

THE BI-COLLEGE NEWS

VOLUME 42—NUMBER 6

Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges

TUESDAY, October 27, 2009



Video Projections Students and community members stand inside the Cantor Fitzgerald during the opening of Jeanne Finley and John Muse's Cantor Fitzgerald show, titled *Imaginative Feats*.

'Imaginative Feats' Opens at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery

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John Muse and Jeanne Finley spoke to a group of students, parents and visitors on Saturday about their exhibit "Imaginative Feats Literally Presented" that opened in the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery Friday. Andrew Suggs, the Executive Director of Vox Populi Gallery in Philadelphia, moderated the discussion with the artists, while attending viewers contributed questions and thoughts on the work.

John Muse, an assistant professor of Fine Arts at Haverford, and Jeanne Finley, a professor of Media Arts at the California College of Arts in San Francisco, have collaborated on numerous experimental documentaries and installations. The three pieces in their exhibit, "Guarded," "Flatlands" and "Lost," are video installations about preparing for disaster and the current American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The videos overlap not only in subject matter but also in the viewer's audio-visual experience. While physically separated, the works spill over onto one another. The continuous stomping sound in "Guarded" permeates the gallery even as you engage in the other two works. And, as you sit on one side of the two projections in "Flatlands," you can also hear the narrative of the video being projected on the other side.

While a viewer's degree of involvement in art is always personal, "Imaginative Feats" incorporates, even imposes, viewer participation more than

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most other works. In "Guarded," one is not merely looking at but plunged into the work: two projections rotating across the surfaces of the space display a combination of generic moments in life, text from a terrorism booklet and a stamp pounding dates onto the same increasingly black screen.

Many viewers on Friday seemed unsure where to stand and what to look at in "Guarded." Some stood still, some rotated to follow one of the two videos projected and many were unsure whether or not they should get out of the way when their shadow intruded on the image.

"Flatlands" is composed of two short narratives of different ways family members cope with the absence of a military parent through surrogates ("flat Stanleys" and "flat Daddies"). The two videos are projected on either side of the same screen which made for a jarring viewing experience when the gallery was crowded on Friday: looking past the projection, one is confronted with a mirror image of viewers from the other side.

"Lost" presents a very different viewing experience in which two viewers at a time can sit and watch a serene and foggy image of a mountainous landscape as, through head-

phones, you hear an entry from the audio diary of a soldier recounting an experience of an Iraqi woman's devastating loss in the war.

Suggs spoke of the position of the viewer several times during the gallery talk on Saturday, emphasizing that Muse and Finley's work in "Imaginative Feats" begs the question, sometimes literally, of where the viewer stands in all of this.

Muse said Finley and he are interested in, and a little nervous about, getting in the way of the viewer's experience. This is "an experiment in just how little we can do and still provoke a hesitation, a gasp," he said at the opening on Friday.

Although there was much focus on the viewer, the artists clarified precisely the effort they put into shaping a precarious work. Finley spoke of the sarcasm and derision that she feared could slip into this work, especially since the subjects of war, fear-mongering and emotional preparedness are passionately controversial and personal.

"Flatlands" most strongly portrays this problem. The artists explained on Saturday that, when the work was presented in a different context a few years ago, "Flatlands" was criticized for not taking a moral stance on its subject. On the contrary, the artists and several viewers on Saturday spoke of the strength of empathy in all the pieces.

Nevertheless, Finley spoke

of how "Imaginative Feats" is very politically critical, especially in "Guarded," which Suggs in fact called "anti-personal." In this piece, there is a distinct criticism of what Muse called "induction into the army of panic"—government-sponsored fear-mongering that has been prevalent in the current American wars.

While "Guarded" speaks more openly about fear and preparedness, all of the pieces touch on this topic visually, auditorily and viscerally. Through sound and personal narration, we are asked to decide the nature of our relationship to the speakers, those who have been hurt and affected by war and fear. And through images or the lack thereof (because there are no images of actual fighting in this exhibit), we play with our imagination of war.

"We don't have photographic images for this conflict," Finley said, explaining that, unlike all other modern conflicts, pictures of war are not prevalent in our cultural understanding of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is what Americans cannot see that feeds into paranoia and the obsession with being prepared. Thus, public imagination—in war and in confronting the narratives and non-narratives of this exhibit—might be playing the biggest role in "Imaginative Feats."