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Anonymous Letter Posted at CCS Hessel Museum

CALLIE JACKS

In an act of institutional critique, an anonymous individual called for transparency at the Hessel Museum of Art. Sometime in October of 2017, a number of pieces of copy paper covered in bold typeface appeared on an exterior wall and in the coatroom of the museum.

The complete statement, hung in two neat rows next to a coat rack, was a message to all museums and highlighted the importance of aesthetic engagement, citing it as an action that “merges physical, mental, and spiritual perception”. In comparing a museum to a semi-permeable cell, the author exposes institutional exclusivity as a problem that is prevalent in the art world.

Many museums worldwide experience criticisms of this nature; citizens and artists alike are demanding inclusivity, transparency, and true objectivity while

denouncing systematic discrimination perpetuated by museums.

The Hessel treated the message like its own art exhibit, leaving it in the original place and including a small label to inform viewers that it was placed there anonymously. Marcia Acita, the director of Exhibitions and Operations, described the piece as a “deliberate” and “thoughtful” action. She wished for an opportunity to have a conversation with the individual. She imagined a situation in which a person could have entered the museum during a quiet hour and, out of view of the front desk, pasted each 8.5” by 11” sheet in the coatroom.

The proclamation was up for a few days even before security guards noticed. Acita recalled seeing two pieces of white paper attached to the exterior of the window, which looks out over the southwest wall and

lawn. They were already buckled by wind.

In a search for the author of the bulletin, Acita questioned a group of Center for Curatorial Studies first years—some of whom curated a final exhibit for their class called States of Presence in December of 2017. She had remembered an instant when they asked if the Hessel had ever hosted an exhibit about the history of Native Americans on the land Bard now inhabits. Perhaps this interest was motive. The CCS students were surprised to learn about the anonymous act; if it had come from inside the graduate center, why were they just hearing about it now?

States of Presence, curated by Mathilde Walker-Billaud, Drew Broderick, Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi, Moses Serubiri, and Julia Eilers Smith, was the third part in “the whole is not the whole is not the whole,” the final exhibit put together by the first-year practicum class. Using pieces from the Mariluise Hessel Collection of Contemporary Art, the ex-

hibit explored different perspectives on how parts make up a whole. States of Presence focused on “the act of staying.” The curators looked for artworks that showed an engagement with territory and land. The exhibit included pieces that address the topics of immigration, migration, home, death, among others.

“the whole is not the whole is not the whole” was one of three exhibits that surveyed multiple sides of an idea at the Hessel during the fall semester. No to the Invasion featured art from the contemporary Arab-speaking world, an area that has been characterized by conflict and shifting powers. Each work was meant to be engaged with alongside this frame of knowledge. Picture Industry, curated by former Bard student Walead Beshty, surveyed many elements of media from the 19th-century to the present including but not limited to, photographs, slides, periodicals, and films. Both exhibits brought many visitors, from first-year Language and Thinking classes to locals

from the surrounding towns.

Picture Industry, in particular, generated a considerable amount of conversation. Many people were drawn to Arthur Jafa’s Love is the Message, the Message is Death, a compilation of found media about African-American identity projected from ceiling to floor in a gallery. Kanye West’s “UltraLight Beam” pulsed under photographs of civil rights leaders, footage from the Rodney King riots, and news clips from Hurricane Katrina. The piece pulled emotion from everyone, security guards and students alike. A professor even brought a class to see the video multiple times.

One might look at these exhibits that took place at the Hessel in the fall of 2017 and question why someone would criticize such an institution in the form of anonymous poetry; each exhibit contained stories perspectives as seen by artists from all over the world. In a response to the posting, one individual cited the presence of Arthur Jafa’s video and Gordon Parks’ photogra-

phy—both of which appeared in Picture Industry—as a counter argument. As if the existence of work by two notable black artists automatically made the Hessel exempt from the category of museum that “institutionally perpetuates racism, sexism, classism, and discrimination.” In fact, only a handful of board members, faculty, curators-in-residence, and artists-in-residence at the Hessel are people of color. In addition, CCS only offers limited amounts of financial aid for graduate students. With limited perspectives to draw from, how can an institution of power be truly inclusive?

It cannot be denied that the past semester of exhibits focused on a narrative of inclusivity and consisted of art from a wide variety of backgrounds. Whether this theme was deliberate is unknown. Intentional or not, the anonymous postings raise important questions about the Hessel Museum and its actions in the future. Perhaps most important: by whose standards do we deem an object worthy?

