

jjhiggins  
artist **statement**

Capture. Time. Observation.

I note the position and imagine the place that will become the entry.

The forms take on significance. They become examination spaces, an affect of the machine.

I construct spaces using the mechanisms of the everyday.

I am a curator, a collector, an architect of experience.

From familiar objects and spaces, I construct for my audience new encounters--shifted perceptions, grounded in time. My research and practice interrogates social behavior, etiquette, and the psychological spaces that embody memory and experience.

My work is a hybrid. Composed of media and performance, it is multidisciplinary, utilizing forms from technology to critical theory. Framed by the context of the non-place --public spaces, homogenization, and "non-culture"-- I am most fascinated by the phenomena and constructs of consumerism, surveillance, and the blurred boundaries between public and private space. As much a scientific enquiry as an aesthetic, my work allows me to discover tools and codes that form common language, with clues linking image to text. My work functions as a bridge, a connection for audiences that have become separated by the politics of space. While technologies have advanced our ability to collect and manage information, it is evident that social behavior, interaction and the reconstructed forms of community have not grown equally. As a collective, we rarely have opportunity to make actual choices. Too often we defer to prevailing forces --external to ourselves-- allowing others to make decisions for us about the meaning and value of things we encounter. As I rework and intervene in social spaces, I challenge my audience to reexamine the language structures they might typically utilize and to construct a new awareness of identity through shared dialogue. In addition, there is often the opportunity to interact, and to play.

The engagement of the audience is critical to my work. In the architecture of the examination space, I address the ideas of transition, including the way that audience responses hinge on the hierarchies of conventional space. Dominant themes in my work include the panopticon of Michel Foucault, Georg Simmel's categorization of social interaction, Michel de Certeau's interventions of the everyday and Marc Auge's descriptive reference of the non-space.

In **[ME]dia space**, a medical examination table is placed at the center of a controlled environment, surrounded by surveillance cameras and monitors that never allow the viewer a direct view of him/herself. The audience is encouraged to interact with components of this installation. Engaging in the physicality of the space might mean readjusting the tilt of the table/chair with its blinding [hot + bright] studio floodlight mounted to the rectangular full length mirror suspended from the ceiling just far enough to contain the space above a seated 'patient's' head. The curious audience or 'patient' might also change the monitor channels to reveal another camera's view of the space, or handle an array of sterilized tools that sit in shiny metal trays near the table, or open drawers and cabinets to discover a specimen frog [for dissection], latex gloves, swabs and disinfectants, or vinyl tubing. The sound coming from below the table is also for the audience to find-- a small monitor containing the image and sound of an 'authority' with a projection larger in amplitude than in size. Moving carefully through the electrical cords—some on the floor, others dangling from above--inspecting 'confidential' paperwork and medical charts, then stopping to view a televised reconstructive surgery on a separate monitor become other ways to experience this space--all of which is seen and recorded by the cameras within the installation. The audience becomes both subject and object in this piece, the controlled and the controller. This type of spatial construct will continue to be prominent in my future research and work.

Another work in the same vein as this interactive intervention is **someone else/not me**. A surveillance camera positioned inside the pocket of a valise captures images from the external [public] space and displays them on the portable monitor sitting inside the case. The objects, out of their original contexts, interrupt the space both physically and psychologically, yet maintain a sense of play—the viewer's image projects on the screen and the site is unsecured. How seriously can this be taken? What is this? The disruption of the viewer's flow of space generates the access to more questions: Should we [the audi-

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ence] be disturbed by the unseen camera that collects these images without our permission? Or is there a larger fascination with our own image so that we do not question? Have we become too comfortable with the media?

My work continues to be performative and, most often, playful, accessible, and interactive. I want the audience to be included, not distanced. I make work that should be touched, its spaces reconfigured—a contrast to the protected spaces of institution. I provide a teaching atmosphere in and about the work—as did Fluxus artists Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, John Cage, Alan Kaprow and others—that makes the space or event significant to the viewer.

**DeVending the Machine** is series of works in which I invited the collaboration of artists interesting in challenging the ownership of space. The original project involved taking over a sandwich vending machine to transform it into a gallery/exhibition space. Individual compartment spaces are accessed by feeding money into the machine, manually opening the door separating the consumer from the product, and 'owning' that space by choosing what occupies it—exchanging a selected object or piece of work for the product. Items are added or removed by the consumer, artist, or "collector" by feeding money into the machine and repurchasing the space or its contents, all for an arbitrary cash amount determined by the vending company, who profits from this intervention through the machine. In addition to the playfulness of this intervention, the project also serves to begin dialogue on the ideas concerning the privatization of public spaces, consumerism, the culture of the machine, the institution of the gallery, and how the arts and artists are [or are not] valued in our culture. This performative intervention generates a forum for dialogue that bridges the gap between artists and curious 'gallery go-ers'.

Much of my work concerns itself with the desensitization to culture—specifically in regard to consumer culture. We no longer know who we are as individuals, much less how to respond to a larger community. Instead of defending our ideas, we simply change location. We hover within a space that we can't comprehend and instead of making choices, and we allow the collective to disintegrate. The language has been distorted and values become skewed. We are alone, yet surrounded.

I hold my audience accountable for a response. They recognize, experience, read and interpret time + image, using a familiar code of forms and tools of memory. The audience becomes my conspirator in the work. The question is this: Can an event become truth again, or is it merely fiction? The work **casual t i e s+o [miss] ions**, is about the disempowerment of authority and a reevaluation of truth and reason. As a performance, the freeing of the text from the static form of the book is liberating. The image recording captures the released pages of a social studies text, an unchallenged authority of that failed to include marginalized groups in its publication. The painful tearing of the fragile pages becomes more determined as the search continues. Where are they? There is a voice in the background, calling out those who went nameless and faceless in this text. The pages torn are removed from the container. This object is no longer of iconic status. Within the same time fragment there comes an awareness of the change of context, a new position. Does it hold the same value? And how is that value determined? The video, a document of the performance, is best viewed as a room sized projection, images crossing the spaces in which the viewer must walk. The interruption of the projection caused by the entry of the audience becomes a component of the media space. Interrupting the flow of space, the projected duration installation, **lin[e]ar**, questions time, space, and viewer perception through a struggle to define location. The perceptual space is ambiguous, yet strangely familiar. As the viewer, are we never allowed to arrive? How do we know where we are going?

In the works described above, as in all my creative research, I am driven by the need to investigate. I encourage viewers to question both position and time, while critiquing behaviors that form social and cultural etiquettes. I examine collective perceptions of authority, consumer identity, and public and private spaces, merging theory with its visual aspects. My goal is to challenge the audience to initiate new ways of thinking, perceiving and engaging with the space. I accomplish this by recreating an environment that teaches through play. From within those interactive and accessible places, I expect my audience to grow in both the awareness of themselves and others, and to consider an etiquette for space.