

KATE HAMPEL

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STATEMENT REGARDING THE REMOVAL OF ARTWORK FROM A-B PROJECTS BY THE CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY ART DEPARTMENT

November 27, 2016

Tell Me You Love Me was exhibited at A-B Projects from November 15–December 1, 2016. On November 21, the above piece, titled "Neither Cruel Nor Unusual" was ordered to be removed.

Statement from the Curator:

A-B Projects is an alternative gallery that I created to augment my position as a bridge between Claremont Graduate University and Scripps College in the role of Lincoln Visiting Artist in Ceramics (2015-2018). A project space is inherently a venue for risk-taking and experimentation. A-B Projects (A-Bprojects.com) is a space for new modes of collaboration, experimental installations, and projects that reach beyond gallery walls into the public realm. It is a venue for building community and possibilities—an accessible, flexible and responsive space that capitalizes upon and creates new developments, particularly in the field of ceramics. Each semester I curate four solo exhibitions by local and national artists who concurrently lecture on their practice in my classes at Scripps College.

On November 14th Kate Hampel lectured at Scripps about the aesthetics of fear and her exhibition *Tell Me You Love Me*. Mere days after the election, with many of us feeling shocked and seeking ways forward, it felt incredibly important to hear Kate speak about her work. Kate is an artist who manages to gracefully illuminate some of the most difficult and even sinister topics that society offers. In the context of her work, it becomes possible to collectively question and to discuss deeply uncomfortable ideas. The use of both beauty and repulsion are part of the necessary tactics that bring us to this place.

Two of the materials in this installation, soil and rubber, gave off unexpected odors. Although the odor was, at first, contained in the project space, it came to my attention that a smell was permeating other parts of the art building. Together with staff and faculty at CGU, after two days of testing, we determined that the culprit was the soil. To address this problem, I added fans to adjust airflow, removed all traces of dirt and reinstalled Kate's work in A-B Projects. The CGU Assistant Vice President for Risk Management deemed the matter resolved and said that the residual smell of rubber, contained only in A-B Projects itself, was not a health concern. Regardless, I was ordered by the CGU Art Department to deinstall Kate's work before the start of business on November 21. Never before in my career as an artist or curator have I been required to remove a work of art from an exhibition and it is my hope that as a community of artists and educators, we can capitalize upon this moment to discuss issues of professional practice, institutional limitations, and the history of other works—from David Wojnarowicz's video at the National Portrait Gallery to Ai Wei Wei's *Sunflower Seeds* at the Tate Modern—that have faced a similar fate.

Nicole Seisler

Statement from the Artist:

CALENDAR

Artist-in-Residence, LATITUDE,
Chicago IL. September, 2016.

World of Threads, Queen Elizabeth
Park Community and Cultural Centre,
Oakville, ON. October 29–November
27, 2016.

Tell Me You Love Me, A-B Projects, Los
Angeles CA. Opening at 6:00 p.m.
November 15, 2016.

Panel Discussion, LATITUDE, Chicago
IL. 6:00 p.m. November 19, 2016.

Artist Residency, Ragdale, Lake Forest
IL. 2017.

LATEST POSTS

Statement regarding the
removal of artwork from A-B
Projects by the Claremont
Graduate University Art
Department
6 DAYS AGO

Opening: *Tell Me You Love Me*
at A-B Projects
2 WEEKS AGO

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To be alive and alert means confronting difficult topics. It is the prerogative of artists to facilitate such confrontations through work that is challenging, affective, and even sometimes, yes, uncomfortable. We, as a society, are indebted to the bravery of such facilitators, from Karen Finley to Dread Scott, and to those who helped them to make and share their work for a wider public. We should be careful not to allow discomfort to be confused with danger.

"Neither Cruel Nor Unusual" addresses (among other things), the frailty of the human body and the aestheticization of capital punishment in the United States today. Not so coincidentally, on November 8 the state of California voted on California Propositions 62 and 66, ballot initiatives to, respectively, repeal the state's death penalty and limit the ability of those on death row to appeal their sentences. The death penalty was maintained by a vote of 53.5% to 46.45% while prisoners' ability to legally contest their sentences was limited by a vote of 51.9% to 49.1%. In other words, the state of California will continue to execute prisoners, and it will do so more quickly than before. The intense attention shown to the topic, and the relatively slim margin of victory, highlight both the urgency and divisiveness of the matter.

It saddens me that this work was removed based on an imagined threat to those who encountered it. These are times when nothing has become more normal than the forced silencing of those with whom we disagree, and under such silencing the potential for discussion, for empathy, and for critical questioning is deeply diminished. The discussion I would have hoped to foster has been preemptively shut down, but together with the curator, I strongly encourage the CGU community to seize the new opportunity presented: to question and critique the status quo, to challenge and allow oneself to be challenged, to be uncomfortable and to ask why this is so. Anything less does us all a disservice.

Kate Hampel

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