG

Available for your educational pleasure day and night, any old time you like!