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TRANSIENT MOTEL

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the School of Visual Art and Design
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2013

Major Professor: Joo Kim

ABSTRACT

“Transient Motel” is an exhibition that investigates the interactions of people and physical environments in low-income areas of Daytona Beach, Florida. The purpose of the exhibition is to raise social awareness of low-income communities among the public through visual art.

Interactions between motel guests were documented as first-hand sound recordings of conversations, interviews and other activities. These recordings are projected through speakers within a constructed life-sized replica of the motel rooms in which they were recorded. Found and appropriated furniture and fixtures from the actual rooms are arranged within the replica as objects of art to familiarize the public with conditions of poverty.

During my exhibition, the public is encouraged to participate by entering and exploring the replica of the motel room. The participant experiences authentic objects, sounds and smells of Daytona Beach motel rooms that have been inhabited by victims of transient poverty.

For my wife Jana, son Alex and daughter Eden.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Transient Motel” examines a social perspective on low-income communities in tourism-dependent Florida, and presents art forms that include installation and paintings.

“Transient Motel” originated as a book that presented photographs of the exteriors of small Daytona Beach motels that offer nightly, weekly and monthly rates. While working on these photographs, I began recording sounds of human interaction in the motel parking lots.

The collection of these recordings and documents culminates in the “Transient Motel” exhibition. The purpose of the exhibition, which is result of lengthy study, is to promote public participation through visual art to improve the social environment for low-income people in tourist areas. This topic is especially relevant to me because I grew up in the neighborhood shared with these low-income motels, and I attended public school with the children who lived in the motels.

Artistic creation can bring changes in our society by conveying messages and creating public awareness. Florida relies on spending and tax contributions from tourism to support locally-owned businesses and individuals that have been seriously affected by the recent economic collapse, especially in low-income communities.

CHAPTER TWO: EXHIBITION

“Transient Motel” is made up of two segments of artifacts. The first is *Motel Room*, a life-sized participatory installation based on a composite of interiors of five decaying motels in Daytona Beach, Florida. The second segment, titled *Translation*, presents a series of paintings that document the exterior of one of the motels in a triptych format. These paintings employ enhanced color saturation and details, overlapped with geometric lines that reconstitute the shapes and form of the *Motel Room* structure.

Process

Family-owned economy motels of Daytona Beach, Florida serve as the settings for extensive investigative research for the development of the “Transient Motel” exhibition. Daytona Beach serves as the archetype for other locations with similar traits on a national and even global scale.

Daytona Beach characteristics that relate to other tourist destination, special-event cities include an abundance of small, inexpensive family-owned motels that rent on a daily, weekly and monthly basis; tourism that is partially attributable to the presence of a public beach; a majority of working adults under 40 years of age employed by service (tertiary) industries; a reliance on special events that are promoted through bars, nightclubs, and temporary vendors of beach novelties (Braun & Soskin, 2002).

My firsthand research of Daytona Beach economy motel culture was conducted as follows: I rented rooms in 11 small motels on route A1A over a span of 26 nights. My purpose was to investigate the poverty culture that permeates these motels, and to document the interactions of the motel guests. These interactions were documented through voyeuristic sound recordings of conversations and activities taking place within the motel rooms as well as through my interviews of the inhabitants. The interiors and exteriors of the motel rooms were documented with photographs, measurements, notes and drawings (The Regents of the University of California, 1997).

The results and recordings collected during the period of my research are transformed into objects of art. These objects include a composite life-sized replica of the interiors of low-income motel rooms, complete with furniture and fixtures extracted from the rooms and presented by me as readymade art objects. Stated succinctly, they are pre-existing objects that have been chosen by the artist to be placed within an artistic context (Tomkins, 1966).

Daytona Beach has 12 motels on route A1A that are suitable exemplars of transient motel poverty culture and worthy of research. In order to authenticate the artwork and installation for “Transient Motel”, my research approach deems it is necessary to stay overnight in a random sampling of these motels, and to temporarily assimilate into that manifestation of poverty culture. While engaging in this Hunter S. Thompson style of journalism, I conducted interviews,

documented behavior, appropriated furniture and fixtures, and recorded video and sound (McKeen, 2008).



Figure 1 One of the selected exemplar motels from Daytona Beach

Motel Room

Methods

Structure and Sound

This architectural installation travels to destinations outside of the poverty milieu. At these locations, the *Motel Room* is brought to life through human interaction, structural additions, furniture variations, fixture alterations and artist collaborations.

Motel Room was constructed as a life-sized interactive installation to approximate life in a decaying, poverty culture motel. While living in the Daytona Beach motel rooms, I

documented the interiors through drawings, measurements, snapshots and notes to facilitate the creation of an authentic replica.



Figure 2 Snapshot interior of Daytona Beach Motel

For this exhibit, a composite of five different motel rooms is used to construct the final life-sized architectural installation. To fill the putative room with authentic structures, I appropriated furniture, fixtures and televisions from the five Daytona Beach motel rooms. These items were replaced with upgraded objects purchased by the artist. I refer to this as “Upgrade Appropriation”. This method references artist Joel Ross’ 1997 sculpture *Room 28*; for which the artist checked into a motel room with tools and 50 suitcases. He dismantled the room’s furniture

and fixtures, filled the suitcases with the appropriated items, and later presented them as one sculpture (Deitsch, 2007).



Figure 3 Joel Ross, Room 28 mixed media, variable dimensions, 1997 (Ross)

Sound recordings from “my” Daytona motels provide the evidence of human interaction within the rooms, hallways and parking lots. These recordings are voyeuristic; their subjects remain unaware and anonymous. The recordings are incorporated in the *Motel Room* installation as sound projections through hidden speakers. Because of these sounds, the listener witnesses several types of human interactions. They run the gamut from a man in an upstairs room disabling the beeping smoke alarm (because his methamphetamine-cooking equipment is on fire) to children pulling their dog into the neighboring room before the motel management is alerted.

