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Alternative legacies: Artist projects in history museums & the importance of context

Lyndsey Boekenkamp

Abstract

The primary focus of this paper is to investigate why artists are drawn to working in history museums, and how an artist-driven critique of museum practices encourages dialogue about artistic and historical authority, and the role of the museum. Drawing from the fields of public history, art history, anthropology, and journalism, this study argues that artists play an important role in fostering multiple interpretations within traditional historical and academically informed museum practices. The primary theorists influencing this study include Art Historian, Douglas Crimp and his analysis of postmodernism; Professor of Art Education, Dipti Desai and her theory of ethnographic shift; Modern European Historian, Susan Crane and her theory of disruption or “excess of memory”; English Professor, Bettina Carbonell and her theory of “bearing witness”; and Patricia Romney’s analysis of Russian Philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin and his theory of dialogism. As an outgrowth of this pre-existing scholarship, this study sought to prove that artists were better positioned to intervene in and manipulate traditional museum practices, not because they helped facilitate shared authority, but because they asserted their own artistic authority in the creation of alternative narratives. Through an analysis comparing Fred Wilson’s installation Liberty/Liberte—shown first in the 2006-2007 exhibition Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery at the New-York Historical Society, and then in its current placement as part of the Historical Society’s official renovations—this study instead concludes that artists are more than capable of successful interventions in non-art environments – specifically, history museums. However, the context in which the artwork is placed, as well as the conversation between the artist and the institution throughout the duration of any project, has the power to make or break the success of these artist interventions.

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What is the importance of "the real thing"? How do you make sense of an object if it isn't yours? Essay topics announced; between now and the next meeting you will need to prepare a paper proposal based on one of these topics, stating the selected topic and your plan for researching it. Candace Tangorra Matelic, "Forging a Balance: A Team Approach to Exhibit Development at the Museum of Florida History," In Ames, Franco, and Frye, Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits, 187-209. Available on Canvas. Susan Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum," in Carbonell, ed., Museum Studies. Ten contemporary art museums are of paramount importance in both the context of their location and in the sharing of information and art worldwide. With over 70,000 items in the collection, visitors can view the works of greatest artists in history for free. The Tate Modern begins its vast collection in the era of Fauvism and moves forward to the present day. The museum is especially proud of its Turbine Hall where visitors are exposed to the works of greats such as Cezanne, Pollack, and Matisse. Turbine Hall's massive architecture allows the museum to commission special artworks created on a large scale once a year, with the exhibition of the commissioned art lasting from October to March. Tate Modern London.

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