

ARTS | EXHIBIT

## PHORA

### Ann Hamilton exploring origins of public speaking



By: Tom Hall, Arts Writer

An exploration of the origins of public speaking from the first forums to on-going political debate is on display at the Bob Rauschenberg

Gallery at FSW.

Occupying the walls (nearly floor-to-ceiling) with more than 120 unique stills, *ANN HAMILTON: PHORA* is an exhibit first created 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. 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 where 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

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:

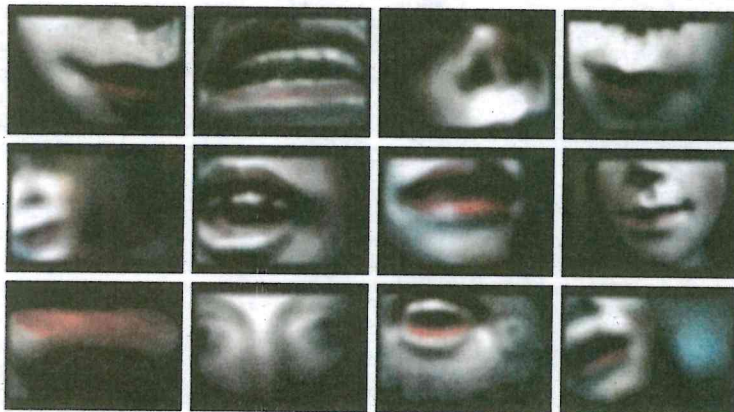
Although it will not be installed in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery in the same way or order that it appeared in *la maison rouge*, this new version of *PHORA* will nonetheless provide much to dwell on. One major change is groundbreaking indeed. For the first-time, *PHORA* will be presented with *The First 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*.

Hamilton has been widely-celebrated for her site-sensitive, multimedia, participatory and performance-based work. The official United States representative at the 48th Venice Biennale in Italy and the 1991 São Paulo Biennial in Brazil, Hamilton was recipient of the prestigious MacArthur "Genius Award" Fellowship and a NEA National Medal of Arts Award.

**- ANN HAMILTON: PHORA will be on display through March 18 at The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, located at 8099 College Parkway in Fort Myers, FL. For more information, call (239) 489-9313 or visit [www.rauschenberggallery.com](http://www.rauschenberggallery.com).**



and scale model of *la maison rouge* floating in mid-air, three female voices recited a mantra in English, French and Arabic.

The installation also 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