

2x2 Collective: double consciousness

25 October – 21 December 2013 at The Arts Center of the Capital Region, Troy.



Maria Driscoll McMahon, Burrtha Rides Again, performance

The exhibition includes a selection of work from four artists: Ben Altman, Maria Driscoll McMahon, and Sandra Stephens, who formed the 2x2 Collective after meeting through the New York Foundation for the Arts' MARK program. The fourth artist, Carla Rae Johnson, is a guest to the collective.

The four have found common ground in their disparate uses of the figure at intersections of the social, political, and personal. In this manifestation of the collective they investigate, "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." This is W.E.B. Du Bois' definition of the situation of American Negroes – seeing themselves, simultaneously as both American and Negro, with "two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." The artists will investigate consciousness in various ways, reflecting privileged and non-privileged identity categories.

The collective will also present new collaborative pieces in pairs – Altman/Stephens and Driscoll McMahon/Johnson. These paired collaborations allow for a further investigation of the double consciousness theme. Using interactive photographic and video installation, Altman and Stephens will explore their similar interests in confusing dualities, while Driscoll McMahon and Johnson will use performance to look at stereotypes within identity.

Altman's work explores double consciousness from the perspective of a privileged white heterosexual male. "For me the normal meaning of double consciousness - seeing oneself and one's heritage through the lens of the dominant culture - hardly makes sense" Altman writes. "So it's more useful for me to think in terms of the reverse - my consciousness of who I am and what I represent as seen by cultural others, those who are either minorities or relatively dis-empowered." His use of self-portrait photography to play with representations of masculinity brings gender into the discussion. Altman is interested in how private vulnerabilities and constraints tangle with a public image as privileged, entitled, and dangerous. He further breaks down divisions between victim/perpetrator, spectator/art object, and observer/observed/observing.

Driscoll McMahon's investigation into double consciousness reveals class to be a key component within this conversation. She uses her perspective as a rural female to bring awareness to rural and class stereotypes enforced by the dominant class culture. "Double consciousness stimulates introspection and reflection on one's own experiences within one's own skin --no matter what color it happens to be. Hopefully that can bring about empathy toward what one imagines others go through" says Driscoll McMahon. Through performance, time-based media and sculpture created from burdock weed that is located in many rural locations in Upstate New York, she exaggerates and reveals the monstrous image of the bigoted, stupid, and inbred redneck created by the media and other influences within dominant culture.

Stephens looks further at double consciousness from her perspective as a mixed race, lighter-skinned Jamaican immigrant to the United States. "Double consciousness is about seeing yourself through the eyes of the cultural other or seeing yourself in relation to that cultural other" says Stephens. She is interested in looking at the interconnections between whiteness and blackness and other identity dualities. Stephens' video installations involve figures that confuse and fall within dualities that don't quite make sense, which reveals the power dynamics at play when it comes to identity.

Johnson looks at race and sexuality as it relates to double consciousness. Through her perspective as a white lesbian she brings attention to the "norms" of whiteness and of heterosexuality as an overarching category. She takes on the persona of privilege - in her own words: "the thoughtless; the bigot; the greedy or the fearful to recognize my participation, through action or inaction, in these mind-frames." Her sculptures embody the double consciousness theme by creating objects that represent a merging of two very different consciousnesses. "I have come to understand that those in a position of less power are compelled to thoroughly understand the consciousness of the dominant or the norm. Double-consciousness is 'required reading' for the 'other.' Positions of privilege do not come with this requirement."

Located on Monument Square in the heart of downtown Troy, The Arts Center of the Capital Region houses studios for pottery, printmaking, digital arts, culinary arts, jewelry, woodworking, painting and drawing, stained glass, dance, and more. Its 36,000 square feet of fully-accessible space also includes a 104-seat performing arts theater as well as four galleries noted for their critically acclaimed exhibits. Nationally and regionally renowned writers, performers, and artists proudly serve as The Arts Center's teaching faculty.

The Arts Center of the Capital Region

265 River Street

Troy (NY) 12180 United States

Tel. +1 (518) 2730552

alana@artscenteronline.org

www.artscenteronline.org

