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Some Assembly Required

Bill Mauro JR.



For Richard Rinehart, curator and director of Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University, setting up new exhibits certainly varies from show to show. For "do it," however, the gallery's exhibit which opened for viewing Monday, the work didn't even show up completed.

"[T]his exhibition is quite unusual," said Rinehart. "Instead of getting crates of artworks delivered to the gallery and then hanging them, I got a book. The book is the 'do it' compendium of 250 artworks, all of which are really instructions for making an artwork; some of them very precise - engineering technical drawings - and some of them very loose - consisting, in one case, of a single word: 'Doodle.'"

Rinehart was a curator at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum for many years before moving to central Pennsylvania in 2011 to take on his current role at the Samek Gallery.

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"My role as curator for this exhibition was also unusual. Instead of choosing artworks to hang, I chose 25 from the 250 artwork-instructions and then invited specific members of the local community to interpret a work that I chose for them. Some declined; most were enthusiastic. Some are working alone; others in teams," he said.

Visitors to the gallery can expect to see works that "range widely in format and presentation," Rinehart said. Some pieces in the exhibit are an electric mirror that vibrates and lights up, a wall mural, photographs, and an installation that invites participation in the exhibit; something that Rinehart is calling "the Red Invitation." A grid was created on the gallery floor, each section measuring 12 inches by 12 inches. Instructions from the "do it" compendium say that the piece will not be completed until a red object has been left in each section of the grid.

"I invite everyone who visits the gallery to see this show to bring one red object and leave it in an empty square," said Rinehart, adding "of course, the object should be one that is safe to leave in a gallery for months and that will fit into a spot no larger than 12 inches by 12 inches." Because of the limited number of squares, "the chance to be an artist in this exhibition is first-come first-served," said Rinehart.

If we follow Groucho Marx's example, a man who "refuse[d] to join any club that would have [him] as a member," we might question the validity of an exhibition that encourages us not only to bring our red thermos (or teddy bear, or binoculars), but leave those things on the floor. Can we consider that an artistic contribution?

Rinehart explains that the very questions of ownership and authenticity are at the heart of "do it"

"[do it] encapsulates the questions asked in so much modern and contemporary art, from Duchampian ready-mades to conceptual and performance art to Fluxus. It's like an entire course in a certain strain of modern art contained in one room. This strain of art - concerned with collaboration and process over authority and product - is influencing contemporary culture in many ways from digital art to pop-music remixes."

Participation is a theme that will be carried through the exhibition until it is taken down in something Rinehart is calling "Do It Fridays."

"Many works are performative and that made me think to include a special feature in this exhibition - every Friday at noon during the course of the exhibition a new work will be made or performed in the gallery and installed in the exhibition," Rinehart explained, adding that this aspect of the exhibit "is also a way for me to carry out the playful, open-ended, and process-oriented spirit of the exhibition."

In fact, the "official" opening for "do it" will be the first Friday in the exhibition's series of "Do It Fridays," at noon Friday. Like all Samek Art Gallery programs, "do it" will be free and open to the public. The Bucknell Gallery is located on the third floor of the Elaine Langone Center at Bucknell University, and the Samek Downtown Gallery is located at 416 Market St., Lewisburg.

More information can be found at galleries.blogs.bucknell.edu. Or, as Rinehart suggests, just stop in and visit.

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