TOUGH TALKS

Chelsea Manning Speaks at Bard

BROWNYN SIMMONS

Wednesday, February 21, 2018, US Army government whistleblower Chelsea Manning spoke at an event hosted by the Hannah Arendt Center Tough Talk series and Queer Student Organization. More than 800 people were in attendance.

Professor Roger Berkowitz, Academic Director of the Arendt Center, opened by introducing Harper Zacharias and Mark Williams Jr., the two students in charge of organizing the event. Rebecca Thomas, Dean of the College, and Professor Kevin Duong, Political Studies, moderated. Chelsea Manning spoke first, initially broaching the subject of failing governmental institutions. “Sometimes you have to replace those institutions and sometimes you have to combat those institutions, and that’s been an ongoing experience in my life, wheth-

er that’s been in school or in the military or in prison or even today,” said Manning. “Sometimes you have to actually step outside that system and move forward.”

Following her opening remarks, Duong and Thomas probed Manning on government surveillance, ethics and duty, transgender rights, artificial intelligence, U. S. military action abroad, prison systems, and community organizing. The energetic debate lasted for an hour before opening up to audience questions.

Event sponsors include The Draft, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Global International Studies, the Office for Gender Equity, Queer People of Color, It’s on Us, Student Labor Dialogue, the Center for Civic Engagement, the Center for Experimental Humanities, the Office for Gender Diversity and Inclusion, and the Trans Collective.

This story will be continued in greater depth in the next issue of the *Free Press*.

Posted by an Anonymous Individual at the Hessel Museum, Fall 2017

AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT MERGES PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION.

ALL OBJECTS HAVE THE POWER TO INSPIRE AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT, BUT GENERALLY THE CONTEXT OF THE OBJECT DETERMINES HOW WE INTERACT WITH IT.

THE MUSEUM IS A MAJOR CONTEXTUALIZER OF OBJECTS ENABLING AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT ON A MASS-SCALE.

IF WE SEE A CARDBOARD BOX ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, WE MAY ENGAGE WITH IT PASSIVELY.

IF WE SEE A CARDBOARD BOX IN A MUSEUM, WE ENGAGE WITH IT AS ART.

LIKE CELLS WITH SEMI-PERMEABLE MEMBRANES, MUSEUMS HOLD THE POWER TO EXCLUDE.

INSTITUTIONALLY VALIDATING OR REJECTING THE OBJECT AS ART.

ANYTHING DEEMED WORTHY TO ENTER IS DEEMED WORTHY OF AESTHETIC PERCEPTION.

EXCLUSION MAKES THE ARTIST AND THE OBJECT INSTITUTIONALLY INVISIBLE.

IF THE PURPOSE OF THE MUSEUM IS TO PRESERVE, TO CREATE A SPACE FOR REFLECTING UPON WHAT IS PRESERVED,

THEN THE MUSEUM PLAYS THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF DOCUMENTING LIVED EXPERIENCE.

ALL LIVES ARE EXPERIENCED, BUT ONLY FEW HAVE INSTITUTIONAL MEANS OF DOCUMENTING THEIR LIVES.

HISTORICAL POWER IS BORN FROM THE ABILITY TO RECORD AND INTERPRET LIVED EXPERIENCE.

AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE IS AMPLIFIED WHEN THIS INTERPRETATION IS INSTITUTIONALLY VALIDATED.

THE MUSEUM HAS THE POWER TO GIVE INTERPRETIVE MEANING TO OBJECTS, ARTISTS, COMMUNITIES, PEOPLES.

WHEN THE MUSEUM PRESENTS ITSELF AS AN OBJECTIVE SPACE, THE IMPLICATION IS THAT THOSE EXCLUDED ARE OBJECTIVELY UNDESERVING THE RIGHT TO PRESERVE,

THE RIGHT TO INTERPRET AND THEREFORE THE RIGHT TO GIVE THEIR LIVES MEANING.

THROUGH SECURING A PERCEIVED SENSE OF OBJECTIVITY WHILE UPHOLDING BIASED STANDARDS OF WHAT IS WORTHY OF INCLUSION,

THE MUSEUM INSTITUTIONALLY PERPETUATES RACISM, SEXISM, CLASSISM AND DISCRIMINATION.

THIS SPACE COULD BE LIFE-GIVING, BREATHING MENTAL, INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE INTO SENSORY OBJECTS.

THROUGH PRIORITIZING INCLUSIVE AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT, IT COULD DISTRIBUTE THE POWER OF PRESERVING AND INTERPRETING.

MUSEUMS PLAY AN IMPERATIVE ROLE IN PROMOTING AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT,

BUT THE CURRENT IDEOLOGY OF THE MUSEUM MUST CHANGE.

