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Artist Statement and Research
SMP in Studio Art, 2014

<u>Intro:</u>

For my senior capstone experience, I created a body of work consisting of mixed media installation and performance. In my recent art practices and research, I have wanted to amplify an element of participatory engagement and collaborative exchange. At this current stage of my exploration in art, my creative interests and intentions are moving away from a desire to create an art object as an end result. In turn, they have moved toward creating and sharing an interactive art experience.

<u>My Exploration in Art:</u>

In both art and life, I consider myself a person who has trouble staying in on place. I feel the need to continually investigate new scenarios, sometimes with a spontaneous and impulsive nature. This ongoing inquiry is continually changing, both influencing and being influenced by the way I understand myself in relation to the people around me. Reflecting on my experiences as an adolescent, I consciously identified myself as a rebel. This construction of self affected my view of community, which often placed me at odds with the people and support I had around me. As I reflect on my own view of self as an adolescent and the relationship that it generated between my community and me, I am able to further assess the view of self that I wish to create as I come into adulthood. In light of this developing inquiry, I have created a collaborative

and interactive artwork, titled *Social Media,* humorously questioning a new art medium's ability to generate social exchange, presenting myself as an artist, and understanding what role I play as community member with that identity.

Exhibition of Social Media

Social Media is a public interactive artwork that uses the audience as a collaborator to explore and question our individual understandings of community. As a whole, I intended to generate a transcendent and reflective experience with two goals in mind. First, I am encouraging other members of my community to continually assess the nature of relationships they sustain as a part of a larger group and, second, I am encouraging other individuals in my community to reflect on the various roles they take on when constructing their own identity. This body of work is made of several works: *Civic Toll, Wall Posts (Dementia in Dialogue), and Face Time* and exists as multiple layers of ongoing inquiry as I explore and reflect on my own immediate social space.

Civic Toll is a public interactive tollbooth that makes the analogy of paying a toll to having an active voice in a community. I experimented with this booth in the public space on and off campus and collected the submissions, which are displayed them on a wall titled *Wall Posts (Dementia in Dialogue).*

I conceived of this project as a platform of exchange that allowed individuals to share their personal thoughts and experiences. This booth got me out of the studio, out of the gallery and into a public space to create art and interact with people passing by.

The booth is painted red to stimulate passion and emotion within the viewer. In almost any context on campus, the booth starkly contrasts the intense green, (or in some cases, white) which dominates our surrounding landscape. Red is a color that provokes urgency, emotion, and passion. It can mean danger and death, as well as love. This not only represents the critical and urgent nature of community dialogue in the same way that red functions on an ambulance or fire hydrant, it also represents the color of human blood, a universal color association that any person relate to. The booth is also composed of straight vertical and horizontal lines. This simple compositional strategy evokes strength,

power and stability, qualities that, in my opinion, any healthy community should represent. (Mahnke 15)

I gave people in my community the freedom to contribute their thoughts anonymously in an effort to foster sincere exchange through creative collaboration. However, this anonymity often led to responses that left no community member accountable, much like the social media platforms of the Internet age. The realization of my inability to foster sincere reflection led me to consider how the aspects of control and anonymity influence personal construction of self especially in relation to personal relationship with community.

A later addition to the *Social Media* collection was *Face Time.* This round table for community dialogue is an extension of my *Civic Toll* booth. With *Face Time,* I provide a platform for community dialogue through a timeless ritual of

communal consumption. Unlike my tollbooth, which asks community members to anonymously submit their "two cents" on community needs, this round table puts community members face to face for a discussion about community needs.

Here I ask people to sit down and "drink the Kool-Aid". In exchange for this comfortable seat and cold beverage, I ask for their presence and engagement as a community member assessing new possibilities for mutually beneficial existence. I also use this table to come forth as an artist and community member, giving my presence back to them. In a sense this exchange is much like a toll, where people who value a space are held accountable for their personal contributions.

