

Learning Places Fall 2018

SITE REPORT #2A

The Brooklyn Museum

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Thinking Frame:

In the reading, audio, and video assignments for this week a number of spaces for voices of protest are discussed. The Guerilla Girls broadcast their messages across a wide variety of media and places: posters on walls and billboards, handouts on the sidewalk, t-shirts on bodies, projections on walls, installations in abandoned buildings and art galleries, magazines, zines, websites, etc. Next Epoch produces ecological art in neglected urban wastelands. Decolonize This Place conducts protests in museums, without prior permission for use of the spaces. As a group, these interventions could be described as unsanctioned or subversive events performed in spaces that were not designed or curated specifically for protest.

In response to these kinds of activities (and perhaps in recognition--aesthetically or culturally of their importance), there have been increased efforts by community leaders and cultural institutions to create spaces for critical or dissenting voices. Landers, et al, describes strategies to create sanctioned spaces for protest in libraries, plazas, and parks. Similarly, the Brooklyn Museum now seeks to create spaces for alternative, minority, and resistant cultures and voices through curation and architectural interventions.

The question remains whether resistant practices, alternative performances, and protest are more effective when sanctioned or unsanctioned. Where is Dread Scott's *Impossibility of Freedom in a Country Founded on Slavery and Genocide* more effective, in the original 2014 performance on a street or represented in photographic form in a museum in 2018 as part of a curated exhibition?

As you go through the site report collecting images and documenting your ideas, keep these tensions in mind.

SITE OBSERVATIONS

Insert two images of Brooklyn Museum's facades. The first of a more **traditional architectural feature** for a public civic space and the second an **untraditional architectural feature**.



Meeting Step



Museum Facelift

Why did you choose these images? As you look at each, what do you expect to encounter once you enter the building? Explain.

Image 1 represents public space because the steps allow patrons to meet, chat or have lunch, or read and listen to music, much like other public spaces such as art generally allow.

Image 2 seems more like the clashing of traditional architecture (columns like those at the MET) and modern architecture (the glass design in the front of the museum).

The stated *mission* of the Brooklyn Museum is "to create inspiring encounters with art that expand the ways we see ourselves, the world and its possibilities." Take a photo of one piece of artwork that expands the way you see yourself or the world. Give the photograph a caption and explain why it expands your vision of yourself or the world.



Of all the interesting art in the exhibition, the colourful and vibrant painting *Black Children Keep Your Spirits Free* by Carolyn Lawrence caught my attention. It's vibrancy as well as its message. In a world where black children are generally misunderstood, mistreated and 'put down', it feels hopeful to see a message boldly made for those children in previous times and current times encouraging us to let our essential spirits be. Even though the painting was created in 1972, it feels like it is genuinely rooting for black children everywhere despite the struggles or set backs we may experience in life.

The stated vision of the Brooklyn Museum is to create a place "where great art and courageous conversations are catalysts for a more connected, civic, and empathetic world." Consider the curated areas of the museum. How is space arranged in order to create "courageous conversations"? Can you describe conversations between spaces?

The beginning of the exhibition on the 5th floor seemed to contrast the neighboring exhibitions. The Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power seemed to have brighter tones of colour at its entrance, the content was different (culturally political where the others only seemed to be cultural pieces. Even the lighting of the exhibition seems slightly darker than the surrounding exhibitions. At the end of the exhibition on the 4th floor, there was the elevator and the entrance in to another exhibition in the Elizabeth A. Cackler Center for Feminists Art.

Insert an image of designed space (not art objects themselves) that suggest "connection." How is the concept of "connection" articulated in the way art is arranged in space? (Consider the walls, walkways, display boards, pedestals, rooms, etc.)



The concept is plainly articulated and suggests that the space is connected by stairs which guides from one floor of the exhibition to the next floor with the continued exhibition.

Brooklyn Museum declares that “since we see ourselves as a conduit for open sharing and learning, we accept the controversies that may accompany courageous conversations.” Consider the way art objects are arranged in space for the *Half the Picture* exhibition in relation to viewers. How would you describe the arrangement of objects for viewers. Did the arrangements accept controversies? Did they encourage courageous conversations? If so, how? If not, why?

Upon entering the exhibition, the sound of a looping projected video greets museum visitors. The looping video is a clip of the character who plays Wonder Woman turning into Wonder Woman by spinning quickly in a room with mirrors while dressed in a champagne satin pants suit. After a few seconds of spinning, combustion occurs she stops spinning and is dressed in the pop culture familiar attire of a gold crown, a red and blue one-piece suit, gold bracelets, gold belt and a golden lasso attached to it. It appeared to be the only media of its type in the exhibition.

The next unmistakable thing is a triangular room inside the exhibition which seems to dictate the arrangement of the other art pieces around it. The room itself is an art piece, a triangular table with place settings inspired by women artists around the world and the female vulva.

The rest of the exhibition contains a mix of large-scale paintings, photography and mixed media pieces expressing the creativity, political and social views of women artists from varying backgrounds and walks of life. Compared to other exhibition spaces, *Half of the picture* seemed smaller and a bit more intimate.

In my opinion, it was not the arrangement that accepts controversies but the content in the arrangement that did. The arrangement allowed for museum-goers where to start and end as most exhibitions do, there was no obstruction created to prevent the enjoyment or viewing of the pieces in the exhibition. The content arranged, however, did allow for courageous conversations. The types that discuss how these women artists took command of how they wanted to be represented in their work, whatever the medium, and the unapologetic yet graceful way their creativity greets the eye of every viewer who sees them. The pieces also encouraged conversations about the lack of gender diversity and ethnic diversity in museum exhibitions and the art world in general. It makes me wonder if choosing a wing in the Brooklyn Museum to dedicate space to women artists will encourage the museum to showcase more women artists throughout the museum in general or will women artists' work remain mostly contained to this one wing?