

Gaining an appreciation of ‘Phora’ by revisiting the original installation

Ann Hamilton created *Phora* in 2005. The term has both Greek and Latin derivations. The Greek word *pherein* means “to bear” and the Latin term *fora* signifies a place of assembly or forum. Ann Hamilton’s iteration of the concept combines both of these sentiments, and much, much more.

Phora was created for an exhibition space in Paris by the name of la maison rouge (the red house) which was located near the Bastille opera and the historic prison. Since it was designed to be site-specific, Hamilton included influences from all three locations.

La maison rouge’s Waltraud Forelli-Wallach explains:

“The interlocking of public and private spaces at la maison rouge enabled [Hamilton] to come back to the idea of the home and explore the oppositions between interior and exterior, private and public, culture and nature. The foundation’s urban and historic environment, with the nearby Opera and the ghostly presence of the Bastille prison, were an opportunity for her to continue her reflections on language and vocal expression. In her eyes, the Bastille prison represents the voice of the insurgent people and has mythical status in the collective memory, whereas the Opera represents the voice of poetic and historic fabrication. These two public platforms form the symbolic context of the foundation with, at its center, the red house.”

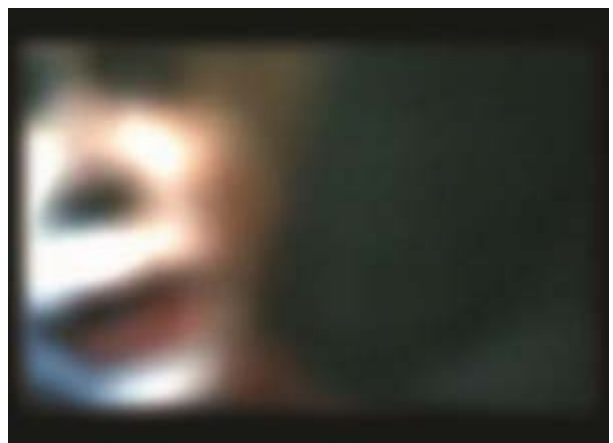


As ultimately conceived and installed, the exhibition sprawled through several rooms of la maison rouge. It began with a hallway filled with printed video stills of the silent, painted mouths of medieval wooden sculptures that led to a dimly lit room in which a revolving projector threw images of an ink pen nib drawing a horizon line onto white paper while five voices uttered unintelligible sounds from different corners of the room. In a second room containing a large scarlet silk tent and scale model of la maison rouge floating in mid-air, three female voices recited a mantra in English, French and Arabic, vis: “There, here, now, you, I, in this place, speaking. The things we offer. How to account for each other, to attend the order, sounding.”

The installation encompassed another room and the basement of la maison rouge as well, and viewed in its totality, *Phora* explored the “genesis of vocalization and vocal expression” through a “progression from silence to sound, from sound to voice, from voice to speech and from speech to speaking” (in the words of the exhibition catalogue).

Textiles in particular were vital to the original installation, evoking references to France’s controversial decision to ban women wearing the veil during school time, the European Union’s struggles with immigration control and the dilemma of housing in permanent homes rather than cloth tents political refugees and asylum seekers. Then, and now, *Phora* offers a timely reminder that identity politics is far from a new concern and voicelessness, whether collective or individual, must be addressed at its multiple and diverse sources.

Although it will not be installed in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery in the same way or order that it appeared in la maison rouge, this new version of *Phora* will nonetheless provide much to dwell on. One major change is groundbreaking indeed. For the first-time, *Phora* will be presented with *The First Line (Sounds for Drawing)*, an experimental drawing project and participatory installation by the artist and Andrew Deutsch that



encourages visitors to take a “hands-on” role by contributing their own drawing in response to audio tracks played through a headset while a newly-commissioned composition featuring micro-loops of the artist’s voice is played aloud in the Gallery to provide further inspiration and a soundtrack both for *The First Line* and *Phora*.

Ann Hamilton: Phora opens with a public reception from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Friday, January 20. The show runs through March 18.

For more information, please visit <http://www.rauschenberggallery.com> or telephone 239-489-9313. The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery is located on the Lee campus of Florida SouthWestern State College at 8099 College Pkwy, Fort Myers, FL 33919.

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