This collaborative collage work titled *Wall Posts (Dementia in Dialogue)* displays the anonymous submissions from *Civic Toll,* a public interactive artwork currently exhibited in the green space between the Annex and Boyden Gallery. Each submission is a contribution from a community member who interacted

with my booth in the public space. I collected a range of statements that were vague, sentimental, poignant, comical, offensive and even aggressive in nature. I have posted the submissions on this wall and arranged them in a form of a disorienting spiral. Essential, I am drawing a connection between the content of these submissions and the chaotic dialogue that emerges from social media platforms. By creating copies of each submission in black and white behind the physical submissions, I implicitly express that many interpretations can exist for each submission. In essence, I wish to communicate that issues of community needs are not always black and white. Both here and in the virtual world, anonymity has taken the accountability out of personal opinion and separated thought from real action. Again I use red with the intention of creating urgency. Another aspect of this collage is the use of handwriting. Each response is written in a different style, whether it was larger, whether it was cursive, etc. Here, I post the submissions as a part of one form, implying that a community consists of a variety of separate and distinct members. (Mahnke 15)

Inspiring Artists:

Gillian Wearing is a contemporary British artist who uses photography and video work as an artistic framework for social inquiry. One art project that I found inspirational and particularly relevant to my project was the photography work, "*Signs That Say What You Want Them To Say, and Not Signs that Say What Other People Want Them To Say.*" In this project, Wearing roams the streets looking for voluntary participants. These participants are asked to write

whatever they were thinking on a card and are then asked to photograph

holding the sign. This simple but clear objective forefronts our preconceptions of

the visual appearance of others, and subverts them, pairing the outer

appearance with statements from the inner self, emphasizing the chronic

contradictions between the two. (Turner 34) One connection between this work

and Social Media is the aspect of participatory and collaborative art exchange in

the public space. Both projects also generate participation and collaboration

using a paper submission method, which is transposed to a new form, bringing

audience ideas to the front of the work.

      Another work that functions in similar way is "Confessions." In

"Confessions," Wearing uses classified sections to find random voluntary

participant who are willing to confess their deepest darkest secrets with a

complete stranger. Wearing videotapes the interviews with participants wearing

masks to protect their identity. With the help of the volunteers, she, then,

constructs video pieces that tell the story through both interview and

reenactment, to consciously disjoint reality and emphasize falsity and façade.

Through her practice, she is able to extract sincere personal truth and artistically

represent the subjects' real emotional experiences. Not only does the larger

audience get to see these illustrations and the contradiction between

appearance and reality, the process also serves to be therapeutic for

participants who get to relive the experiences and gain emotional resolution.

These illustrations can be dark, violent, and disturbing, but also light and

positive, attempting to depict a variety of personal truths that emerge from the

real life experiences of her subjects, and to reflect the complexity of the human condition. (Turner 44) This collaborative project is similar to *Civic Toll* in its use of voluntary and anonymous participation. In both projects, participants have the opportunity to contribute their perspective and reflect on what that means in relation to others.

Participants in Wearing's projects generally wear masks to protect their anonymity, further echoing the contradictions between appearance and reality. Conceptually, Gillian has spent many years exploring "truth," as we see it. Yet here projects always express that life is often far more complex and confusing than we initially imagine. I find this similarity in my own exploration in *Social Media.* As a witness to the entire evolution of the industry of "reality" television, she revels in the push and pull between synthetic presentation and pure documented reality by creating enhanced depictions of personal accounts in a unique style to give the audience a heightened sense of self, and a deep emotional connection with a fellow human being. I do not believe my work can be compared to artist of her caliber in her ability to generate this experience, but I was deeply inspired by her work.

By using the practice of anonymous interviews, Wearing uses the audience as collaborator to allow participants to voice opinions typically swept under the rug. In essence, Wearing has inspires me by seeking an art practice that probes the public audience for sincerity. With my *Civic Toll* booth, I call upon the St. Mary's Community to make sincere statements regarding the needs of their own community in a public but anonymous setting. Using popular

culture and its use of media as a jumping off point, Wearing uses both staging and documentary techniques to depict everyday people in a number of precarious but captivating scenarios. She seeks out everyday people who wish to share their life experiences, recording their accounts anonymously. With my booth, I, too, seek voluntary participants who wish to remain anonymous with their submission. However, this anonymity can also be considered a staged truth, because anonymous participants are not measurably accountable for the sincerity of their responses. (Turner 40)

Gillian Wearing's open-ended use of audience as collaborator and her artistic practice of entering the public space has inspired me to incorporate these elements into my senior project. By incorporating these elements, art can be generative, where the project grows on its own, outside of my control. This makes it more exciting for me and takes me out of the studio and into the world around me.

