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FROM THE PRINT



An international exhibit of socially engaged art featuring archived documentation from 22 projects that blurs the boundary between activism and art runs at Antioch College's Herndon Gallery in South Hall April 18 through May 16. Co-curators of "Living as Form (The Nomadic Version)" are Antioch visual arts professor Sara Black, center, and Antioch artists in residence Jillian Soto, left, and Anthony Romero, right, who recently worked on the exhibition at the Herndon. The three artists will host the first of three weekly conversations about the exhibit at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 23. (Photo by Megan Bachman)

Activism and art at Antioch

By Megan Bachman

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No Comments

When is activism also art?

For example, Women on Waves, a ship that performs medical abortions outside of the territorial waters of countries where it is illegal, or Project Row Houses, a low-income housing development in Houston where the houses are sometimes canvases for artistic expression. When aesthetics or theatrics are used in everyday social activism, is it also a kind of visual or performance art?

At Antioch College, which has staked out a legacy in both activism and art, that question will be explored in a new exhibit at the Herndon Gallery in South Hall that runs April 18 through May 16.

"Living as Form (The Nomadic Version)" is an international exhibit of socially engaged art featuring archived documentation from 22 projects that could be considered both activism and art.

Originally presented by Creative Time in New York City in 2012, "Living as Form" challenges traditional notions about art's boundaries, contributing to a new category of contemporary art sometimes referred to as "social practice," according to co-curator Sara Black, assistant professor of visual art at Antioch.

"It's so contemporary that it is still finding its feet in the art historical cannons, and there's so much debate about what to call it," Black said. "It's testing the boundaries of what we comfortably call art."

The exhibit is a collaboration of Black with Antioch artists-in-residency Jillian Soto and Anthony Romero, Chicago-based performance artists who arrived on campus last week to teach, create and curate for three months. To Romero, a performer and writer native to Texas, the exhibit looks at how art can be used for social change.

"The exhibition is a question about how activists are able to use artists' strategies and tactics to organize communities and make change," Romero said.

The "Living as Form" projects (which include Women on Waves and Project Row Houses) are organized by theme and will be presented in three sections. Weekly conversations with Antioch art faculty and residents showcasing work on each theme will begin at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 23, with a discussion of "Occupation and Convening."

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Tuesday, April 29, 2014

YELLOW SPRINGS WEATHER

Today



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Explained Soto of the first theme: “Many of the projects involve people occupying territories they aren’t supposed to or convening in public places you wouldn’t normally convene to perform an action or sing.” Other conversations will be on “Borders and Access” on April 30 and “Difference” on May 7.

In addition, two new performance art works were commissioned for exhibit and will be shown on the weekend of May 9–11. Performing is Micha Cárdenas, a transgender artist from California whose work focuses on ending violence against queer and trans people, people of color, indigenous people, youth and sex workers, according to her website. The Compass Group of the Midwest Radical Cultural Corridor will also present a day-long “people’s hearing” on Monsanto, which has been previously held in St. Louis, Mo., Iowa City, Ia., and Carbondale, Ill. Those works will ultimately become part of the archive of projects as it continues to travel around the country.

Herndon Gallery is one of 15 venues to exhibit “Living as Form” since 2012 with other exhibitions as far-flung as Israel, Taiwan, Russia, Western Sahara and Mexico and as close as Youngstown, Ohio, according to the project’s website. Curator Nato Thompson, who has also written a book on the 100 socially engaged projects he collected, created the exhibit to respond to what he saw was a historically unique trend in art.

The atypical show won’t simply feature artwork on the walls, since “the work happened out in the world,” according to Black. The exhibition arrives as a hard drive of saved images, photos and videos documenting the actions, putting the daunting task of presenting material that is “ephemeral in nature” on the co-curators, Black said. The goal is to turn a hard drive in a “box the size of my hand” to something that is engaging to the community, she said.

But Black, with her background in sculpture, installation art and performance, and the experienced performance artists Romero and Soto are well equipped to craft a meaningful show from the documentation, since performers often have to explore how people experience work outside of its live context, Black said. Recently, the trio began by building a platform in the center of the Herndon, but the audience will have to wait until the exhibit opens to see how the work will ultimately be presented.

The “Living as Form” exhibit is an extension of the artist in residency program at Antioch, which is designed to expose students to new voices and ideas in art since Antioch is so small, with only one instructor in each artistic discipline, Black said. In addition to co-curating the exhibit this quarter, Romero and Soto will open their studio time to students and teach courses in the performance curriculum while associate professor of performance Gabrielle Civil is doing research. Three artists in residence per year live and work on campus.

Soto and Romero are graduates of the Art Institute of Chicago who have collaborated with Black as ESCAPE GROUP, a platform in Chicago that Soto and Romero created to work with other artists.

Performance has recently become a focus of the young art program at the revived Antioch College as an art form that is “on the rise” and which helps students feel more comfortable in their bodies and their selves, Black said. Instead of separating traditional performance forms like dance and theater from performance art, Antioch in its interdisciplinary curriculum has combined them by focusing on “presence,” Black said.

Romero sees performance as about learning how one’s body is “occupying space,” which can be valuable for everyone from an aspiring lawyer to a professor, while Soto says that performance can be used to explore art or life:

“Performing is a kind of skill set and lens to look at art. Once you are aware of what it is to perform, that we are always performing at life.”



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April 30

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Mass, St. Paul Catholic Church.

Overeaters Anonymous meeting, Friends Assisted Living.

YS Strings spring concert, Senior Ctr. great rm.

Alcoholics Anonymous, United Methodist Church.

Needlework group, Senior Ctr.

Flexibility exercise, Senior Ctr.

Senior Ctr. trip to GCCOA senior recognition luncheon, Bryan Ctr. parking lot.

Senior lunch, Senior Ctr.

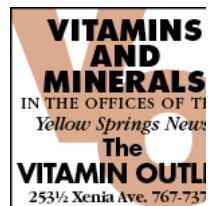
Dominoes, Senior Ctr.

Dancing With Parkinson’s, Senior Ctr.

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