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"EXPRESS+LOCAL: NYC AESTHETICS"
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At a time when the educational institutions in our midst are under siege along with the unknown enemy in the Middle East, 16 New York City-based artists and teachers have reminded us that education continues beyond grammar school and beyond the scientific grammar of survival and competition that has become the bible of globalization. When Jacques Derrida, broadcasting continental philosophy from Paris after WWII, shot *Of Grammatology* (1967) into the educational institutions of the "West," he gave shelter to experimental thought in every academic discipline. But his construction proved feeble in the face of aggressive political and theological agendas that took over every thought experiment in the mid-1990s and high-jacked thinking only to crash it into and destroy the relay station of ideas that was American academe.

Leading her guests through the hallways encircling a glass rotunda in the heart of the library building of Queens College, Anne Sherwood Pundyk, one of the exhibiting artists in residence, cast a gloomy look on the oversized odd-shaped American flag suspended -- on the lowest floor -- as if in mourning, and observes: "It was different with the Vietnam war. The war was beamed into our living rooms. This one [in the Middle East] is unavailable to us; there are no images, there is no way to mourn." Her *Mourning Tower*, a fade-to-black paper trail encircling the flag, is an attempt to supplement an absence and to draw attention to the "missing" pages, missing not only in the media, but also in our schools and colleges, indeed in our grammar. During WWI it was up to the love and war neurotics, first diagnosed as such at that time, to stay back home and format our documents of personal and group identification. Because they couldn't fight, because they had no enemy, they poured out their hearts and minds to shape--and thus inoculate--everyone who would receive them, friend and enemy alike. Thus a new species of workers infiltrating the office, studio, and boardroom emerged that took over the function of history as academic discipline.

Mourning means historicizing and historicizing means identity formation. The inability to mourn is characteristic of the media-technologically equipped failures in love and war declaring the end of history. What's odd about this war, observes Pundyk, is the refusal or inability to develop the photographic negative lodged inside, inside the library rotunda for example, not least because of the transition of the reproducible image from negative development to digital photography. Thus Pundyk alternates mainstream

media source photographs and iterative images of unprecedented developmental phases that feed the final product with a solid memory blackout. The center of gravity and narrative wellspring was her five-foot-square painting *Change My Mind/Martian Easter Tree* (2011), which curator Tara Mathison strategically positioned at the top of the tower's interior.

The downward pull of the emotions during mourning periods is the greatest puzzle for the analyst otherwise accustomed to view all human activity in the service of the pleasure principle. Pundyk's work, much like the recording practices of the past century, finds its libidinal resources at the front of the line where the bodies fall and which separates out, differentiates, and enables iteration as formative principle in language and in every other medium. Although *Change My Mind* slips easily into its assigned role of *gravitas*, because it explores the empty spaces--mourning panels--between developed images borrowed from mainstream media, Pundyk works with a "cheerful" palette and avian brushstrokes that do not immediately invoke the grave internal landscape from whence they emerge. The concepts of overarching and overcoming, of cradling and containing, unify the visual experience of an exhibit driven by the feminine function of weaving over blank spaces of pure difference, reminding us that the task of education is not only global conformity but also one of curating the unseen, as well as the un- and under-developed. Mathison's own Proust-inspired *Queens Questionnaire* and Tommy Mintz's *Student Views*, which assemble seemingly disparate pronouncements, don't take perfect grammar for granted but rather search for the odd spaces where iteration takes hold as if to commemorate the loss of difference. Antonia Perez's *White Fence for Baby Trees* (crocheted plastic bags and wood in the orchard outside the second-level entrance to the Rosenthal Library) strung together discarded material as it recycled the libidinal positions education often requires us to abandon as we graduate ever higher. The low-hanging American flag emerged in this setting not as a symbol of power, but as the abandoned hope of a past that has grown increasingly difficult to record and archivize, but one that will get recycled beyond the glass dome that protects it.

"EXPRESS+LOCAL: NYC AESTHETICS" brings us back to a time when the American educational institution nourished and was nourished by the developing suckling at its breast. The ominous reality of a war that is pushed into the shadows of media development and that remains unavailable to plain view have attended the withdrawal of education into a delusional order of certainty and false security that will ultimately cost it its cutting edge.

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