Unlike many other conceptual artists that wholly reject mainstream television for its illusionistic quality, Wearing sees television as a wealth of information about society's subconscious, viewing it as a real indicator of the suppressed urges of the common man. Wearing likened her artistic interests to the sociological theories of Erving Goffman, specifically his writing on "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life." Wearing attests to an inherent "back stage" and "front stage" of life, proposing that cultural roles and identities take the shape of "masks" in the theatrical drama of society. With *Social Media,* I

hoped to express my feeling of a similar experience in my own community, that things were not always as they appear

The figures of speech incorporated in *Civic Toll* work in this way. Things on the surface may appear a certain way, but upon further investigation, we often reject our initial assumptions in favor of logical analysis. I consider my art to be no different. Over the course of this project, I have investigated my own understanding of community and how my art practice is beneficial or harmful to the people around me, but often I find that answers to this question are not always black and white.

 In other words, although it is human nature to assume that personal traits will always fall in line with outer appearance, but we are consistently misunderstood. We constantly make initial positive and negative judgments about another person's character, despite the reality of a very blurry line between "right" and "wrong." To our surprise, the human condition is much more nuanced than we could initially imagine, and linguistic classification can never truly document the whole person.

A second artist whose work has inspired me throughout my senior project is Rirkrit Tiravanija, an American mixed media installation and performance artist. Although Tiravanija is considered one of the more influential artists of our time, an artist to whom I pale in comparison, there are several commonalities that exist between our investigations. One overarching aspect that unites our investigations is a democratization of art. With both my work and Rirkrit's there is nothing to be bought or sold and everyone gets an equal opportunity to

become apart of the work. The art is about participation and experience, fundamentally by bringing people together. In essence, the art is not fully made without audience participation and the line between audience and artist is blurred. (MOMA 1)

One piece that Rirkrit Tiravanija has created to address these concerns is an interactive piece called *Untitled* (Free/Still) (2007). This piece featured a fully installed functional kitchen and seating area in which Tiravanija cooked a curry dish to be eaten communally in the gallery space with his audience. In this sense he is both performing and actively creating relationships with his audience, something I hoped to accomplish through my final exhibition. This piece was one presentation of a constantly evolving inquiry that focuses on community interaction through ritual. Interactivity is important to my work. I consider art to be a place of exchange rather than an object. Beauty lies in the relationships formed by the artist and audience, and between all audience members. Ritual also seems to be important in my work. All community members engaging in a confirmation exercise that reaffirms their belonging to a community much like the way confirmation functions in religion. With my SMP, I have sought to blur the line between artist and audience as well as the line between gallery and public space. I have intended my work to be a space to talk about societal change rather than a passive visual experience that rests on the formal art elements in a two dimensional work. This work is continually changing, open to the chaos of the unknown. Existing within the project are layers of effort, and objects that exist from prior exhibitions, which are

constantly being tweaked. Lots of people are the essential ingredients in the work. (MOMA 1)

Results

As I wrap up the project, I wish to leave it a bit open-ended. My initial intentions were to promote community dialogue in a productive way for the sake of mutual needs in my immediate environment. Looking back, I am uncertain if I did accomplish this goal. However, the project was a success in that I learned a great deal about the implication of art in the public space, and got closer to my community, meeting new people, gaining new perspectives and making meaningful connections with my audience through collaboration and a physical presence as the artist who made the work. As far as my opinion about community needs is concerned, it's a tough question to resolve. Primarily, I think community members need more love and respect for each other and themselves, the earth, and the laws of the universe. I also think my community needs a more heighten sense responsibility for "the greater good," so that they might continually ask themselves the question of community needs. I think my immediate community has so much that it's hard to identify a clear unanimous concern. As an artist, it is my personal opinion that my immediate art community would benefit from arts funding. Furthermore, it is my opinion that the arts aren't in a significant or secure enough position in our society to have the privilege of being so critical and internally judgmental to each other. We need a stronger "GO TEAM" attitude as a field. This is why I would add that my community needs a more sincere open-minded approach to understanding each other. With

that in mind I hope to continue investigating art in the realm of the public space

to further serve my community as an active and engaged community member

and maker of art.

<u>Bibliography</u>

<u>"The Art, Technology, and Culture Colloquium." *UC Berkeley Art, Technology, and*</u>

  <u>*Culture Colloquium*. N.p., 1 Nov. 2004. Web. 02 Apr. 2014.</u>

  <u><http://atc.berkeley.edu/bio/Rirkrit_Tiravanija/>.</u>

This source offers an abstract and a video documenting a community based,
interactive project, titled *The Land.* In this project, Tiravanija created a community
space in northern Thailand where community members can collaborate and interact
through communal living and farming in a place free of private ownership. There are
many elements of this project that have inspired me to explore public art for the senior
capstone experience.

