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[Text]ure: Weaving Together an Understanding of Literacies

The exhibition title is a compilation of words including: text, texture, textiles, and culture.

Exhibition Timeframe

Length: 1 day (excluding setup and takedown) Date: Thursday, April 5, 2018

Location: Georgia Art Museum Room: Learning Center, First Floor

Museum Hours: 10AM until 9PM Event Time: 5PM until 8PM

Exhibition Elements

1 mixed media installations; 4-8 photography prints

Exhibition Size

Mixed Media Installation #1: approximately 35ft Length x 19ft Width x 10ft Height

Photography Installation #2: approximately 19ft Width x 10ft Height

Details of Individual Exhibits

Mixed Media Installation #1

I was introduced to ¹Marcel Duchamp's work *The Given* in Dr. Wallace's art history course when studying the perspective and the gaze. In this exhibit, viewers approach a large wooden door, and gazing through the peephole perceive the staging of a violent scene, the naked body of a woman who has been raped. As I explored his work further, I came across images that provided a different perspective of the piece. One image offered the viewpoint looking through the peephole, which appeared to be a flat one-dimensional painting. When I came across another image that provided a view of the door from the side, my initial perspective changed as I discovered that I was not gazing upon a one-dimensional painting but a three-dimensional installation. I have never seen the work in person but viewing these various images of the piece delivered an altogether different experience, as most viewers only gaze upon the view from the peephole.

With that in mind, I hope to create a similar



¹Marcel Duchamp

Given: The Waterfall and The Illuminating Gas
1966



experience that jars the viewers' initial understanding with one from a different perspective. I believe a change in perspective will create a site of struggle that might raise questions to once commonly received views about literacy in hopes of broadening that perspective to a more inclusive one.



Words Matter. The phrase "words matter" is about the privileging of the written word over other forms of communication. When I

was thinking about this installation I was thinking about the articulation of how written words are valued over other forms of communication, which is almost driven into our way of thinking in education. The repetitiveness of the phrase, "words matter, words matter..." mimics the idea of how western culture engrains this perception throughout the educational process. I was thinking about the skill and drill practices of the behaviorist period in education when student learning was conditioned by performing the same task (like writing the same phrase or word over and over again) in order to learn. The writing of the phrase "words matter, words matter" over and over again is getting at how the privileging of the written word has been engraved into our thinking. It reminds me of the opening scene on the TV series *The Simpsons* when Bart is standing in front of the chalkboard writing the same sentence as a form of punishment. By having that phrase written over and over again to create a repetitive body of text with one message, to me connects with the popular quote: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results". Continuing to confine scholarly production to one form of communication but expecting change to occur (like the irony expressed by new literacy scholars about making an argument for broadening literacy practices while continuing to stick with the traditional one) is insanity and will not lead to different results (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008).

The use of the phrasing "words matter" is also an attempt to capture the power of words, which can negatively impact individuals within society (e.g. the use of microaggressions to intentionally harm or marginalize someone). The careful use of words is especially important for individuals within power, like the President of the United States. The release of Trump's offensive comments about grabbing women "by the pussy" and his subsequent dismissal of such words as "locker-room talk" produces a hostile and degrading environment for women. The fact that he was able to gain presidency even after such blatantly sexiest remarks further articulates the treatment towards the voices of women.

The freestanding wall (or in Duchamp's case the door) would have the phrase "words matter" written over and over again in black paint across the entire surface. By physically writing it myself, the process would be a way to embody my experiences in education. To further emphasize my feelings of how traditional literacy practices have been like a weight restricting me, the letters used to form these words would gradually start coming off the page as three-dimensional objects (visually similar to ²Annie Vought's **Christmas**). The letters would appear to fall from the page onto the ground into a 3-dimensional puddle (like ³Michael Scoggins' **Red, White and Blue Warrior**). This waterfall like motion would be created with the suspension of some of the letters in the air similar to that of ⁴Liu Jianhua's **Collection of Letters**.

Another idea would be to project the phrase onto the surface, much like the back wall in ⁵Rose Barba's work **The Indifferent Back of a View Rather than Its Face**. For a more interactive audience experience, the projection could function like ⁶Murat Can Oguz's **In Order to Control**. Obviously this will require a much higher technological skill level and therefore may be out of my range of abilities.

The concept of the projection rather than actually painting the words on the wall would be to emphasize a



⁵ Rose Barba
The Indifferent Back of a View Rather Than Its Face
2009



² Annie Vought
Christmas
2007



³ Michael Scoggins
Red, White and Blue Warrior
2011



⁴ Liu Jianhua
Collection of Letters
Society for Asian Art

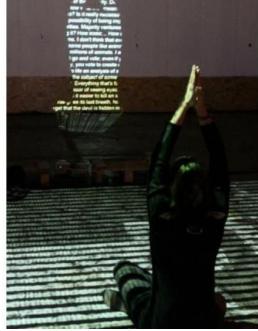




point that articulations are only temporary; the privileging of the written word will hopefully begin to fade. Having the phrase casted merely as a projection plays at the received view of literacy, the shadows of commonly accepted cultural beliefs.



