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From Road Signs to Errant Lines: *carte-blanche* artist projects re-imagine ideas and collections at the Spencer Museum of Art

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Article abstract

Cet article aborde trois projets récents réalisés par des artistes à la demande du Spencer Museum of Art de l'Université du Kansas à Lawrence, et pour lesquels on a eu recours à diverses méthodes d'intervention, à la carte blanche comme formule d'accès aux collections ainsi qu'à des échanges avec le personnel et les publics du musée. Ces trois projets sont *Stop Look Listen: An Installation by Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco* (2007-2008) ; *Visitation* de Ernesto Pujol (2011) ; et *An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton/Cynthia Schira* (2013) (avec les installations *figura* de Hamilton et *Etymon* de Schira). La sélection des artistes a tenu compte de l'ensemble de leur travail et des idées précises que chacun concrétiserait sur les lieux – un musée universitaire des beaux-arts doté d'un programme d'exposition actif et d'une collection de quelque 45 000 objets. Chaque projet avait son calendrier, son approche, sa forme et sa méthodologie propres, mais tous répondaient aux collections du musée en intégrant oeuvres nouvelles et pièces historiques, qu'elles soient exposées ou entreposées.

Parmi les questions abordées ici : comment s'y est-on pris, dans ces trois projets, pour incorporer les collections du musée et offrir un accès « carte blanche » à ces cinq artistes (et aux publics du musée) tout en améliorant le fonctionnement du musée et son rayonnement sur le campus ? Quelles sont certaines des forces de la carte blanche en ce qu'elle s'applique à ces projets ? En quoi un tel accès a-t-il permis aux artistes de réaliser leurs projets particuliers et de produire de nouvelles oeuvres tout en interpellant le public de manière aussi efficace ?

Cet article examine l'évolution de chacun des projets, son utilisation des collections ainsi que la participation des collaborateurs, du personnel et des visiteurs. Les méthodes choisies pour ce faire ont consisté notamment à comparer les projets et à examiner les objectifs des artistes ainsi que leurs points de vue recueillis lors de rencontres. Chacune des trois projets a, à sa façon, déplacé des objets, au sens littéral comme au figuré, du passé jusqu'au présent, en interrogeant [au passage] les stratégies et les concepts de présentation choisis. L'accès aux collections fourni aux artistes a permis autant aux visiteurs qu'aux personnes oeuvrant en coulisses de regarder ces objets sous un angle nouveau. Par leurs méthodes, les artistes ont su ranimer ces formes et en renouveler l'apparence.

Chaque projet traite d'aspects importants de la culture muséale – le dévoilement et la dissimulation, entre autres, tant sur le plan humain que sur les plans muséologique et institutionnel. Ces projets ont équilibré événements et recherches (artistiques), modifié les interactions avec les collections et approfondi les dialogues et les connaissances, contribuant ainsi à mieux intégrer le musée au sein de la collectivité régionale et du campus. En nous faisant voir les objets à travers les yeux des artistes et leurs recherches, ils nous ont amenés à nous interroger sur qui possède le musée.

Article huit

From Road Signs to Errant Lines: *carte-blanche* artist projects re-imagine ideas and collections at the Spencer Museum of Art

Susan Earle

Susan Earle has served as curator of European and American art at the Spencer Museum of Art since 1996, where she oversees the collection of painting, sculpture, and decorative arts from those regions. Earle earned a bachelor's degree in English and art history with distinction at Williams College, and a doctorate in art history at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. She has curated or organized more than fifty exhibitions and works to promote artistic research among students, colleagues, and community members. Earle serves also as affiliate faculty in the Kress Foundation Department of Art History and the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, both at the University of Kansas. She held a Curatorial Research Fellowship from the Getty Foundation in 2006 and received an Outstanding Educator Award from the Kansas Torch Chapter of Mortar Board Senior Honor Society in 2004.

[Previous page] ***Fig.0***
***An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton/Cynthia Schira*, view of exhibition banners at entrance of Spencer Museum.**

The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas, has generated multi-faceted, transformative projects as a result of opening its collections to artists *carte blanche*. These artist activities have sometimes included event-driven strategies and have resulted from sustained interactions with the Spencer Museum's galleries, collections, and staff, as well as with students and local communities. As part of ongoing, intentional institutional self- reflection, and more than ten years of frequent artist projects, the Spencer has called upon artists and other thinkers from a range of disciplines to utilize artistic research and collaboration to help re-think who owns the Museum—and how to better integrate its historical collections of nearly 45,000 objects with other voices.[1]

In recent years, the museum inaugurated an International Artist-in-Residence program, augmenting the number of artist residencies and commissioned artist projects over the past decade.[2]Along with many other museums, since at least the early 1990s, the Spencer has been working to expand, diversify, and better serve its public, building on its research traditions but updating them from a more polyvocal perspective. Artists and others have offered various interrogations, ranging from short visits to lengthy commissions. Using a series of focus groups as part of redefining the permanent collection gallery displays in 2008-2011, for example, the museum has sought campus and community voices and input.[3] Collection displays of varying sizes that relate to specific course content or class assignments are switched out every few weeks in a recently expanded gallery. Over the past five years, the Spencer has initiated two undertakings to expand the role of artistic research within and beyond its walls, with Arts Research Collaboration and the Integrated Arts Research Initiative (IARI).[4] There have also been projects that included poets, scientists, musicians, and representatives from other disciplines, including commissions and installations like *Talking Trees: Karen McCoy and Robert Carl*, outside the museum, in the trees, in 2010, among others.[5]

Three artist commissions at the Spencer over the past decade encompass a range of artistic and curatorial approaches that illustrate the impact as well as challenges of full collection access for artists. The three projects are *Stop Look Listen: An Installation by Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco* (2007-2008); *Visitation* by Ernesto Pujol (March 15, 2011); and *An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton | Cynthia Schira* (2013) (with Hamilton's installation titled *figura* and Schira's *Etymon*). All the artists are nationally and internationally recognized, and the Spencer Museum of Art commissioned each project. Artists were selected based on their work overall and their specific ideas for creating a project at this site. Looked at together, these projects offer examples of *carte*

