

## EXSCRIBED!

### – The Making of a Survey Exhibition

By inscribing significations, we exscribe the presence of what withdraws from all significations. – Jean-Luc Nancy

Art is only as good as it is presented. – Anonymous

## THE ISSUES

The idea for this project grew out of the Bay Area Now's statement that it surveys the state of the arts in the Bay Area; a lofty goal given the diversity of the art practices in this region. As with any survey show of this nature, the selection process itself is inherently of major significance since it tends to validate the artists/art being presented. Invariably, due to considerations of logistics and of formal and thematic coherence for the exhibition itself and curatorial bias etc. many good artists have to be left out. In a time where the exhibition of art has all but become an art practice in its own right, I personally feel this is a rich territory in which to explore the role of curatorial decisions and exhibition models on the presentation of art, to reflect on the institution strengthening through self-critique, and to experiment with the model of exhibition through the blending of social-sculptural artistic practice with hierarchical exhibition model.

The proposed project centers around my institutional critique/intervention practice, and will be a continuation of my past projects such as the *"Four on One: Four curators curate Stephanie Syjuco"*, and my intervention project at the "9<sup>th</sup> Baltic Triennial – *The Black Market.*" I am interested in creating a situation which explores the complex issues and processes involved in the organization of a major survey exhibition such as the BAN5. Thus, I will treat the exhibition in its entirety as both the subject matter and the source material for a situational piece. It will help reveal issues and ask questions such as:

- the value of a major survey show
- the thought process and decision making process in organizing such a show
- the inherently contrary aims of best representing the artistic innovations of the Bay Area art scene versus putting together an exhibition that is cohesive in its own formal and thematic considerations

- the effect of curatorial decisions on (re)presenting the art works in such a context; how it augments or potentially alters the reading of the original art works
- the effect of such a large survey in facilitating the creation of new art works that would otherwise have been impossible
- the potential of exhibition models to truly break out of the walls of an art institution
- the role of institutional self-critique

## THE PROPOSAL

This proposal takes as its point of departure the fact that YBCA will be inviting about 150 artists to submit proposals for the BAN5 exhibition, but from among them, only about thirty will be selected to participate. It appears to me that this process of invitation and selection/rejection is pregnant with all the touchy issues of how an institutionally curated exhibition affects the presentation of artists and art works. My approach will be to treat the entire pool of invited artists and the process of selection itself as an entity; to conjure up an image for the viewers through which they can peek into contemporary art presentation practices and to come to their own conclusions about the values and issues of such an important effort.

There will be two components to my proposal.

### Description of the visual/aesthetic aspects of the piece:

Upon entrance to the galleries, one sees sheets of white paper (of about 2'x3') lined up perfectly in a row about 1' below the ceiling, and hung 1/2" away from the wall. The papers are semi-reflective, in contrast to the matte finish of the surrounding white wall. Once in a while, a passing draft will wave some of the sheets slightly, bringing attention to their existence. Almost indiscernible excisions on these papers can be felt but will be hard to see. Looked at from below, they recall a stoic array of coats of arms or tombstones, producing a somber effect of serenity or uncanniness, as if the viewer were confronted by silenced voices, or quiet stares.

These same papers will also appear on walls of other spaces in the YBCA. On shorter walls, the excisions in the papers are more noticeable, and the names of artists become discernible. Other information about this piece is provided on the wall label for the piece:

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Names of the invited artists who didn't make it to the final BAN5 are cut out from the white papers as well as painted on the wall behind the cut out spaces with glow-in-the-dark paint.

Each paper is 2'x3', contains one name. 120(?) in total throughout the exhibition space.

The sudden recognition that those not-quite-visible names appear in glow-in-the-dark paint behind the papers leaves a ghostly image in people's minds. It's not hard to imagine, however, that as night falls and the lights go off, these names start to show their feeble existence and ever so slowly increase the intensity of their stare as the surroundings get darker. Yet the glowing has no audience since people will have left. In the emptiness of the dark, the stares start to have conversations among themselves and with the exhibition down below, just as in pitch darkness, flocks of fireflies blink in unison.

Some of these papers will be hung on the walls visible from outside (e.g., in the lobby facing the garden, or in that glass box facing Mission). They will absorb a plentitude of light during the day and give out their light intensely at night, cluing in the passers-by to the existence of these names.

I will also make announcement cards with images of these names glowing in the dark and distribute them on site.

The second component of the proposal:

If the "EXSCRIBED" can be thought of as the negative space of the composition, then this part serves to tie it together with the rest of the show, to complete the picture of the making of BAN5, and to drive home the concept of "exscription". It includes a video and other supporting materials. The video documents an interview I'll be conducting with you about the making of BAN5. What are some of the main considerations for BAN5? What's the premise of such a survey show? How do you see your role as curators in such a show? Do you see it as a conflict of interests to have a survey exhibition that best exemplifies the different artistic innovations of Bay Area while curating a show that is in itself formally consistent and thematically cohesive? How do you decide who to invite to submit proposals? What's your process of deciding which work to include and which to leave out?

The interviews will focus on the issues described above, providing an anecdotal and official vantage point to the process that leads to the exhibition on view. The documentary format of the video is intentional. Its factuality provides a certain stark authenticity. This, in combination with the quiet but insistent presence of the excised names, makes the process of BAN5 more transparent, lending credibility to the institutional self-critique this project engenders and to the overall curatorial effort.

Optional third component of the proposal:

I am also interested in organizing separate shows with the rejected proposals, to further address the complex issues of how curatorial decisions affect the presentation of art. The main thoughts in this area proceed from the understanding that there are some good works that have to be left out due to considerations for the exhibition itself. These could include 'difficult' works such as performances, large pieces that demand big spaces, site-specific work that cannot be meaningfully 'customized' for the YBCA, or pieces that don't work for the overall consistency of the BAN5. Yet they all contribute to the larger meaning that the BAN5 survey attempts to convey. This component of my proposed project attempts to extend the exhibition model to be more inclusive. This is possible by virtue of the different premises my project will be working with. It purports to break out of the limiting parameters of the institution and to bring the viewers to where art is.

The space allotted to this project will serve as a hub of all these activities and functions as a point of dispersal. I will also be making a website to help index and document these satellite events. A computer screen will display these as a clickable map. One-time performances and similar events could be held at the space. To facilitate repeated visits, the site is best in the lobby area, where entrance tickets are not required.