

ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

SPECIAL MUSEUMS ISSUE



E 2013

5 US
0 Canada



*****5-DIGIT 01915
P-1 P90
BRADBURY, LEONIE
DIRECTOR AND CURATOR OF GALLERIES, MONTS
US POSTAGE PAID PERMIT #1926
MAINEHETER NH
BEVERLY MA 01915-4508

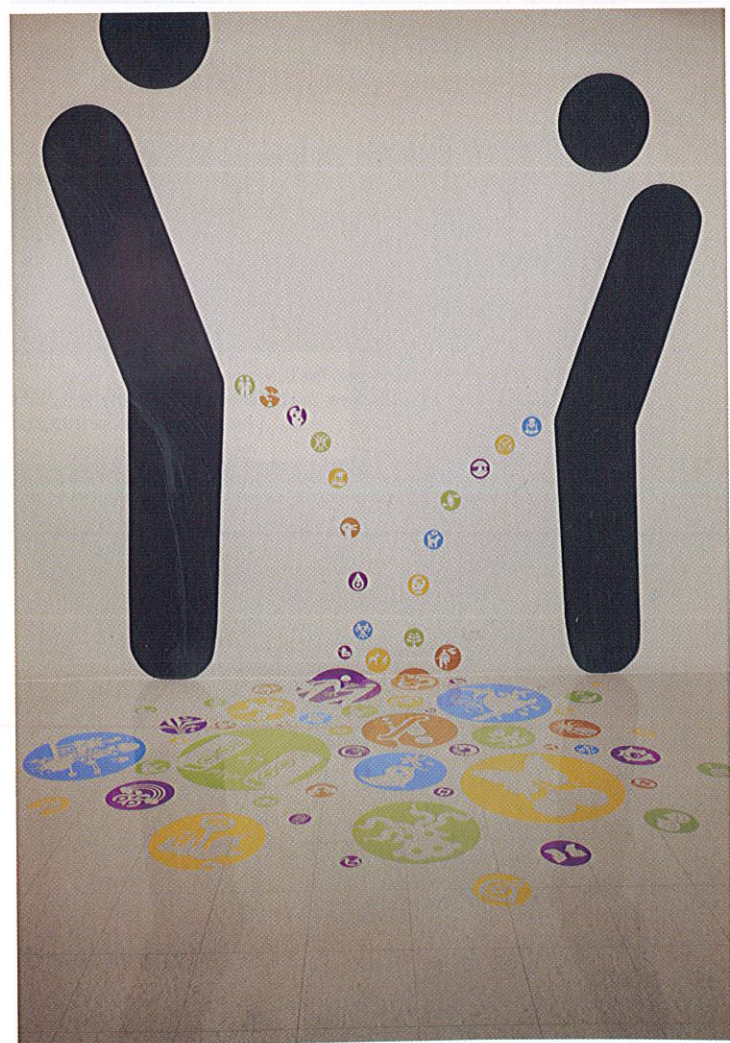


ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

NEW VENTURE MEDIA
332 CONGRESS ST. STE. 2
BOSTON MA 02210

LEONIE BRADBURY

The Campus *Kunsthalle*: A Site of Convergence



I will stick, therefore, to describing what appears around me: I do not seek to illustrate abstract ideas with a “generation” of artists but to construct ideas in their wake. I think with them. —French theorist and writer Nicolas Bourriaud in his essay, *Postproduction Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (2002)

Like Bourriaud, my job as a curator of contemporary art is a “thinking through” of an artist’s work. I establish context for the works of art created by my contemporaries, works that often have not yet been analyzed in depth nor written about in a scholarly or serious manner. The field is still wide open, with room for interpretation and opinion. My work is a type of “digging in front,” which is what excites me about my curatorial practice. I do think it is a practice, and a creative one. It takes time and experience to organize thoughtful exhibitions that tell stories and engage us intellectually and emotionally.

Much of curating is accomplished within limitations. The trick is to still have your vision come through despite having made compromises along the way. Curating is about seeing and connecting the ideas that emerge from and exist between works of art. It is exciting to see how, once brought together in the gallery, new connections form, even beyond the ones you anticipated.

