

Proposal for Covington Interactive Art Installation/Ceremony

Artist: Alton Falcone

- The goal of this project is to create a kind of artist installation that achieves the following objectives:
- Appeals to the entire community, crossing race, class, education, gender and other boundaries
- Embodies an elegant, meaningful aesthetic experience that is respectable to the art community
- Requires minimal costs in order to be realizable, preventing economic obstacles
- Involves the community on various levels (such as government, religious leaders, art dealers, etc.) in order for it to be realized and be successful.
- Has a content that is generated by the attendees of the event so that it is not a fixed object that is viewed/absorbed
- Includes ceremonial/ritualistic aspects so as to have special performative moments to film or highlight

1) Project Summary: This project has two parts. The first is a three-story installation and its growth from the interaction of its users. The second part is a ceremony in which the above content is inserted into the ground in a 50-year time capsule.

Part One: This part of the project is a projection in a conceptual fashion of the principles of the spiritual journey of the poet Dante taken from the Medieval epic poem *The Divine Comedy*. For those unfamiliar with the *Divine Comedy*, Dante's narrator passes through three stages of metaphysical existence, each representative of the psychological drama of the soul. The stages in the poem are *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradisio*. Translated to a less religiously-specific terminology, they represent sorrow, struggle, and joy.

The project will utilize three floors of an old building (or possibly three rooms) and transform them into representations of the atmosphere of these three stages. Within the atmosphere created, the person entering the space will be invited to submit privately some writing, an image or an object that for them represents an embodiment of such a stage. For example, a man on the level of sorrow, the first floor, may write on a small slip of paper about the loss of his wife, and then fold it up and leave it in the space. A couple on the level of joy may put a photo of them with their newborn child.

Each space will be especially designed to accommodate the objects and writings so that they are visible to other viewers while yet retaining an aura of ambiguity, distance and sanctity. A good example of this to illustrate the use of ritual for sorrow is the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem (see photo). The Wall, considered the final remnant of the Temple of David, is a cult location of worship for Jews. They fold up messages with prayers and hopes and insert them into the wall. Many peoples of other religions attend to this as well. Such rituals abound in cultures, such as *Dios De Los Muertos* in Mexico and the site of Golgotha for Christians. The point is that a particular site is given meaning and within that site an interaction occurs between the visitors and the site itself; the visitors leave an object, such as the paper at the Wailing Wall.



The spaces will be specially transformed to evoke the given atmosphere so that visitors are inspired to interact with the space. What this entails exactly depends upon the space itself, the amount the project may intervene (e.g. a site selected for demolition may be painted without any concern for future occupants) and the flexibility of the owner. In general, I imagine that the first floor would be a mostly dark, somber space with minimal, point lighting and a wall as the point of focus. The wall would be modeled after the Wailing Wall; hence one that is craggy and brick-like with large cracks would be ideal.

The audience would then move from this experience of communicating pain to the second floor. The act of having written out or communicated conflict brings consciousness to suffering and is hence in itself liberating. There will be a first *cathartic* moment as the users walk upwards – a symbolic act – to the second floor. The second floor represents struggle – those aspects of one's life where a person is striving to improve, overcome obstacles and grow as a free spirit. This room must be an energizing room full of conflicting visual details. Here I imagine, for example, a space with diverse lighting, some lights strobing slightly, and highly textured surfaces. Spaces that remind one of post-conflict, such as rubble from a war zone that has been isolated and cleaned, would be useful. Like the first floor, users will be asked to submit their experiences, but here of course the content is different. The form will require users to pass under a bar or stick of some kind, an act of humility before their own challenges, as they move to submit their strivings to some kind of contrivance that asserts and empowers them. I am not sure yet of this form, but it should be one that feels encouraging to them.

Leaving this room results in a second cathartic moment. Having liberated themselves of their sorrows and reinforced their strivings, what remains is a reflection not on joys to come but the love that is present in their life. The attendees would somehow record such experiences, e.g. when they first fell in love etc. in a fashion that is movingly upbeat. Here I imagine a room that is bright and luminous, even all-

white, with approximately three-foot transparent nylon cord (fishing wire) hanging downwards from points from the ceiling. The audience's objects would be attached to these cords. Large fans in four corners would blow gently upon the cords, causing the objects to flutter beautifully in the air. It will add to their ethereal quality.

Since the previous two floors resulted in an expression of difficulties, the attendees at this point will feel liberated even before entering the third floor room. The experience of liberation coupled with the affirmation of the beauty and joy that is already in one's life will create a palpable sense of euphoria.

