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Bowdoin
March 27, 2018

Constructing Drawings With Chicago-Based Artist Tony Lewis

In February, fifteen Bowdoin students helped Chicago-based artist Tony Lewis create two large site-specific wall drawings. They were conceived as part of the current exhibition, *Second Sight: The Paradox of Vision in Contemporary Art*, curated by Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow Ellen Tani.



Tony Lewis, artist, and Bowdoin students work together on a site-specific wall drawing at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art in late February.



Tony Lewis, artist, (far right) meets with students at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Students worked in two-hour shifts over a long weekend, drilling hundreds of screws into the wall and stretching graphite-dipped rubber bands around them to form the wall drawings. The first, white rubber bands dipped in white graphite powder, spells out “1459 • Stand out from the crowd.” The second drawing, made with black graphite powder is not a sentence but an abstract-looking mark: it is the word “rubber” written in the stenographic system known as Gregg Shorthand. Lewis invited students to “commit [themselves] to the physical labor of the drawing,” which

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transformed a temporary studio space in a museum gallery into a “meditation on the present moment.”

Lewis hoped that the “unruly, messy process” encouraged students to “learn from experience as opposed to learning from instruction.” Lewis’s drawing, *1459 • Stand out from the crowd*, responds to an expression from *Life’s Little Instruction Book*, a best-selling collection of inspirational statements originally published in 1991 and dedicated by the author to his son before he went to college. Reflecting on the troubling relationship between authority, conformity, and power, Lewis notes, “The book presents a myopic power in the form of conventional wisdom, in the form of general sensibility and common decency.” The book’s “muted aggression,” as he describes it, has inspired Lewis’ labor-intensive drawing process for years. Though the white graphite drawing seems to dissolve into the white wall of the museum, a violent tension between the screws and taut rubber bands emerges. The material friction of Lewis’s works reflects the tensions inherent in the forces of language, color, and subconscious structures that inform our social lives and personal histories.



Detail from the site-specific drawing, “1459 • Stand out from the crowd,” by Tony Lewis. Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



Installation views of two works by Tony Lewis: “Rubber” (to the left) and “1459 • Stand out from the crowd” (on the back wall). Both site-specific drawings are included in the exhibition “Second Sight: The Paradox of Vision in Contemporary Art” at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

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