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Bard College Bell Tower Architectural Lighting Project

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David Bull

Artist Statement

Bard College

April 18, 2016

Bard College Bell Tower Architectural Lighting Project

The Bard Bell Tower is located in front of the Fisher Studio Arts Building, between the Bertelsmann Campus Center and the Anna Jones Memorial Garden. Until recently, the tower structure, built by students in the spring and summer of 1965, existed in a slow state of decay due to natural aging and disuse. It is an important piece of Bard's history that has been ignored in recent years, which is something I set out to change. My Senior Project in Studio Arts is focused on restoring the Bell Tower by stabilizing the structure and implementing a permanent light installation of my own design, which will emanate from below the bells.

The illumination creates a glowing volume, or essence that escapes the tower and casts light on branches of the neighboring trees. The sequence will begin at 6pm with the color temperature of 1,600 kelvin, which mimics the glow of a candle and after 14 hours will conclude at 20,000 kelvin, the wash of a clear blue sky. During this period of time, the entire color spectrum is revealed. The illumination is elusive and minimal, while captivating, it is in no way harsh. Light moving over time, alive, creating shadows addresses the possibilities life presents.

The restoration of the structure includes the repair of the bell ringing mechanism so the bell will ring, eight times at 8am, twelve times at 12pm, and six times at 6pm, to mark the passing of the day. The mechanized bell is controlled by a system of gears and cogs that are programmed by a digital WR-2 system. Six Chroma Q Compact lighting fixtures have been installed with two fixtures on the front and back walls and one on each of the side walls. The light fixtures are powered by a Chroma Q PSU 15 and are controlled by a ENTTEC DMXStreamer. A small lean-to plexiglass roof with a tempered glass shelf was built to protect the electronics and bell ringing mechanism from the elements. A sample of the existing mortar has been analyzed by Edison Coatings in Plainville, Connecticut. Edison Coatings will replicate a mortar to the exact color and composition of the original. Over spring break, I took a historic repointing class at Edison Coatings on how to repoint the tower structure properly. In addition to cleaning out the 80 gallons of bird feces, bat guano, sticks, leaves, tooth paste, beer bottles, and dirt, a net was installed to keep the birds from the bells. A copper water drainage system to protect the mortar is currently in the works. Since half of the tower is at a higher gradient of ground and the other half is at a lower gradient of ground, Bard College Buildings and Grounds is digging a drainage trench so the tower floor will no longer flood during storms.

This project is a monumental feat which has required collaborating with approximately 30 different people and various organizations. It is the official 2016 Senior Class Gift. My intent was to evaluate the environmental performance of the structure and to use light as an ethereal ever changing force. Addressing the physical building, preserving its historical importance, while at the same time transforming the

tower through light to a place of hope, a beacon during dark times, and a symbol of the ever changing future ahead of us, encourages the Bard community to experience the space differently while making it an integral part of campus life.

If there was what would it be?