<u>Boros, Diana. "Introduction." Introduction. *Creative Rebellion for the Twenty-first*</u>

  <u>*Century The Importance of Public and Interactive Art to Political Life in*</u>

  <u>*America*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. N. pag. Print.</u>

This source offers an argument advocating for public art as a critical and integral part
of American life, and serves to strengthen the ideals that represent our democracy. I
came across this book while taking Art for Educators and Community Activists, with
Carrie Patterson, and it informed my inquiry as I learned about the many ways that art,
activism, and politics are interwoven in the American perspective.

  Boros makes analogies between the experience of engaging in art to the
experience of engaging as a civic participant, advocating public art's power to instill
pride, agency, and motivation in its audience. Furthermore, she argues that
experiencing "visionary" art generates a creative state of mind within the viewer,
allowing for the emergence of new imagined realities that sustain the progression of
American democratic structure. This article serves my SMP by providing rational and
philosophical framework for the importance of public art.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Leses Du Réel, 2002. Print.

This source is a compilation of theoretical art essays that attempts to contextualize and ground contemporary emerging art practices in a discussion of social theory, modernization, and traditional understand of art history in the last 100 years. One artist that is heavily referenced is Tiravanija, an artist that I have chosen for one source to self essay for his use of public and private space, as well as his theme of interactivity and control.

Dewey, John. Art As Experience. Perigree Publishing. New York NY. 1934.
John Dewey was highly influential American philosopher and psychologist who made invaluable impacts on American education and social reform. His ideas about democratic life, as well as his perspective on experiential aesthetics are hugely inspiring and play a direct role in my intentions for SMP. He was a huge advocate of experimental intelligence and plurality, and promoted art that aligned itself with other aspects of culture rather than segregating itself. He also believed that art was a universal form of communication critical to civil society. By understanding his life, I have gained huge insights into my own place in American society and American education, which has set the context for my inquiry in SMP.

Daichendt, G. James. "Artist-Driven Initiatives for Art Education: What We Can Learn From Street Art." *Art Education* **66.5 (2013): n. pag. Print.**
This source is relevant to my work in that it brings the discussion of street art into a larger understanding of art and art education. I can across this article while exploring and navigating the present world of modern art from the perspective of a practicing street artist. It helped me to narrow down my interests in the public space to something that was about communication and exchange.

Enright, Robert. "Gillian Wearing: The Art of Everyday Illumination." *Border Crossings*30.3 (2011): 26-43. Print.

This source is a review of the work of Gillian Wearing, one of the artists who I have chosen for the source to self research aspect of SMP. It contains some interview sections that help me to understand why Wearing engages people through her art, and helps to illuminate the themes of back stage and front stage in life. The article also provides some descriptions of specific works, drawing analogies between the central theme of social identity.

Grosenick, Uta. *Art Now*. Vol. 2. Hong Kong: Taschen, 2008. Print.

This source is an index of present day practicing artist that helped me to move from article to article when evaluating my source to self artists. The discussion of contemporary artists is organized in such away that connections between contemporary artist are still being formed, and they are used interchangeable at points to explain each others work. Since I don't always recognize the work or the artist's name, this source served as a research map or glossary.

Hirsch, Faye. "Rirkrit Tiravanija." *Rirkrit Tiravanija*. Art in America, 7 June 2011. Web. 02 Apr. 2014. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/rirkrit-tiravanija/

This source is a review of Travanija's work that identifies some common themes running through his work of the 90s and early 2000s. It touches on his relationship with printmaking and how this carries into some larger scale installation and performance work. As I was exploring and understanding more about Tiravanija as an inspirational

source, I realized that both me and Tiravanija had a shared interest in the commercial aspect of the printmaking process. The printmaking process has also been the last artistic interest I experimented with before the SMP process began, it helped me to identify urban landscapes as potential subject matter and content in my work.

Horodner, Stuart. *The Art Life: On Creativity and Career*. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, 2012. Print.

This source was a book of compiled artist quotes given to us by Carrie Patterson at the beginning of the year. These compiled quotes offer both inspiration and advice for practicing artists on a number of important topics for artists in the "real world," including criticism, advice, audience, medium etc. This book has guided me throughout the smp experience in times of doubt. It is important to look to your heroes often in art and relate to other artist who face similar obstacles as you.

Mahnke, Frank H., and Rudolf H. Mahnke. *Color and Light in Man-Made Environments*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987. Print

I used this source to understand the psychological phenomena that color can evoke in a man made space. This helped me to proceed with creating a public art project and set a tone and feel for the work I wanted to create. This source articulates the variety of emotion that red can evoke, including passion, fear, love, action, danger, etc. The book also illuminated some aspects of color depending on where it was seen: on the ceiling, on the floor, on a wall, etc., which helped me to understand why I was getting the responses that I did.

"Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth." *Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Apr. 2014. <http://www.themodern.org/exhibition/upcoming/focus-rirkrit-tiravanija/2177>.

This abstract is essentially a description of Tiravanija's work, specifically a mixed media installation at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. Although this exhibition is rather tangentially related to my project and my ideas, it gives some interesting information regarding Tiravanija's past which sheds light on his ideas and his work. I think it particularly interesting to see how reviews of many different exhibitions of the same artist are written about with a different frame and I believe little chunks of information of who the artist is can emerge from each account.

O'Reilly, Sally. "Gillian Wearing." *Art Review* **58 (2012): 64-69. Print.**

This article informs my research by further outlining the themes Wearing hopes to convey through her work. It explains Wearing's relationship to video work, articulating her experiences as a young adult with pop culture media and the explosion of reality television in the early nineties, and how these experiences led her to explore the subjective realities we all navigate through our unique social identity. Unlike many contemporary artists who distance themselves from popular media, Wearing utilizes it as well of inspiration and a reference point for popular ideology to investigate our relationships as social beings. This relates to my work, as I intend to use my project as an indicator of the social identities which make up my immediate community as a student at St. Mary's.

(Free/Still). 1992/1995/2007/2011-. MoMA. **Prod. David Shuff, Calvin Robertson, and Ben Coccio. Perf. Rirkrit Tiravanija.** *Rirkrit Tiravanija. Untitled (Free/Still). 1992/1995/2007/2011-.* **The Museum of Modern Art, 3 Feb. 2012. Web. 1 Apr. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xRx2s3FpSg>.**

This video documentation featured on the MOMA web site reviews Tiravanija's most well-known installation and performance work, *Untitled (Free/Still)* exhibited in 2002. It interviews curators and art historians about the significance of this work and features

comments from museum attendants who participated as collaborators and audience members in an art experience. This information about audience reception helps hash out the intentions of the work, demonstrating the specific experience that has been curated and what meaning transcends the exhibition as audience members leave and reflect.

Thea, Carolee, and Thomas Micchelli. *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*. **New York, NY: D.A.P./Distributed Art, 2009. Print.**

This source contains interviews with influential members of the contemporary art world, including Rirkrit Tiravanija. These articles take a big picture view of curatorial studies and express a number of perspectives and goals with regards to curatorial practice. This interview serves my research by attempting to tackle the question of Tiravanija's untitled or multi-titled generative works. Themes and objects in his work disappear, evolve, and reappear as physical manifestations of more complex ongoing inquiries. In this interview, Tiravanija explains how his artworks appear as layers, sometimes as unfinished works that are moving toward something much larger. For example, the communal consumption ritual underpinning Untitled (Free/Still) was first explored in a similar unresolved work titled *Pad Thai*, exhibited several years earlier.

Tiravanija, Rirkrit, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. *Rirkrit Tiravanija*. **Köln: W. König, 2010. Print.**

This source is an extensive biography of Tiravanija's life and work, often referenced in discussions of contemporary art. This biography serves my research by providing a broad analysis of Tiravanija as a person, showing how his ideas have evolved over the course of his life. This biography also sheds light on some pitfalls and obstacles that inherently affect the reception of Rirkrit's work, and have directed further explorations.

Witt, Helen De. "Express Yourself." *Sight and Sound* **9 (2011): 12-13. Web.**

This article touches on Wearing's interest in social identity by drawing connections between her public statements and several works she has exhibited in the last twenty years, referencing an interview with Wearing shortly after she was awarded the Turner Prize. The central vein in the article focuses on her first feature film, titled *Self Made*, which utilizes method acting to create collaborative performances which are staged similarly to documentary-style television shows. This article shows the elements of voluntary participation, exchange, control, anonymity, and subjectivity of experience which all permeate her works in a variety of ways.

Turner, Grady T., and Gillian Wearing. "Gillian Wearing." *BOMB* **64 (1998): 34-41.**
    Web.

This article reviewing Gillian Wearing's works frames the discussion in terms of "Confessional Art." This source is in the form of an interview, directly sourcing Wearing's own opinion of her work, at least in reference to the questions asked. Reviewing quite a few works by Wearing, including her collaborative photography project, Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Other People Want Them to Say, which uses voluntary participation as a means to express the complex influences of individuality on social ideology. This interview also illuminates the connection between anonymity, honesty, and personal subjectivity as critical aspects of modern social theory.