

Urban Cuts Schedule:

Friday, April 16, 2010

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Tour of the Exhibition “Urban Alchemy/Gordon Matta-Clark” with Francesca Herndon-Consagra, Senior Curator, Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

Location: The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis

5:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Opening Reception

Location: Adorjan Hall 142, Saint Louis University

Saturday, April 17, 2010

Location: Pere Marquette Gallery, DuBourg Hall, 2nd Floor, Saint Louis University

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Panel 1: Urban Space and Visual Rhetoric

Nanette E. Boileau, Saint Louis University:

“The Writing is on the Wall”

ABSTRACT:

St. Louis offers various images which influence the commuter as they move routinely through the urban space. Many of these pervasive images exist as billboards. Throughout St. Louis a number of early 20th century billboards were painted on the side of the business’ brick building. These worn billboards reveal themselves slowly to the pedestrian through a continual presence on the commuter’s path. Fragmented from the years of neglect and exposure to the weather, St. Louis’s advertisements transform the urban space as “barely there” visual moments. Within this state these billboards speak the loudest. This presentation proposes to look St. Louis’ “barely there” visual moments in connection with two ideas I identify as the “mental city space” and the “spatial city memory”. The “mental city space” is a pedestrian’s individualized memory of the built environment. This memory develops out of the relationship between the pedestrian and the daily routine and pathways they take in the city throughout their lives. The “spatial city memory” based on Randal Mason and Max Page’s ideas on preservationist work creating historic memory for our urban space. “Spatializing memory” developed by preservationist in hopes of endowing buildings, sites and landmarks with powerful, lasting, historic memories. By endowing certain sites with this elevated status preservationist felt the sites would give the citizen historic

memories to share with society. By building on this notion and applying it to the banal or old advertisements of St. Louis city I hope to historicize the writing on the wall.

Liviu Gajora, Wake Forest University:

“Banksy and the Rhetoric of Reclaiming the Public Space”

ABSTRACT:

This paper focuses on the analysis of the work of British graffiti artist Banksy as a form of visual rhetoric and as a particular illustration of a rhetoric of dissent. Graffiti has always been at a cross between vandalism and art, between social exclusion and social recognition. This has taken new heights with the arrival of Banksy, as many of his pieces have received artistic recognition and been sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars in the past few years, while he still maintains his actions are a protest against consumerist society. Although he mainly operates in Britain, graffiti pieces by him have been reported in other countries too, including the United States. One of the distinctive features of his work is the use and appropriation of iconic images and photographs, from *Mona Lisa* to *Accidental Napalm* or *The Simpsons*. This, along with the use of overarching themes such as cops, monkeys or rats, allow us to refer to a coherent body of work that is aimed at fighting the dominant voices of institutional and corporate rhetoric. The presence of iconic images also suggests that the scope of Banksy’s work may extend beyond reclaiming the physical public space, to also reclaiming the cultural public space. One of the most difficult challenges that Banksy faces constantly remains striking a delicate balance between being accepted in order for his works not be removed, but at the same time being an outcast in order for his acts to constitute a rhetoric of dissent.

10: 00 AM - 10:30 AM

COFFEE BREAK, DuBourg Hall 157

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Panel 2: Urban Neighborhoods: Visualizing Identity and Community

Andrew Wasserman, Stony Brook University

“The Paper Landmarks of Harlem’s Neighborhood Museum”

ABSTRACT:

A close-cropped image of four women in purple track suits. A murky reflection in water pooling in sidewalk crevices. A view into a nail salon through illuminated neon lights. These are but three of the eighty-eight postcards comprising the Studio Museum in Harlem’s ongoing *Harlem Postcards* project (2002-present). Thrice annually, the museum commissions a set of four artists to produce a single postcard each, with a common goal of capturing visible fragments of the region. The images selected reflect an engagement with the greater Harlem area, indicating the multidimensionality of the region through showcasing “local landmarks.” Although each postcard can be considered singularly, when viewed collectively, a complex network is revealed. The museum is curating a visual directory of the community for the community, and simultaneously situating itself at the center of this community. Institutional cache legitimates these images, particularly those of more banal subject

matter. Four decades following its founding, the museum maintains an important position in the cultural landscape of its uptown Manhattan neighborhood. Locating the institution as a central component, both as sponsoring institution and as central distribution point for the circulation of the postcards, is critical to an analysis of the project. Playing against discussions of personal landmarks, minor monuments of everyday life, and how circulated printed materials can crystallize an understanding of place, *Harlem Postcards* reveals an institutional engagement with the public designed to redefine an understanding of Harlem itself.