WE NEED MUSEUMS THAT ARE NOT PREDICATED ON AN APPEARANCE OF OBJECTIVITY.

WE NEED MUSEUMS THAT REMAIN CRITICAL OF THEIR POWER TO EXCLUDE,

THAT REMAIN CANDID ABOUT WHO IS BEING EXCLUDED

AND WHO HAS THE POWER TO DO THE EXCLUDING.

BY WHOSE STANDARDS DO WE DEEM THE OBJECT WORTHY?

LOOK AT THAT BIG WHITE WALL.

BY WHOSE STANDARDS DO WE DEEM THE OBJECT WORTHY?

If you have any more information or more to say about this incident, please contact the Free Press.

SPORTS

Lorenzo Ferrari Field Gets Turfed

ZACH HAYES

Due to heavy use and the reality of winter weather in the northeast, Ferrari Field is often unusable until mid-March. For Bard’s lacrosse teams, who begin their season just as the calendar flips to February, this poses a significant problem.

Despite being a two-sport athlete and captain of the Bard women’s lacrosse team, junior Casey Witte is less familiar with the Lorenzo Ferrari Soccer & Lacrosse Complex than she’d like to be. Location isn’t the issue—the two fields that make up the soccer and lacrosse teams’ game and practice facilities are just a few steps from the back door of the Stevenson Athletic Center—timing and weather, however, are a different beast.

“It has a lot to do with the spring sports. Both of the la-

crosse teams, and really any sport that needs to practice outside, can’t because of the snow. We don’t have our own home games until at least halfway through the season, sometimes not even until the last few weeks,” Witte said. The solution: lots of indoor practice time, and if not that, a bus ride to Deitz Field in Kingston, a frequent necessity for spring teams during the early part of the season.

“Practicing in the gym is a lot different than practicing outside,” Witte elaborated. “During the bulk of the season we want to be outside as much as possible, so we’ll go to Deitz at least two or three times a week.”

Though it gets the job done, practicing in the gym is far from ideal. Due to lack of time and space, gym practices are often considerably more difficult and time consuming than their

outdoor counterparts, not to mention the hassle of a bus ride to and from Kingston. For everybody involved, the situation is far from ideal.

Soon, these will be issues of the past. In early January, construction began on a conversion of the Ferrari Complex from natural grass to artificial turf. While the switch may seem minor, it has vast implications for Bard athletics.

Access to Bard’s athletic facilities is often inadequate. During the winter, for example, a quick game of pick-up basketball can be tough to squeeze in as the gym is often occupied by one of the six varsity sports teams in need of practice space. Anybody who has hit the gym at 5 p.m. can attest that it’s far from an ideal spatial arrangement.

Today, there is seldom enough space for the student athletes required to be there, however, the turf field promises to open up more space for them, the public, and the rest of the student body.

For many, the sight of bulldozers laying down new foundations brings something stronger than relief—catharsis.

Plans to upgrade the athletic facilities have been in the works for more than a half a decade, an eventual necessity “of a rapidly expanding athletics department. “Since 2011, maybe 2012,” Bard athletic director Kristen Hall commented, “there’s been such anticipation for such a long time, it’s like a sigh of ‘finally, we’re going to offer the students what they deserve.’”

But how did this finally come about? Though it has been an objective of the athletic department for nearly a decade, like any other ambitious undertaking by our underendowed institution, these plans were contingent on the generosity of a small number of enterprising donors. With the November, 2017 announcement that the college was likely to receive a significant grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, it appeared that the long-de-

sired improvements might come to fruition.

Eventually, thanks to the efforts of students and administrators in the athletic department, who met repeatedly with upper administration in an effort to make clear the long-overdue nature of the desired upgrade, wheels began to turn. With considerable advocacy from Jim Brudvig, Bard’s chief financial officer and occasional faculty basketball coach, a financing deal was agreed upon that would allow construction to begin immediately, with hopes for completion in time for at least a partial spring sports season.

Brudvig, who frequently

works closely with the athletics department, understood that a change was rapidly needed. “Using the field for both soccer and lacrosse was a maintenance nightmare,” he commented via email. “The turf surface is more durable, [and] I hope students on teams or students just out for a workout will feel good about using the field on a regular basis.”

The field is expected to be ready by mid-March. Until then, many wait with bated breath as loads of rock, rubber, and strips of turf gradually pile up behind Stevenson Athletic Center. Its completion, as Hall and Brudvig both hope and expect, will be a boon for the entire community.