1 I am deeply grateful to the five artists whose work I discuss here, each of whom gave so generously of themselves to their work at the Spencer; we remain in their debt for the continual stream of ideas that their projects still yield. I thank my colleague Celka Straughn for bringing this volume of Muséologies to my attention. I am grateful for the support of other colleagues at the Spencer, especially Saralyn Reece Hardy, Stephen H. Goddard, Ryan Waggoner, Richard Klocke, Sofia Galarzu-Liu, Janet Dreiling (now retired but not forgotten), and my two recent curatorial interns, Samantha Lyons and Tyler York. I owe much gratitude to the Muséologies volume editors for their kindness, patience, and helpful insights. My thanks also go to the anonymous outside reviewers who offered excellent suggestions that greatly aided the finished essay. Lastly, I thank my parents, my two amazing sisters, my extended family, and especially my spouse, John Pultz, and my children, Ian, Noah, and Eliza, whose love and support sustain me.

2 For more information on some of these activities and publications, see https://www.spencerart.ku.edu/.

3 The Spencer convened more than a dozen focus groups of 10-20 participants in each as part of re-thinking its permanent collection gallery displays. The museum also created a Student Advisory Board about fifteen years ago.

4 Both initiatives were made possible through grant support, the first one from within the University of Kansas, and the second one, IARI, through a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. For more information, see https://www.spencerart.ku.edu/integrated-arts-research- initiative

5 For *Talking Trees*, which I organized, see < http://www.karen- mccoy.com/sculpture/pprojects/talking_trees/ttrees.html >

blanche artists involvement and how it can shift not only engagement with the museum's collections but also staff habits, uses of collection storage, and audience understanding, on multiple levels. From the vantage point of my position as curator of European and American art at the Spencer, as well as the curator for each of these endeavors[6], I chose these projects to discuss in this essay because of the range of *carte blanche* elements that they amplify. Each commission utilized, in different ways, the museum's collection, both as displayed and in storage. My aim was to give the artists ample access and permission to allow them to pursue their vision—hoping to enact the theory that "curating could be about making impossible things possible"—as articulated by Hans Ulrich Obrist based on the suggestion of artist Alighiero Boetti early on in his career.[7] Each of the three projects differently elaborated an implicit analysis of display. Each one also brought in new audiences and helped develop the Spencer's role as an artistic incubator for the campus and the region. Each project pushed the boundaries of the Spencer's capacities, and added new collaborators. In addition, a broader range of classes have utilized the Spencer's resources as a result of these projects.[8] None of the artists' voices became counter-authorities. Instead, each artist created work that was open-ended and that interrogated structures of display, especially the tension between what is hidden versus what is revealed. This essay will consider how each project expanded the Museum's abilities, including the level of community involvement and the function and visibility of the collection on this university campus.

Stop Look Listen: An Installation by Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco

The methodology of *Stop Look Listen* sampled various works featuring human figures that were on display at the time in the Spencer Museum galleries. It also involved many outside collaborators. Velasco is a visual art faculty member at the University of Kansas, with whom Davidson-Hues, an independent artist, has collaborated on several occasions; both artists currently live in Lawrence, Kansas. The Spencer invited the artists to consider its collection on the occasion of re-opening a renovated gallery for 20th and 21st-century art, but Velasco and Davidson-Hues responded with a proposal that incorporated objects that spanned the full temporal range of the collection. Spencer director Saralyn Reece Hardy and I constituted the main team to work with the artists on the museum end, along with other staff as needed to help realize the project. The artists were selected in large part because they responded with nuanced and inventive ideas to the challenge of working with the museum's collection. They intervened in the collection by creating a multi-part way-finding system with signs that directed visitors to view seven works already on display, where they would stop, look, and listen to audio tracks the artists produced. [9]

The way-finding system began outside the building, just as a visitor would, using seven signs placed in a parking lot north of the Spencer (called Lot 91). The artists distilled seven objects in the Spencer's collection into flat, iconic symbols to represent each object (Figures 1 and 2). The images that the artists coaxed out of the seven works of art took on the

6 The Spencer's curatorial team, consisting of the museum's Director and the other four curators, as well as related staff, approved proposals from the artists and maintained ongoing discussions, during the commission periods, of conceptual and logistical elements of each project. At various points in the timeline, there were wider consultations with faculty or staff on other parts of campus.

7 OBRIST Hans Ulrich, RAZA Asad, *Ways of Curating*, New York: Faber and Faber & Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014, p. 10.

8 New collaborators have included KU Parking and Transit and Audio-Reader. Classes from more than 50 departments visit the museum.

9 DAVIDSON-HUES Janet, VELASCO Maria, *Stop Look Listen* an unpublished project proposal for the Spencer Museum of Art, January 2007, p. 1. The project was also documented in a 4-page exhibition brochure.

Fig. 1
***Stop Look Listen: An Installation by Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco*, view in the parking lot with signpost of "Salomé" and the artists posing, with sign for "Standing Amida Buddha" visible behind.**

Fig. 2
Parking lot sign for "St. George Baptizing the Pagan King & His Daughter," ***Stop Look Listen*****.**
©Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Robert Hickerson].

abstracted look of international signage, found worldwide along highways and in airports, and designed for intelligibility. Then, with the help of the university parking staff, the artists printed these distilled forms in black silhouette against yellow, on metal signs that have the (diamond) shape and look of roadside warning signs. For example, as seen in Figure 2, they reduced a multi-figural wood relief baptism scene from the sixteenth century to a streamlined, single figure with arms crossed over its chest and a floating head above, receiving drops of water, reincarnating an historical image in an elemental way, perhaps saying "Warning: Art Approaching" or "Yield to Art." In their accessibility and openness, the signs interrogate the power of images and art in our society, and they humorously disrupt our expectations.[10]

The way-finding system continued inside the museum, with the self-guided audio tour created by the artists and keyed to seven objects on display from the museum's permanent collection identified by wall labels that looked like the outdoor signs but smaller. The indoor signage directed visitors on an offbeat and compelling tour available on portable MP3 players with an audio track of spoken text for each work. The signs that told visitors to stop were octagon, or stop-sign, shapes, with a stylized image of the infant Jesus (Figure 3). Visitors happened upon the "stop" signs while touring the galleries on their own route.