Seth Feman, College of William and Mary

“What Alma Thomas Teaches: The District as Art Lesson”

ABSTRACT:

What do city teachers do when confronted by blight? Do they focus their lessons on their neighborhoods? Or do they brace their students against the decay? If they teach art, does the deterioration color their approach? And when they make art, is the city present there, too? Alma Thomas’s paintings attend to these questions with remarkable directness. Much like the art lessons she taught at DC’s Shaw Junior High School from 1924 to 1960, her paintings are, as another teacher said, “possessed of the city”; along with her curricula, they form an experiential pedagogy – spatial lessons – that locate exuberance amid the slums. Critics overlook her art’s relation to the city, in large measure because they fail to consider teaching part of Thomas’s aesthetic practice. Instead, they read Thomas’s art for signs of her racial identity, most recently when the Obamas chose her *Watusi* to decorate the White House. When rightwing bloggers “discovered” *Watusi* resembled a Matisse collage, they charged her with “plagiarism.” Others defended her “quotation” as “signifyin’.” Despite their opposition, all based their arguments on race: the art either “stole” or “appropriated” because Thomas was black. This paper reconsiders *Watusi* by situating Thomas in the city that gave her art meaning. For example, I examine art lessons she developed that used the city setting to teach children about racial identity. After attending lectures at Howard and local artists’ studio talks, all near to Shaw, Thomas sent students to explore DC’s national galleries independently – knowing they would face segregation – and had them make art responding to their experiences. Considering *Watusi* within this pedagogy complicates assumptions about how race figures into Thomas’s art by locating, and thereby historicizing, Thomas’s identity within DC’s urban relations. This also rejects art historical methods that read artworks as “texts” denotative of identity. Instead, I read *Watusi* like a map – as a means for entering into a thicker, more material, and embodied understanding of DC’s urban spaces.

12:00 PM – 1:30 PM

LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Panel 3: Tales of Two Cities: Representations of Urban Change

Jaclyn Kirouac-Fram, Saint Louis University:

Picturing the Community: The McRee Town Neighborhood in Saint Louis, Missouri

In 2003, the Garden District Commission demolished more than two hundred buildings on the eastern half of the McRee Town neighborhood in Saint Louis, Missouri. The Commission, a private coalition headed by officials from the nearby Missouri Botanical Garden, demolished six blocks of historic brick homes and apartment buildings that housed primarily low-income renters and homeowners, relocated hundreds of residents, erected twenty-five acres of market-rate, single-family, suburban-style housing on the cleared land, and ceremoniously renamed the area Botanical Heights. This paper explores how visual representations of McRee Town between 1998-2003 helped legitimize this urban renewal project and the dislocations it caused in the lives of McRee Town residents. It engages viewers with the photographs of burned-out, boarded-up buildings that populated newspaper reports and public relations documents during these five years, and juxtaposes these images with photographs taken by Genevelyn Peters, a McRee Town resident prior to the neighborhood's destruction. I argue that the second set of photographs – of family, homelife, and play – complicate and challenge the dominant understanding of McRee Town and its residents as criminal and atomized by suggesting a vibrant neighborhood community. In considering both sets of photographs through the visual genealogies of slum housing and family snapshot photography from which they emerged, this paper denaturalizes viewers' affective reactions to the photographs and describes how each set constructs a distinct, divergent representation of the former McRee Town neighborhood.

ABSTRACT:

Christopher Ciesielski, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
"Madison Park Neighborhood – Baltimore, Maryland"

ABSTRACT:

The Madison Park neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland is comprised of mostly stately Italianate row houses and Queen Anne Victorian mansions. The problem with Madison Park is that they are mostly burned out and abandoned as a result of urban decay. In the spring of 2003, I was given a project for my senior thesis class while attending Maryland Institute College of Art. "Choose a word that starts with the letter B that depicts Baltimore." Within thirty seconds of the words coming out of my professor's mouth I had my word. "Boarded Up." I began by photographing the streets of Madison Park early in the morning. As I had been warned, these were dangerous streets. In the process of photographing street after street of abandoned houses, the question arose, "how many abandoned properties are there in Baltimore City?" One phone call later, a woman at Baltimore City Department of Housing said that from their estimate one in every six buildings are abandoned in Baltimore City and as she said those are only the ones we know about. I requested the addresses of abandoned properties in the zip code of 21217, which included Madison Park. The spreadsheet that I received from here contained over 2,000 addresses. I was stunned. For the project, I incorporated a photograph of one of the stately Italianate

row homes as a background, overlaid with the addresses supplied Baltimore City Department of Housing. This project led to further documentation of other structures throughout Madison Park including partially demolished structures and abandoned public buildings. As of December 2009, the property still remains abandoned and the neighborhood has seen very little gentrification.

2:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Panel 4: Urban Space as Transnational Space: Tracing Visions and Voices

Jesse Draper, Michigan State University:

“Mother of Exiles: Gendered Visions of Symbolic Power in American Cities, 1870-1940”

ABSTRACT:

On May 6th, 1903, Emma Lazarus' famous poem was permanently affixed to the base of Òthat mighty womanÓ the statue of Liberty, a symbolically infused icon representing the United States as the Òliberator of the tired, [the] poor, [the] huddled masses yearning to be free.Ó One woman's vision forever connected to the image of another woman, standing as a symbolic monument to the promise of liberty and opportunity in America, a woman whose Òbeacon hand glows worldwide welcome... and her name Mother of Exiles. The meaning ascribed to that symbol was not shared by the white male elite who controlled not only the public spheres of government and commerce, but also the material conditions located within the “private” sphere of working class homes. The business elite of American cities understood the awesome symbolic power of the skyscrapers which supplied both the space, and the symbolic presence (as corporate logos) desired by growing industrial-age corporations. A cultural reading of the great physical monuments through which men and women symbolically represented their disparate visions of urban America at the turn of the twentieth century suggests that men had sought to conquer, to dominate, and exploit for individual commercial gain, while women sought to liberate, to heal, and to unite the masses of immigrant exiles. The contestations in public spaces over social, political and economic power, and better health conditions (both at home and in the workplace), arose as a result of the agency of many different groups and individuals. This paper suggests that, acting on behalf of their own interests, men and women developed competing interpretations of the symbolic meaning generated within the late nineteenth-early twentieth American city.

Aaron Johnson-Ortiz, University of Michigan:

“Exile & Utopia: Tracing the Non- Places of Transnational History”

ABSTRACT:

In 1906, the Mexican exiled journalist Ricardo Flores Magon published a manifesto that would catalyze the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and serve as the template for the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Uncannily, the manifesto was first drafted at 107 N. Channing Ave in Saint Louis, on the grounds of what is now SLU's Baseball Field. As an artist/activist/scholar, I retraced Magon exilic journey through Laredo, El

Paso and San Antonio, Texas, Saint Louis, Missouri, and Toronto and Montreal, Canada. *Exile* describes the loss of a homeland, and *utopia* the hope for a better world. Placed together, however, they point to a productive paradox. How is one exiled from utopia (or "not- place" from the Greek ou- topos)? This tension characterizes Magon political transformation from his early calls for reform in Mexico to his later utopian vision of a world without borders. On the centennial of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, my work re- 'traces' the life and travails of Ricardo Flores Magon in three ways: First, I use primary source documents compiled by Saint Louis private detectives, such as intercepted correspondence and telegrams, to 'trace' his ideas and their distribution in the social field. Secondly, I 'trace' his journey and photograph the exact addresses where Magon lived and passed through. The sites are usually parking lots or highway ramps, and I document these erasures. Finally, my 'diagrammatic drawings' chart the flows of ideas, affects, people, and movements. They function as maps to the non- places of transnational history.

3:30 PM – 4:00 PM

COFFEE BREAK, DuBourg Hall 157

4:00 PM – 5:30 PM

Keynote Address and Discussion

Dr. Lisa Cartwright, University of California-San Diego, Professor of Communication and Science Studies, Affiliated Faculty in Critical Gender Studies: "Biomedical Citizenship and the Spaces of Critical Art Practice"

Sunday, April 18, 2010

**City Tour with Dr. Ben Looker, Department of American Studies,
Saint Louis University**

10 AM – 11:30 AM

Meeting Point: Adorjan Hall 142, Saint Louis University

Introductory Remarks, followed by walking tour