Please note that there are many levels of collaboration that may be used to realize this project. Depending upon space and costs, artists may be commissioned to submit a series of sculptures that help imbue the various levels with the appropriate atmospheres. Figures in a state of mourning, for example, may bring out a strong sense in the first floor, whereas a series of gestural studies of power may well be effective on the second floor. The top floor could use forms roughed out in wire to suggest their form without the heavy material presence. I could design these works and use other artists to assist in their realization.

Part Two: The ceremony is an essential part of this project as it will become a form of communication between the current generations and the generations that will inhabit these buildings 50 years from now. All the content that has been submitted on the three floors will be collected into three distinct containers colored black, red and white (representing the three floors respectively). These could be constructed in ceramic by a local artisan. They will be put into a special time capsule to be buried at some significant site. This time capsule will be opened 50 years from now.

It is important to stress the ceremonial aspect of this part. I envision all the civic, spiritual and religious leaders of all groups present to make speeches and send their blessings upon the capsule as it descends. It will be a special sense of closure for the interaction exhibition. It would inevitably have all the members of various press corps present.

As a final possible expense, should funds be available, we could make a large outdoor bronze sculpture to mark the place of the capsule with an appropriate inscription (i.e. "Herein rests the sorrows, struggles and joys of the people of this area recorded in community 2009 so that the peoples of 2059 would know their forebearers.")

2) Estimated Costs. As a whole, the costs are fairly low, with an increment in funds depending upon how complex and visually attractive we wish to invest in the project. Some parts may be volunteered, and certainly the building to be employed will be one that has been vacant for some time. Each floor may require about \$500 in materials; lighting may prove more challenging in old buildings also.

The key costs will be the recording/hanging aspects for the various rooms as well as the time capsule materials. We may project approximately \$1000 for all time capsule materials, including the vase

contents. However, the main cost will be in human power: the effort to staff the event, publicize it and reach out to large audiences is key to its success. I believe much of this may be done with volunteers. This leads to 3) below.

3) Projected Audience. This will appeal to all audiences as well as art lovers. It is important to motivate religious leaders of all sects (every Christian denomination as well as atheists, Jews, Muslims etc. all should be included and non excluded). This is our community and it should be represented in the exhibition and time capsule.

Also, this project cuts across all demographics. Whether someone is poor or rich, well-educated or not, everyone has suffered or felt joy. The project represents the individual human experience that is uniquely human. What is uniquely ours – our suffering, struggle and love – is also, paradoxically, that which we all share in common. That which marks our own particular human existence at the same time makes us comprehensible to our fellow humans.

4) Time Frame. I suggest keeping the interactive element open for three weeks only so that people move quickly in acting upon it.

5) Insurance and safety. The current proposed building on Pike Street offers four floors. The second floor will be walled off and possibly used as a theater stage for actors only; the public will not be able to walk there. It is the only floor that has questionable elements, such as a small opening in the middle of the floor where someone might (at best) trip; however, these dangers are negligible since the floor will be closed.

It is easy to imagine safety problems in any building; the question is, what safety risks stand out that are out of the ordinary in the proposed building and within the proposed project? All stairwells are in excellent condition. The 'catwalks' to the freight elevators are questionable but they will be blocked off by large sliding doors. The doors will be sealed shut as well. There is some lingering water damage to the floor in one small niche; we will repair that damage by placing planks over it. The electricity will not be used in the building; the exhibition will be illuminated by natural light alone.

The artwork that will be installed will be site-based and of *no value*; normally insurance for art galleries and museums may be excessive due to the risk of damaging art objects. Again, this is not an issue for the exhibition.

The only other imaginable risk is that a member of the public manages to somehow injure himself or herself while interacting with the exhibit. However, the exhibit will be designed in a minimalist fashion to prevent such risks.

I have been trained in OSHA standards during my MFA program and will hence respect all safety norms.

Conclusion

The significance of the time capsule in this project cannot be underscored enough. The capsule creates a dialogue with the current generations with those of the future. As it stands, most of the recorded media of today is the internet. However, the internet is predominantly a tool of a certain degree of wealth and age group. It is also, unfortunately, often the expression of what is lowest in the human being instead of what is more profound. That will be our legacy should we not create something apparently old-fashioned as a time capsule. Let us be recorded for what is highest and most noble in us, not that which is an expression of distraction and desire before a computer screen.