With *Stop Look Listen*, the audio tracks for the objects on the tour offered poetic soundscapes that imaginatively extended beyond the galleries to other (metaphoric?) places, as they evoked geographies that often related to the artists' vision of the collection object's significance—rather than to a fictional construction unrelated to the object. Sounds and words were layered, unfolding in listeners' heads, in terrains unexpected—a wonderful counterpart to the pared-down sensibility of the signage. The variety of resonant voices and texts suggested the openness of each object to multiple perspectives and varied meanings. The two-voice audio track for Carol Haerer's monochromatic and abstract, half-moon shaped painting *Abiquiu*, for example, mixes excerpts from Haerer's letters with exhortations to listeners to move to different viewing positions while listening. The track for Mimi Smith's *Steel Wool Peignoir* (Figure 3), an icon of early feminist art from 1966, involves the viewer in movement figuratively, commenting on how the work attracts and repels. The audio track for the *Amida Buddha*, a work from the 1400s, evokes a meditative state, playing a chant written by monks specifically for this Buddha.[11] Perhaps the most powerful audio track is the one for Lesley Dill's wall sculpture *Thread Man* (1992) that reproduces Emily Dickinson verses in cursive script constructed of wire and thread. Using binaural sound technology, the audio mimics the sculpture's invocation of poetry, fiercely suggesting the fragility of language, in contrast to the tangibility of voice and skin. Providing visitors a layered experience that could not be found elsewhere, and that shifted the Spencer into offering multi-sensory possibilities that encouraged a completely different map of the collection and more, the spoken text calls the sculpture "A jumble of words dangling," while also posing provocative questions, such as "Is there an obligation to speak?" and "What are words for, when no one listens anymore?"[12] The words

10 When the project began, Lot 91 was large and served students, but the University's athletics program turned most of it into two full-size practice fields for the football team. The resulting smaller lot served fewer people and only faculty and staff. To address this change and to encompass a bigger area, the artists also placed some of the signs they had made beyond the limits of the parking lot.

11 The following people loaned their voices and ideas to the audio tour: Philippe Barrière, Mohamed El-Hodiri, Kip Haaheim, Laura Herlihy, Robert Hickerson, Sharyn Katzman, Stan Lombardo, Sue Lorenz, Barry Newton, Janet Rose, and Leatrice Smith.

12 DAVIDSON-HUES Janet, VELASCO Maria, Audio track for Lesley Dill, *Thread Man* (1992), *Stop Look Listen*, Spencer Museum of Art, 2007; and ongoing in digital form on the Spencer Museum website and on the artists' websites. *Stop Look Listen* was on view at the Spencer from August 7, 2007, through May 31, 2008. This timeline was adequate, but I would argue that *Stop Look Listen* should have remained on permanent display.

and sound environment intone a reminder that art, like life, is about experience, not just about objects.

The signage and audio tour served to re-imagine the museum-going experience, encouraging visitors in our hyper-stimulated, media-rich world to slow down and, as the title suggests, *stop, look*, and *listen*. Listening to the artists' audio tour exposed visitors to new ideas and unexpected elements about, or spinning off from, each of the objects, and to perhaps also ponder how we do or do not listen. Part technological and part curatorial, the way-finding system commented on selected works of art, reinterpreting and re-picturing earlier objects, to bring the past into the present. The project even included a take-home item: a car bumper sticker that looked like the outdoor and indoor signage. The artists' audio tour and related signage quietly disrupted gallery displays, injecting artists voices into the labeling of objects, and making sly reference to the museum tradition that features expensive Acoustiguide head-set tours to accompany blockbuster exhibitions. With no corresponding sense of authority or counter-authority, the audio tour encouraged visitors to re-think the authoritative words on those other soundtracks, and to instead embrace a more personal, thoughtful experience.

This intervention in the museum without physically moving any of its artworks functioned in a way more analogous to hyper-text, allowing for alternative pathways within a text while not disturbing its original syntax. In *Stop Look Listen's* allusion to traditional way-faring signage of contemporary travel and tourism, it undercuts existing hierarchies hidden within it. By instilling a dynamic that embraced both outdoors and indoors, the project extended the museum experience, or opened another kind of experience, beyond the confines of the building.[13]

Visitation by Ernesto Pujol

Visitation by Ernesto Pujol also utilized movement through the galleries, but as a one-day, live performance, the time-frame was inherently much shorter. Pujol lives in New York City and approached the Spencer about doing a performance work, in part, as a result of other projects he had created in Kansas and the Midwest. "The point is to gaze and gaze again at the collection, as if I were in a loop." This is one of several ways that Pujol envisioned the goals of the project. The artist progressed through several proposals before arriving at the full ideas for *Visitation*.

Each concept built on the previous one as he considered the Spencer Museum and its placement in Kansas. In a later proposal, called "Mouth-to-Mouth: A Museum's Body; An Artist's Breath," Pujol wrote: "I wanted to study, draw, and redraw a historical landscape painting from the collection, creating hundreds of drawings in the durational process. I wanted to examine a vanishing regional landscape, in terms of memory, myth, cultural identity, loss, and mediation/translation." The artist further specified:

> … the Spencer Museum has a body in transition, in flux, in the process of being redefined, like a coming reincarnation. As part of this, it is trying to increasingly welcome the physical presence of living artists. But living artists make boundless gestures, they do not hang nor stand still, they flow like mighty rivers….

13 This dynamic might be seen as prefiguring the literal opening up of the architecture achieved by the 2016 Pei Cobb Fried renovation of the Spencer: large chunks of the original 1977 limestone exterior walls were replaced with expansive windows, now allowing an actual dialogue between inside and out.

Fig. 3
Former KU student Miyako Wakita enjoys the audio tour for *Stop Look Listen*, stopping at Mimi Smith's *Steel Wool Peignoir*.
©Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Robert Hickerson].