In my position, I curate with Montserrat College of Art students and their BFA curriculum in mind. My exhibitions range from semester-long group shows around a central concept to smaller, month-long solo shows with work that either con-

trasts or expands on the main theme. The artists vary from regionally emerging to internationally known and established. The galleries provide a complement to the instruction the students receive in the classroom, a window onto the art world. It is crucial for emerging artists, which our students are, to have authentic, first-person encounters with works of art. They serve, of course, as examples of process and technique, but also as sites of thought. I love inviting artists whose work challenges preconceived notions of what art is, should, and could be. Ryan McGinness, Jonas Ohlson, Anna Hepler, Gregory Crewdson, and the Guerrilla Girls are but a few examples of artists who aggressively push at the boundaries of their respective media.

Within an exhibition, I like to visualize how a concept can be explored across a diverse range of media and through different artistic practices and approaches. The theme emerges out of a series of relations that I see form between the works. My topics are diverse and have included biotechnology, consumerism, regionalism, environmentalism, social activism, beauty, and data as art. The subjects are intentionally broad and culturally relevant so the exhibitions appeal to an audience well beyond our campus community. Complex issues in our society can be understood through looking at and experiencing works of art. For example, the exhibition, *It’s Alive: A Laboratory of Biotech Art* (2007), examined the complexities of biotechnology, a scientific field whose discoveries affect us all in our day-to-day lives, while few of

Above: Kate Gilmore, *Between a Hard Place*, 2008, video still (Absent | Present). Below: Ryan McGinness, *Mildly Subversive*, vinyl on wall, Montserrat Gallery, 2005. (Mildly Subversive). Opposite: Zsuzsanna Szegedi, *A Proper Erasure*, c-print, 2012–13. (Absent | Present).



us truly comprehend the ramifications of genetic research. Considering works by artists such as Shawn Bailey and Jennifer Willet, Hunter Cole or Brian Knep allows us to gain a deeper understanding of some of the questions that need to be asked and the ethical complications that arise when scientific interventions into our lives are largely invisible. *Random Access: Data as Art* (2012) looked at information visualization through the works of artists such as Nathalie Miebach and Reese Inman who use data as an integral component in their practice—data becoming a source and a medium. My most recent exhibition, *Absent | Present* (2013), explores the role of the artist's body and artwork as a network in performative videos by Kate Gilmore and Zsuzsanna Szegedi.

Academic museums and galleries are situated to present objects for study and contextualization. Alternately called the jewel in the crown, best-kept secret, or learning laboratory, campus art museums and galleries provide exciting exhibition venues. Guided by their

educational missions and operating as an institution within an institution, the aim for much of the programming is to highlight collections, or as a type of noncollecting *Kunsthalle* to encourage many kinds of thought through temporary exhibitions, rather than to meet a financial bottom line. At the end of the day, the mission of the parent institution is to educate its students. Since most academic museums and galleries depend upon said parent institution for resources, their missions need to be closely aligned.

Campus galleries always have been sites for transformative encounters with works of art. The newest trends in education are object-based and participatory learning, which the campus museum is uniquely equipped to teach. As nonliterary knowledge objects, works of art provide nontextual, non-numerical opportunities for learning. They offer instead visual and bodily or experiential learning—in person, in real time, and real space. With a renewed focus on interdisciplinary and cross-

disciplinary teaching, the academic gallery has become the place where the authentic object or experience provides a stage for broad intellectual discourse.

Art objects elicit and create thinking. They are vessels of knowledge. As multivalent objects and experiences, they generate their own theories. Works of art are also sites of convergence where past and present cultures collide and intersect to create new meanings and interpretations. The objects and exhibitions that contextualize them can give us a new understanding of the world around us. Critical thinking, skill, visual literacy, and observation skills are key in many professions. Students today need to be perceptive, and discerning visual thinkers whether they are artists or not. Alternative ways of looking and learning are needed in order to teach the skills of the twenty-first century.

Leonie Bradbury is Director and Curator of the Montserrat College of Art Galleries in Beverly, MA.