⁶ Murat Can Oguz
In Order to Control
2012



Body of Text. After walking around the side of the installation, the word text will appear on the opposite side of the front wall. The initial perspective will appear like typed letters on a page. However, this view of printed words would be challenged a second perspective that changes the composition from the flatness of a single page into the dynamics of an installation. Viewers will discover that the letters are formed from shadows cast by the physical bodies of four mannequins and the ways in which they are dressed; a play on the phrase "body of text" (a form created from printed matter).

These mannequins will also help to depict the struggle I (amongst others) have felt about having a voice in higher

education. Communication is not limited to discursive forms. However, discursive forms are intellectually privileged in higher education. I personally have found the communication of knowledge through forms beyond a book to be more suitable to the development of my understanding. But when it comes to assessment (especially in institutes of higher education), students are largely stuck with producing print based text. And as much as I try, I feel as though my mouth were duct taped closed because I feel unable to effectively communicate what it is that I want to. The experience is not only frustrating but also disempowering. It's like stretching your arms towards something so close you feel you can almost reach it, then realizing your feet are standing in cemented ground. I imagine the experience is like the sticky black tar of an oil spill on the wings of a bird, physically unable to fly, or like the creatures in R. L. Stein's Goosebumps movie: "The world is just outside your grasp but you can't move. You're trapped. That's what it felt like to be locked inside your books".

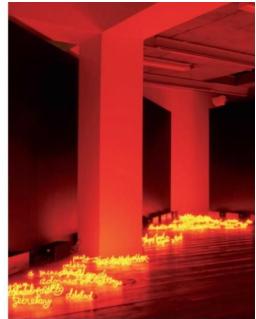


With this in mind, the first part of the installation will focus on the feeling of restraint and struggle while the second part of the installation will focus on the sensation of being released and unbound from those constraints. When I saw ⁷Jill Magid's **I Can Burn Your Face**, my thinking was drawn to the idea of having to walk across hot coals. I began to think of a large pile of three-dimensional letters on the ground. This lead me to

think of a similar experience that would not only be painful but could also leave someone physically scathed. I began thinking about when I lived in New York and I had to wear high heels to work even when running around the city. This often required running across the uneven cobblestones in the meatpacking district to deliver a garment for a photo shoot. Despite my inherent



⁷ Jill Magid
I Can Burn Your Face
2008



⁸ Daniel Libeskind
Fallen Leaves
The Memory Void
Jewish Museum Berlin





lack of balance, I was able to avoid any major falls until a time during Milan's Fashion Week when I took a face-first dive in front of an entire festival of people. Completely mortified, I scrambled to get back up onto my feet. Stumbling across those uneven bricks reminds me a lot of my experiences in higher education: constantly stumbling to try to communicate through a particular form that I am confined to and falling along the way. With that in mind, the four mannequins will be positioned in a blob of ink-like substance with 3-dimensional block letters of different depths (like the uneven cobblestone) scattered around their feet. ⁸**Daniel Libeskind's Fallen Leaves** provides a similar experience to this concept. As the blob moves further away from the mannequin, it will gradually thin to mimic an ink spill. At certain parts, the viewer will have the opportunity to walk across the uneven path to experience literal and figurative stumbling blocks.

Design Collection. The total installation will include five mannequins: four as the "bodies of text" and one stand-alone at the opposite end. The group of four mannequins used to create the word *text* would be a depiction of the type of censorship the female body is scrutinized with in education, in which the female body is essentially dissected into parts (appropriate vs. inappropriate) rather than allowing for the whole to be present (the division between mind and body). To illustrate this point of detachment, parts of the body forms will be constructed from mannequins and other parts from various scrap materials. I plan to color the mannequin parts white to imitate the same whiteness on a blank page and to use the color black for the pieced together materials to represent the ink that covers up the page. The black both conceals and also reveals parts of the body. By covering parts in black, the viewer's gaze is drawn to the parts in white (using negative space to draw attention to the "real" subject). In this reverse type of censorship, I hope to illustrate how the policing of the body actually calls more attention to those parts by making them more looked-for, perhaps even fetishized. The white mannequin parts will be placed in specific locations to accent the areas of the body traditionally censored or perceived as inappropriate as well as those that have been articulated as dangerous when it comes to the seduction powers of women.

These four forms make up the first part of the installation and will try to capture the feeling of struggle when stuck within the confines of a particular form (like being cemented to a printed page by the black ink). ⁹**Vanessa Beecroft's** work provides a visually similar depiction of this concept. The designs from this part of the collection will also encompass some of the problematic consequences of articulations with women, the main one of this collection being the link between beauty and death. The link between women's beauty and death has been articulated from an early time and has been rearticulated during key historical events. Drawing from those events these four designs are inspired by elements found on the following mood boards: [Black Plague](#), [Salem Witches](#), [Shape Wear](#), [Veil](#), [Fashion Texture](#), [Armor](#), [Body](#), and [Black & White](#). See the fashion illustrations for the first part of the collection [here](#).