Fig. 4
Spencer Museum security guards greeting Ernesto Pujol at the start of *Visitation*.
©Ernesto Pujol; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Ryan Waggoner].

> Therefore, honoring the past of the Spencer Museum while looking at its future, a future that seeks to encourage a constant open flow, I would like to make a physically light but metaphorically meaningful gesture about the evolving integration of living artists into the metabolism of the museum's present-to-future body.[14]

This description relates closely to the ultimate form that the project took and provides insights into ways in which the Spencer Museum engages with living artists. Pujol's perceptions of the "boundless gestures" that artists make and the "flood" that this sometimes entails as part of artistic expression might correspond to what Pujol calls "the evolving integration of living artists into the metabolism of the museum's present-to-future body."

Pujol staged *Visitation* at the Spencer on March 15, 2011, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. The performance began with the artist alone inside the museum's entrance, already present before the museum opened, and lit up like a sculpture. He wanted people to find him the way they find a sculpture, in a slightly theatrical way, about to be unveiled and come to life.[15] His first act was to shed his outer robe, and then to meet a human "wall"—the seven security guards on the Spencer Museum staff at that time (Figure 4). These seven guards were made visible as a community, as they are not usually placed or seen as a group in one place—and then they gave the artist the implied or metaphoric key to their territory. This part of the performance addressed museum culture's practice of protecting art and prescribing the hands-off gaze as the very purpose and means of the conventional museum visit. In a museum, people gaze at objects, an experience overseen by the presence of guards, by "do not touch" signs, by the circulation routes that are available or designed for movement through the space. Pujol's activity acknowledged and gave form to this implicit role that the security staff perform every day. He had met with them beforehand and sent memos to them, so that they would know exactly what to expect from him and there would be "no surprises, no interruptions, no hesitation."[16]

As he moved from the Museum's third floor to the fourth floor, via the public elevator, he engaged with the security staff again, at each gallery entrance, to silently recognize the role that they play in a visitor's experience, and to acknowledge the permission that they gave him to address each space and each object. The involvement of the guards made the project live and breathe—not as an event per se, but in bringing awareness to each of these often-ignored aspects of a visitor's experience in a museum. This served to diminish the sense of the museum in its role as a kind of library of collected things, and instead elevated it as a vibrant space created from top to bottom by humans, every day, and over time. Pujol's remarkable ability to do this stems in part from his stated "methodology of vulnerability" as well as from his debt to feminist art and theory.[17]

Once he had paid homage to the guards, the artist began his silent journey through each gallery, one after another, addressing every object on display in the geo-temporal, chronological, art historical sequence that the works appeared on the walls (Figures 5 and 6).

Walking in meditative stillness and silence, Pujol's approach gives visibility to (upends?) the sense of ("sacred"?) ritual that several thinkers have identified as a mainstay of museum culture. Carol Duncan, for instance, has argued that the art museum is a site of rit-

14 PUJOL Ernesto, *Mouth to Mouth: A Museum's Body; An Artist's Breath*, proposal submitted to the Spencer Museum of Art, August 1, 2010, p. 1.
15 PUJOL Ernesto, email to the author, February 16, 2011.
16 *Ibid*.
17 See PUJOL Ernesto, *Sited Body, Public Visions: Silence, Stillness, and Walking as Performance Practice*, New York: McNally Jackson, 2012. See also PUJOL Ernesto, interview with GOODEVE, Thyrza Nichols, « Vulnerability as Critical Self-Knowledge », *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics, and Culture* (October 3, 2013).

ual, that "a museum's central meanings, its meanings *as a museum*, are structured through its ritual."[18]

Duncan states further that "In art museums, it is the visitors who enact the ritual"—and goes beyond that to argue that this is the case even when visitors watch "performance artists" at work.[19] In Pujol's *Visitation*, he is neither a visitor, nor a staff member, but instead is one who addresses the institution's, and the visitor's, complicitness with the ritual by enacting, and disrupting, that very ritual. His stance of endurance and walking meditation serve as counterpoint to the dominant discourse of power and ritual. Even the performance name, *Visitation*, becomes part of this consideration, as the meaning of the word connotes both a ritual visit and its undoing or a disaster regarded as divine punishment.

For the drawings that Pujol made, he had carefully selected a group of pens that he believed would provide the desired feeling of drawing. For the paper to be used for each drawn gesture, the artist had asked Spencer Museum staff to engage in a process of setting aside their recycled correspondence or other pieces of paper that were part of the Museum's work day, sheets that contained non-sensitive information or internal memos. Pujol wanted these recycled memos to then become his drawing surface, on the clean or blank or back side, as a way of turning the museum and institutional practices inside out. This recycled correspondence was put to another use, forming the background or surface for an original work of art based on art objects in the same Museum from which the sheets of paper came. Museum memos thus morphed into being part of a work of art.

Stacks of these recycled memo sheets were placed neatly in each gallery prior to the artist's performance, so that the artist only had to carry his pens (in a pouch around his neck to keep his hands free). Pujol moved, barefoot, from gallery to gallery conducting a meditative "drawathon" as he called it, as students and the public followed along. "Each image/object in the collection will provoke a reaction that is ultimately documented on paper, either with a simple trace or a more complicated tracing."[20] For some works Pujol did more than one drawing, and a few times he went back and added to an already finished drawing, or made a second one.

The pilgrimage through the Museum included all visitors, and embraced every corner, object, and curator in the Museum—and every staff member who provided recycled memo paper to the process or attended the performance. The audience ebbed and flowed as the day continued, in silent observation, or instead in swells of conversation; at some points there were entire university classes present in the galleries. Audience members were permitted to handle the drawings left on the floor. Some visitors sketched drawings of their own, inspired by the artist's journey and eager to utilize the creative space that Pujol stimulated. But the artist remained silent and entirely focused on gazing, walking, and drawing. Pujol envisioned the performance to be "a huge copy of the museum, like a shadow reflection, a humbler miniature, a profound act of looking and not missing." Like *Stop Look Listen*, *Visitation* involved reproducing work in the Museum collection. But unlike the very selective focus of that earlier work, this one was encyclopedic, "performing a cataloguing of the museum in this moment; performance as an act of cataloguing."[21] Pujol did not omit any object in his drawing process, and the sense of including each work on display was critical to his method. Being inclusive and encyclopedic aided his subtle interrogation of the museum as display space.