Interaction and Participation

Before the “Transient Motel” exhibition, *Motel Room* has been disassembled and reconstructed at various offsite locations. Changing locations led to variations in the room’s structure and furniture selections. The transient characteristics of the *Motel Room* vary with each destination. As the set travels, the piece also becomes collaborative space for the artist and choreographers, performance artists, sound artists and the visiting public. The interactions in each location are documented with videos and still photographs. The idea of employing a complicated movable installation as a participatory art object echoes early work by Pepon Osorio (Osorio, 2012).



Figure 4 Economy Motel, Multimedia Collaboration with choreographer Rachael Leonard and videographer at Atlantic Center for the Arts, Florida



Figure 5 Projection still from video collaboration with choreographer Rachael Leonard and videographer Greg Cole at Atlantic Center for the Arts, Florida

Materials

Motel Room is constructed with two-by-four pine wood supports, bolts, screws, luan plywood, imbedded speakers, tile, discarded sink-with-vanity, discarded carpet, and unused latex paint.

The total dimensions of the movable installation are 132”Wx156”Lx100”H. The installation is constructed and disassembled using hand tools and power tools, and it travels in a fourteen-foot-long moving truck.



Figure 6 Motel reconstruction in progress

My “Upgrade-appropriated” furniture and fixtures are presented as readymade art objects (Tomkins, 1966). These “Upgrade-appropriated” items include a bed, bed frame, dresser, vanity light, lamps, toilet, carpet, jars, funnels, PVC chairs, pillows, bedspread, side table and Gideon’s Bible.



Figure 7 Bryce Hammond, "Upgrade appropriated" Dresser, Television, Dresser Back, Wallpaper, variable dimensions, 2012

Translation

Methods

The *Translation* segment of the exhibition is made up of three, square-formatted paintings that depict the exterior of a Daytona Beach motel. A builder's plumb line is used to delineate the motel room replica.

The paintings are installed as a triptych with five-inch horizontal gaps between them. The painting on the left depicts the exterior of a small motel, utilizing white latex paint with textural variations. Each reassembled replica of a motel room coalesces through chalk architectural guidelines in vertical, horizontal and diagonal orientations. The center painting is presented in de-saturated colors as a simple architectural elevation. The form of each incarnation of the replicated motel room emerges through the use of architectural chalk guidelines that have been

partially erased, which reveals a more articulated view of the extracted room. The painting on the right uses the same subject matter as the other two panels, but the chalk guidelines have been erased further to distinguish each *Motel Room* installation.

Because the three panels are the same size, but characterized by similar subject matter (i.e. the motel with emerging room), they are read as a triptych. Gestalt psychology posits that the sum of the parts equals the whole if identical parts are separated by consistent spacing. Gestalt psychology guarantees that the panels communicate as a single (hopefully reverential) art object (Tuck, 2010).

Furthermore, my paintings serve as a map key for decoding the reconstituted motel room replica. The shapes in the paintings' interiors match the *Motel Room* installation's contours. Therefore the structure of the architectural space links with the paintings through semiotics; the motel room contours become a symbol that is conveyed by the chalk lines in the paintings. The recurring symbols of the motel room installation unify the "Transient Motel" exhibition (Sonesson, 1989).



Figure 8 Bryce Hammond, Motel Room Extraction, discarded latex and acrylic on board, 24"X70", 2013

Materials

The individual *Translation* paintings are 24"X24" and are constructed with two-and-one-half-inch deep pine framing with luan underlayment plywood as the support surface. Discarded latex paint and construction chalk from a carpenter's plumb line comprise the materials used to create the paintings. Rather than using conventional art supply paints, such as acrylic and oil, I chose to use mediums that are more consistent with constructing and painting motels.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSION

Turning the plight of the transient motel population into a work of art is the purpose of this exhibition. The related artistic expressions are designed and executed to inform the public of life patterns in specific locations. The subject matter of Daytona Beach family-owned motels is infused with the history of those who have inhabited their rooms from an earlier era when these motels were thriving to the present day when they suffer dilapidation and criminal activity.

My *Motel Room* installation encourages participation by the public, with the hope of providing an uneasily interactive glimpse into the transient life of the economically disadvantaged.

My *Translation* paintings provide a reverent, aesthetically pleasing composition depicting the exterior of a Daytona Beach Motel. The architecture of the *Motel Room* installation is translated into geometrical shapes, which symbolically represent the *Transient Motel* exhibition.

The family owned motels that have not come under scrutiny within the exhibition are those that rent rooms only on a nightly basis. The motels chosen for “Transient Motel” continue to rent rooms on a weekly and monthly basis.

As a result of my research for this thesis, I am currently serving as a consultant to Dave Castinacci at the Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce. I am asked to report in detail which motels are safe, clean and can be endorsed by the City of Daytona Beach to encourage tourism. This information is also provided to travel resources including Trip Advisor. I have also been invited to attend city zoning meetings as an investigational consultant. Serving as a consultant has been a rewarding outcome of creating the “Transient Motel”, because I grew up in Daytona

Beach adjacent to the motels from my study. Growing up in this nearby community served as a primary motivation to begin my research methodology.

Social impact within my art works does not manifest itself exclusively through presentation for social awareness. Due to my first hand research and recordings, I was able to testify on behalf of a child that was living with her mother in a motel room that doubled as a methamphetamine lab. This child had been severely scarred physically from exposure to the chemicals. The child has been relocated to a foster family outside the state, and will not be returned to her drug addicted, abusive mother.

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