⁹ Vanessa Beecroft

various works



The fifth form will make up the second part of the collection and will stand-alone at the opposite end of the installation. Although the mannequins are discussed as part one and part two of the installation, together the parts create one piece in its entirety. The installation will appear as though the fifth mannequin was able to escape the restraints (the blob of black ink) and fly (off the page) towards freedom (much like a phoenix rising up from ashes). Or like the saying goes, "Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly". The fifth form will be a whole mannequin but will be colored to look as though the exterior white color (imitating that of the page) is peeling away to reveal the flesh hidden underneath like the disintegration of a mask of sorts. The main idea being the disintegration of the black ink from which the body is constrained. The garment will progress from a black train to a



¹⁰ Kate McCwire

various works





nude bodice, as if the ink were washing (or rather burning) away from the body (a progressive release from constraints). ¹⁰Kate McCwire and ¹¹Tomohiro Inaba provide visually similar depictions of this concept. The stand-alone mannequin will wear a garment inspired from elements found on the following mood boards: [Virgin Mary](#), [Red](#), [Feather](#), [Eve](#), [Betsy Ross](#), [Butterfly](#), [Fashion Texture](#), [Form](#), [Golden](#), [Ink Spill](#), [Body](#) and [Veil](#). The entire collection will consist of texturally rich materials to provide yet another dimension to the experience. See the fashion illustrations for the second part of the collection [here](#) and [here](#).

Color Meanings. The color choice of the garments in the first part of the installation will be black to mimic the physical appearance of the printed word (black ink on a page). The mimicking of the bodies as text plays further on the female experience of embodying the masculinity of higher education. The camouflaging (things being concealed from sight) of the body links to the type of struggle female scholars embody in academics, being seen but not seen (making the body invisible) and at the same time more visible because of the attention drawn to what shouldn't be seen. The color black is also associated with death, a concept linked to women and beauty.

The stand-alone mannequin's garment will be predominantly red. Red was selected for several reasons. Initially, I was drawn to the single bright red letter at the top of a page, customary when books were scripted by monks. Later, my thinking was drawn to the Scarlet Letter worn by Hester Prynne to physically mark her adultery. Even as a young girl I found this story quite troubling. As a female, Hester was publicly punished for her sins but the same act for a man went unaddressed. The letter "A" stitched upon her clothes in bright red thread was a means to physically mark her as different so that she could be identified (and inevitably shunned) by others as well as a way by which to make her physically wear her sins. At times, I have felt like Hester as though having a background in fashion has in some way marked a giant "F" across my chest in academia. Or maybe an "A" for artist, a feeling also expressed by arts based researchers. In other ways, I feel I wear this marking as a female scholar. Red has been articulated with women and blood because of their menstruation cycle, and is perhaps the reason why the handmaids wear red gowns in Atwood's (1985) novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The story was recently made into a TV series on Hulu inspiring several activists to replicate the red gowns worn by the maids as a form of silent protest for current healthcare regulations. The color red also has to do with evoking the feeling of passion and emotion, two things particularly looked down upon in formal education.

Mannequins. Initially, I imagined the mannequins would be faceless as a way to exaggerate the feeling of not having a voice. I believe Atwood (1985) captures this concept best when she writes, "It's the bags over the heads that are the worst, worse than the faces themselves would be. It makes the men like dolls on which the faces have not yet been painted; like scarecrows, which in a way is what they are, since they are meant to scare...there's no life anymore to hold them up. The heads are zero" (p. 42). Later in my research, I thought the facelessness could be a means of pushing back on the dichotomy of mind over body, in that the mind would be essentially made invisible (like a veiling of sorts) and the body seen (unveiled). In Dr. Wallace's class, we discussed the introduction of Leon Battista Alberti's invention of the veil, a geometric grid used as a standardization instrument for the reference of perspective. To me, the concept of a veil plays on both the muting (covering up) and revealing (providing perspective). I was also drawn to the link in Greek mythology between women and their eyes with the story of Medusa as well as women and their voice with the story of the Sirens. The covering of these parts of the body draw attention to the articulation of their dangerous powers when linked to women. The censorship of these parts on the mannequins in the installation is an attempt to capture the problematic consequences of such ideas. For one of the forms, I draw on the use of the Scold's, or Witch's, Bridle. This device was used as a form of punishment to prevent women who were considered troublesome from speaking. In other words, the device was used as a means to muzzle their voices to prevent them from emitting ideas to the public, while also visibly humiliating the wearer.



¹¹ Tomohiro Inaba

Deer Ryandonato
2011 + 2014





References

- Atwood, M. (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York, NY: Everyman's Library.
- Tseelon, E. (1995). *The masque of femininity: The presentation of women in everyday life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.