Pujol's method necessitated thorough planning, down to the minute, and of every detail, so that there would be no surprises on the per-

18 DUNCAN Carol, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 2.
19 *Ibid*, p. 12; n. 13, p. 137
20 PUJOL Ernesto, email to the author, November 2, 2010.
21 PUJOL Ernesto, email to the author, October 30, 2010.

formance date. This seems to also dovetail with the "methodology of vulnerability" that he cultivates. He arrived at the final form that his project would take as he matched his vision of what the Spencer Museum is to the artistic process that seemed most closely suited to how he could engage with the Spencer and its visitors. As with *Stop Look Listen*, Pujol's *Visitation* did not necessitate a separate exhibition but instead interacted with the displayed collection. It did require an event—an event that brought visitors back to themselves and to the Museum's collection, allowing those present to slow down and look in new ways, to ponder the power of endurance, and to experience the unexpected merging of art with a walking meditation. For *Visitation*, Pujol conceptualized the representation of our human gaze and became, in deed, the embodiment of that gaze. If you meditate on an art collection, it takes on new meanings—meanings that defy commercialism and commodification, and instead shift the locus of attention to each person's subjective experience. This enabled a deeper understanding of what a museum is, for all involved.

Part of the rigor of Pujol's work is its engagement with time, in a direct and intentional way. Pujol trained and lived as a Trappist monk for five years, and a sense of the meditative permeates all that he does and how he interacts with the world, including museums. To *Visitation*, Pujol brought a monk's approach to time. He also brought a transcending of time and deep adherence to the rhythm of time or its both antidote and essence—meditation—to the Spencer Museum's collection and the audiences that give it meaning (Figure 7). This allowed audience members to step into a fresh imagination of time and how it relates to art and museums. To reexamine an entire museum collection in one day shifts the institution to the present—erasing assumptions and wiping clean one's mental slate, truly creating a *carte blanche*.

As the displayed collection and its sequence determined the route of Pujol's walking and drawing, one might also find in his performance a subtle exposure of the ways that the visual organization of public museums function to produce modern subjectivity and our collective "sense of control and mastery over [our] place in history," as Donald Preziosi has argued and Fiona Candlin has also discussed.[22] Pujol created a space for public and private consideration of the structure and metaphors of display. He engaged in a silent institutional intervention, gentle and laborious, through the body of the artist, for an entire uninterrupted day—ending in a humble exit after the Museum was filled with paper. The drawings he made were collected in their sequence the following morning, before the Spencer opened, and they remain as an archive of the project with future use to be determined.

An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton/Cynthia Schira

In 2009, the Spencer Museum invited artists Ann Hamilton and Cynthia Schira to create large-scale, site-responsive work as a two-person exhibition. The artists had met in the late 1970s, when Hamilton transferred as an undergraduate student to study weaving with Schira at the University of Kansas. Providing a homecoming of sorts for both artists, the commission and exhibition not only allowed them to create all new work, but it also gave them the opportunity to revisit and honor their former relationship as student and teacher. The Spencer commissioned the two artists not only because of the importance of their work and its international scale but also on the basis of long-standing student interest in their work on

22 CANDLIN Fiona. *Art, museums and touch*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 61, also in reference to PREZIOSI Donald, « Brain of the Earth's Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity», *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, (DURO Paul Ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 96-110.

Fig. 5
Ernesto Pujol, *Visitation*.
©Ernesto Pujol; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Jessica Bettoni].

Fig. 6
Pujol drawing in the Spencer Museum galleries with museum visitors observing during *Visitation*.
©Ernesto Pujol; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Jessica Bettoni].

Fig. 7
Pujol in the Spencer Museum's Central Court, at the conclusion of *Visitation*.
©Ernesto Pujol; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Jessica Bettoni].

Fig. 8
Ann Hamilton (left) and Cynthia Schira (right) working with *presepio* figures, Spencer Museum, April 2011.
©Ann Hamilton and Cynthia Schira; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Robert Hickerson].

campus, as well as the history and strength of the KU textiles program—in which they had first met.

In returning to the University of Kansas to create an exhibition together, Schira and Hamilton explored their mutual interest in cloth and the ways museums organize and maintain material legacies as they investigated the Spencer's collection (Figure 8). Each artist-contemplated the Museum's legacy of collecting, exhibiting, and preserving objects, with a focus on the handmade and its relation to the digital world. This level of reflection on both broad-based and institution-specific museum practices resulted from, and was made possible by, in-depth access to virtually all museum processes over a prolonged period of time. The artists participated in many activities as part of their (and our) process, including close work with the curator (me), interactions with museum staff in virtually all departments, involvement in our fund-raising efforts, and engaging with several groups and classes of college students. Pedagogy was subtle and poetic but inherent in their endeavor—which also contributed to the ways that the artists aided the Museum's efforts to re-establish itself as a discursive forum. [23]

Studying the collections online during the periods when they were working from their respective studios, the two artists spent an extended amount of time exploring museum storage on their multiple visits to campus. They opened drawers, boxes, and cabinets. In the process, the artists recognized how select objects might become source material for their own new works to be made expressly for their two-person exhibition. Both artists especially admired the Museum's collection of doll-sized, eighteenth-century *presepio* (or nativity) figures. [24] Made of finely detailed terra cotta and painted wood, these free-standing sculptures are clothed in garments perfectly tailored to their small size. Schira was particularly drawn to the miniature patterns of the fabrics from which their costumes were sewn, while Hamilton was drawn to the expressiveness of their gestures.

Both artists employed multiple methods and processes as they worked from the Spencer's and other campus collections—and the choice to work from these collections was entirely their own. In exploring how various technologies affect and interpret what we see, Hamilton experimented with several different digital imaging tools for representing the *prespio* figures, while Schira magnified details of the figures and other collection objects by using the Spencer's online collection database, as well as other KU digital image repositories, through the electronic platform Luna Insight. Having stumbled upon an older flatbed scanner in a museum office, Hamilton discovered she could create images of the *presepio* figures that amplified their gestures, transformed by how the scanner "sees" (Figure 9). The scanner rendered in focus only the parts of each figure in contact with its glass scanning surface, while noticeably blurring the parts that did not touch, and it also produced a pinkish tone (for reasons still unknown). Working from pre-existing digital images, Schira abstracted object details from the *presepio* figures but also from more than thirty works as varied as quilts, ceramics, hand-written letters, maps, shoes buckles, paintings, collages, and weavings—and then juxtaposed and combined them into large weavings and other textiles, using complex digital and weaving methods.

Each artist transformed these digital raw materials derived from the Spencer's collection into other forms. Schira took the smallest

23 Their creative and participatory strategies might be seen in the context of several nuanced studies of artists' projects in museums, especially Claire Robins's *Curious Lessons in the Museum: The Pedagogic Potential of Artists' Interventions*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, and *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, (POLLOCK Griselda, ZEMANS Joyce, Eds.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

24 *Presepio* are traditional to Christmas celebrations, originating from live theatrical reenactments of the birth of Jesus Christ that date back to the seventh century in Rome. Later, in the 13th century, *presepio* figures were used to instruct the young, a custom popularized by St. Francis of Assisi, whose father, Ann Hamilton learned, was a cloth merchant.

motifs—a button or a handwritten letter—and digitally reworked them to create the patterns of her large-scale woven artworks—Jacquard weavings produced on a computerized loom at the Oriole Mill in Hendersonville, North Carolina. In the exhibition, she visualized her "Making" process for visitors in a section of the gallery (Figure 10). Hamilton took the high-density scans of *presepio* figures, already transformed by the scanner's limited depth of field, and printed them as larger-than-life, rendering the miniature gigantic (Figure 9).

For what evolved over nearly four years to become *An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton | Cynthia Schira*, each artist produced an installation that filled a gallery: Hamilton created *figura* and Schira, *Etymon*.[25] Schira's installation of monumental, original, ceiling-hung, black-and- white textiles (Figure 10) was organized to consider poetically the interrelatedness of an artist's process and museum practices: "Making," "Showing," and "Saving." Her forest of textiles included sheer, woven, and mesh fabrics, framed by two Damask, Jacquard weavings each measuring more than 10×30 feet. One of these large-scale weavings, *Etymon*, featured symbols and abstracted forms (visible in the left third of Figure 11), while the other enormous *Word Cloth* inventively catalogued multiple ways that textiles can be described. Schira also brought out (and fabricated) a range of object storage elements to make visible the ways that museums store/hide objects, revealing the very structure of preservation and care.[26]

Bringing stored objects and entire storage structures out into the exhibition display as part of her investigation of museum processes, Schira described her gallery in a wall panel:

> The center room, the only space that might be viewed as a single artistic presentation, illustrates the public role of museums as places for exhibitions. Called SHOWING, this room insists upon a physical interplay between the viewer and the work.
>
> … I have always been interested in systems of notation and the ways in which an original sequence can be deconstructed. Bits of the notation remain visible, but are severed from their original meaning, creating a new language possessing a wholly unfamiliar syntax.[27]

Schira's whole installation, especially *Word Cloth*, confirmed on a grand scale the relation between text and textile, and argued for the active participation of the viewer in reading an artwork.

For her installation, Hamilton lined the walls of the Museum's two-story Central Court with an irregular grid of prints/printed textiles or cloth prints depicting lone *presepio* figures that had been greatly enlarged and printed on a surface of thin Japanese Gampi paper bonded to fine cheesecloth. Rising all the way to the ceiling, the work revealed and transformed the architecture. Some figures were shown from the back, or only in parts, fragmented onto multiple sheets of paper to compose a whole. Removed from what was likely once their nativity ensemble setting, the original sacred

25 The commission and resulting exhibition were supported by two consecutive *Art Works* grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, with additional support from Emprise Financial Corporation, Linda Bailey, Dave & Gunda Hiebert, the Kress Foundation Department of Art History, the KU Department of Visual Art, and the Loomis family. The exhibition was on display in all three galleries on the Spencer's main floor from March 2 through August 11, 2013.

26 This installation was Schira's first fully three-dimensional textile environment, and the inclusion of storage elements and objects that had been stored enhanced the physical and conceptual space. For Hamilton, the idea of scanning objects in a collection resonated with other projects. See, for example, Hamilton's subsequent project *the common S E N S E*, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington, October 2014-April 2015.

27 SCHIRA Cynthia, « Cynthia Schira on *Etymon*», *An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton & Cynthia Schira*, (EARLE Susan, Ed.), Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, 2013, p. 157.

Fig. 9
Ann Hamilton installing *figura* as part of *An Errant Line*.
©Ann Hamilton; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Ryan Waggoner].

Fig. 10
Cynthia Schira, *Etymon* installation, part of *An Errant Line*.
©Cynthia Schira; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Ryan Waggoner].

Fig. 11
View from Schira's *Etymon* into Hamilton's *figura*, with the Spencer Museum's Spanish platersque-style *reja* (choir screen) installed in the opening between the two galleries.
©Cynthia Schira and Ann Hamilton; image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Ryan Waggoner]. [Photographer: Ryan Waggoner].

narrative receded, leaving only their gestures. Installed only with tiny magnets at their top corners, the prints hung from the walls, fluttering slightly in response to the air currents of the ventilation system and of visitors' movements (Figures 9 and 12). The oversized figures seemed almost alive, animated in their textured clothing and the overall pinkish tonality that enveloped them, moving gently and gesturing toward viewers. At the same time, they seemed like specters, pulled from the shrouding of history, of another time, and from the eerie, shadowed hue produced by the scanner.

Creating a rich and surprising tapestry through multiple galleries that employed both images of and objects from the Spencer's collections, the artists curated a third space, next to the Central Court, to display nearly one hundred collection objects that had inspired them, arrayed in cases in a kind of taxonomy.[28] For this display, the artists replicated the inert methods of object storing that they had observed in their material-gathering process, both revealing and contrasting this with their own installations. This gallery also included one prior work by each artist that featured an errant red thread—another manifestation of the errant line of the exhibition's title.[29]

Although Hamilton's work contained many colors and Schira's restricted the palette to black, white, or gray, the installations were linked to one another, and to the legacy of cloth production, as they explored and exploited, historically and metaphorically, the reciprocal relationship between weaving and today's ubiquitous digital encoding of nearly everything.

The results of their nearly four-year process reflected their attention to the relation of the handmade and the immediately tangible to a world increasingly virtual and distanced from our touch by the digital code of zeroes and ones—and by the prevalence of electronic images of artworks and the growing tendency to encounter an image on a screen rather than in person.

Another element of the artists' installations was the Spencer's historic Bechstein grand piano (played by Franz Liszt during his last tour of England in 1886), which welcomed a series of lessons between (volunteer) teacher and student pairs during the six-month run of the exhibition. Hamilton shrouded the piano with a bronzed pink satin similar to the hue produced by the scanner, concealing an object that was normally on view in the galleries. When students performed on the piano, they were hidden inside the curtain (Figure 12). The periodic music emanating from the piano seemed to serenade and accompany the figures arrayed salon-style up the walls and the labyrinth of weavings hung from the ceiling in the adjacent gallery. "Honoring the origins of the project in the student/teacher relationship, lessons on the Bechstein piano took place, continuing in music the conversation of hand and touch that grounds our project together," Hamilton stated.[30]

An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton/Cynthia Schira resulted from far-reaching access to all the Spencer's stored collections in two buildings. Hamilton and Schira's methodology was wide-ranging, including extensive reading and the incorporation of literary texts and poets' writings about cloth in various ways. They based their process on collaboration and adaptation to collection interests and different ways they might use the gallery spaces as ideas unfolded. The artists' preparation process was an important part of the full-scale access approach (Figure 8).Examining hundreds of objects up close, the artists gravitated toward works that featured cloth, which seemed to

28 For a listing and description of all the works in the exhibition, see *An Errant Line*, (EARLE Susan, Ed.), p. 153-154.

29 The exhibition title was inspired by a weaving technique using a supplementary weft, which has long been a unique element in Schira's practice and one that she passed, significantly, to Hamilton. In a cloth woven with two (instead of one) horizontal threads, the second can float freely. The artists called their path through the Spencer's collection "an errant line."

30 HAMILTON Ann, « Ann Hamilton on *figura* », *An Errant Line*, (EARLE Susan Ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 156.

drive a particularly deep investigation of the museum's holdings. As with Ernesto Pujol, there was also a sense of becoming a blank slate, on both spiritual and artistic levels. For the institution, this sustained creative process demanded multiple ways of providing access to the collection (including handling and scanning sculptures behind-the-scenes) that was virtually unprecedented for this museum, even including other commissions.[31] In discussing her preparation for a different work (*myein*, in Venice in 1999), Hamilton stated: "I make lists of words that describe the physical circumstances. I look for their metaphoric possibilities. I wait. That is the practice—to be blank and to listen—and to wait."[32]

As a result of extensive involvement and access and the contribution of my time, and that of my museum colleagues and students, the exhibition was able to convey the artists' mutual involvement with cloth and their artistic contemplation of human and institutional practices that both reveal and conceal. The long project timeline involving the artists, museum staff, and students evolved to accommodate the artists' other projects and allow the time needed for this level of investigation. Moreover, the artists' deep attention to the collection yielded new research about it, for both the artists and for Spencer staff; the artists' vision made possible the power of historical objects to speak to us today. The installations also transformed the architecture on multiple levels, pushing the spaces to capacities not seen before and redefining relationships of art, space, and audience that now help re-conceptualize these spaces following the Spencer's recent renovation.The project set a high standard for the creation and exhibition of site-responsive artwork, as it engaged with students, local artists, the entire museum staff, and many university classes in multiple ways that often generated additional art forms: poetry, dance, textiles and other works of art, and musical compositions. *An Errant Line* most substantially altered the museum's research methods, as the museum responded to the artists' systems, and in turn interrogated limitations of knowledge, especially collection contact, on many levels.

The project was designed to explore the two artists' former relationship as student and teacher by incorporating art students directly into it. Several courses taught in conjunction with the project offered students connection with the artists, and the entire campus became a frame for the commission. Students assisted with background research, and also created their own new work inspired by Hamilton and Schira, making the whole of the project a reciprocal form of teaching.[33]

The dynamic compositions that Hamilton and Schira realized combined original digital imaging, weaving, printmaking, and installation with objects from the Spencer's permanent collection as historical objects were incorporated—with no damage to their own integrity—into innovative new works. The objects were revealed and animated through touch, challenging traditions of museum display and the study of art history. An essential part of the artists' project, touch has a layered and complex history in the context of museums; in earlier centuries, only curators and connoisseurs could touch collection

31 My student intern and I oversaw many hours of scanning, both with Hamilton present and without, as we worked with small teams of textile students mentored by artist and art professor Mary Anne Jordan to aid in the process. Prior to this labor, we endeavored to sift and sort aspects of the collection to share as lists with images with both Hamilton and Schira as they researched their way through the museum's holdings.

32 HAMILTON Ann, « Ann Hamilton with Mary Jane Jacob», *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, (BASS, Jacquelynn, JACOB Mary Jane, Eds.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p. 180.

33 The artists originally hoped for additional interactive elements to be included, such as live readings from a variety of sources on the subject of cloth, to take place in the galleries. They also wanted to insert special pages into the student newspaper that would be constituted with images of the artists' work—completely displacing or replacing the regular newspaper content.

objects—a sign of their expertise and also class status. But whereas in the 18th century, touching art museum objects indicated elitism and expertise, by the early 20th century, touch was considered a threat on many levels. Today, however, the idea of touch in museums is being re-invented and integrated where possible into museum practice, as its history is traced by authors like Fiona Candlin and others, and museums (including the Spencer) create "touch tours" for seeing-impaired visitors. But for Hamilton and Schira, touch was an essential and animating element—and it was crucial to the works of art they produced. Human touch and digital manipulation liberated these collection objects into a renewed life.

Cloth, springing from touch and movement, was another animating factor in *An Errant Line,* pushing the project into new realms due to the tactile, and human, aspect of cloth and clothing. Cloth allowed the artists to reveal the collection. Objects based in cloth proliferated in abundance; as Ann Hamilton stated, the museum's founder Sallie Casey Thayer had given "permission to use the collection in Thayer's spirit of accumulation." Steeped in the university's history and its acquisition of historical objects, Hamilton and Schira recognized the accumulative approach of the museum's 1917 founder. There is also connection to the gendering of touch and gendered aspects of its history, including the embrace of the tactile as part of a feminist methodology.[34] Touch, often written out of the history of art, here is welcome: the touch of scanning collection objects—generally forbidden or unheard of—and the artists' methods, the focus on cloth, which is inherently tactile. Hamilton and Schira's *carte-blanche* went deeper in comparison to the two other projects, as it demanded touching so many Spencer Museum objects! Only touch made the exhibition possible.

Conclusion

The systems of sequence and opticality, with no touch allowed, that dominated museum conceptions are subverted by Pujol, Hamilton, and Schira in these projects; although it is primarily the artists who are allowed this privilege. Multiple other senses are brought in. Objects are rearranged, and what is stored is brought to light and made visible. Similarly, their use of touch created movement, too. Hamilton and Schira moved objects to make their work (scanning them for enlargement, bringing entire shelving units out from storage), and then installed the works they created in the galleries so that they were not static and instead slightly moved, Hamilton's on the walls, and Schira's free-hanging from the ceiling. Where Pujol moved through the galleries, and Velasco and Davidson-Hues fashioned a sign-system that pointed to objects and allowed expanded experiences, getting visitors to move through space, Hamilton and Schira instilled movement through the actual objects that they created from their full-scale access to the collections. All three projects, in different ways, moved objects from the past into the present, and questioned display strategies and concepts in the process.

Their projets are an integral part of how the Spencer Museum embraces change and self-critique, which moves beyond the museum, into the parking lot and also the adjacent grove of trees, and on campus. Bringing in artists pushes the Spencer to question, and to utilize, what feminist art historian Griselda Pollock has called and credited to the profound work of Canadian educator Judith Mastai, "the emancipatory thrust of art as a living and unashamedly intellectual practice."[35]

34 See, for example, CANDLIN Fiona, *op.cit*, especially chapter 2. My own research into the feminist methodologies of *An Errant Line* needs additional theorizing and is ongoing.

35 *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, 2007, *op, cit*, p. 21.

Fig. 12
Opening reception, *An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton / Cynthia Schira*, with pianist Steven Spooner and student Soojin Kim playing the curtained Bechstein piano, March 2, 2013.
Image courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas [Photographer: Ryan Waggoner].

Résumé

Cet article aborde trois projets récents réalisés par des artistes à la demande du Spencer Museum of Art de l'Université du Kansas à Lawrence, et pour lesquels on a eu recours à diverses méthodes d'intervention, à la carte blanche comme formule d'accès aux collections ainsi qu'à des échanges avec le personnel et les publics du musée. Ces trois projets sont *Stop Look Listen: An Installation by Janet Davidson-Hues and Maria Velasco* (2007-2008) ; *Visitation* de Ernesto Pujol (2011) ; et *An Errant Line: Ann Hamilton|Cynthia Schira* (2013) (avec les installations *figura* de Hamilton et *Etymon* de Schira). La sélection des artistes a tenu compte de l'ensemble de leur travail et des idées précises que chacun concrétiserait sur les lieux – un musée universitaire des beaux-arts doté d'un programme d'exposition actif et d'une collection de quelque 45 000 objets. Chaque projet avait son calendrier, son approche, sa forme et sa méthodologie propres, mais tous répondaient aux collections du musée en intégrant œuvres nouvelles et pièces historiques, qu'elles soient exposées ou entreposées.

Parmi les questions abordées ici : comment s'y est-on pris, dans ces trois projets, pour incorporer les collections du musée et offrir un accès « carte blanche » à ces cinq artistes (et aux publics du musée) tout en améliorant le fonctionnement du musée et son rayonnement sur le campus ? Quelles sont certaines des forces de la carte blanche en ce qu'elle s'applique à ces projets ? En quoi un tel accès a-t-il permis aux artistes de réaliser leurs projets particuliers et de produire de nouvelles œuvres tout en interpellant le public de manière aussi efficace ?

Cet article examine l'évolution de chacun des projets, son utilisation des collections ainsi que la participation des collaborateurs, du personnel et des visiteurs. Les méthodes choisies pour ce faire ont consisté notamment à comparer les projets et à examiner les objectifs des artistes ainsi que leurs points de vue recueillis lors de rencontres. Chacune des trois projets a, à sa façon, déplacé des objets, au sens littéral comme au figuré, du passé jusqu'au présent, en interrogeant [au passage] les stratégies et les concepts de présentation choisis. L'accès aux collections fourni aux artistes a permis autant aux visiteurs qu'aux personnes œuvrant en coulisses de regarder ces objets sous un angle nouveau. Par leurs méthodes, les artistes ont su ranimer ces formes et en renouveler l'apparence.

Chaque projet traite d'aspects importants de la culture muséale – le dévoilement et la dissimulation, entre autres, tant sur le plan humain que sur les plans muséologique et institutionnel. Ces projets ont équilibré événements et recherches (artistiques), modifié les interactions avec les collections et approfondi les dialogues et les connaissances, contribuant ainsi à mieux intégrer le musée au sein de la collectivité régionale et du campus. En nous faisant voir les objets à travers les yeux des artistes et leurs recherches, ils nous ont amenés à nous interroger sur qui possède le musée.