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A collection of art-making ideas by artists

Zarouhie Abdalian's Proposal for a Site: Changing perceptions of places

For me, an important part of developing a site-specific work is observing how people relate to the site as it is, before I install anything. I want a work to change the way a viewer experiences a site or relates to other spectators there. For this assignment your class will collaboratively select a site for an artwork. Each student will then propose a work to be created at that site and present his or her proposal to the class. After the proposals are presented, the class will discuss the artistic merits and feasibility of the projects. Finally, the class will choose by consensus one project to collaboratively realize at the selected site.

Instructions

Once the class has agreed on a site, create a proposal for a site-specific artwork. Be sure to choose a location that is accessible to all of the students in the class, so that each of you can visit it as you develop your proposal.

The proposal will consist of:

1. A written description of the artwork that responds to one or more of the prompts below
2. Sketches that describe the project
3. A sample of the materials that will be used to create the artwork

Here are some questions that can serve as prompts for the development of the artwork:

- How do spaces guide the movement of people within them? Propose an artwork that modifies, complicates, exaggerates, or subverts the qualities of a space that influence a visitor's

Media:

Installation

Materials:

+ Pencil

+ Paper

+ Sample materials for proposed installation

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experience. Consider how these exaggerations, modifications, etc. both shape the artwork and impact the ways it is perceived. Can the work suggest new ways of experiencing the space? Does the work make an argument? Or perhaps the artwork is a joke: if so, think of who you want to “get it.”

- Think of a phenomenon that is universal to our experience of the physical world, such as the reverberation of soundwaves, or the reflection of light. How can you change a viewer’s perception of a space by changing the ways these phenomena operate within it?
- How does an artwork announce itself as such? In a wall text? By virtue of its proximity to other artworks? Because an artist is identified at the time of its making? These factors are also features of its site; consider making a piece that is created through the tweaking of these parameters.
- What are the borders of the site? Are there sites within the site? Think about how these sites are defined: do the borders mark physical, social, or political divisions? Draw a map or diagram that describes these divisions. Consider the different dynamics between an “inside” site and an “outside” site. What relationship does the artwork propose between the inside and that which is outside it? How might you go about making that relationship seen, felt, heard?
- How is history read as conflict in the site? Research the site’s history through observation of the present site and also through texts about the site from various times and points of view (essays, articles in periodicals, memoirs, poems). Interview people who spend time at the site or work or live nearby. How might an artwork shape the history of a site?

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Artist Biography: Zarouhie Abdalian

Born in 1982 in New Orleans, Louisiana
Currently lives in Oakland, California

Zarouhie Abdalian creates subtle interventions into everyday perception. Often bordering on the edge of invisibility, her minimal installations engage with the specifics of a site. Through researching a location's history and physical features, she addresses the dynamics between visitors and a given space, arriving at simple adjustments that transform a viewer's physical or emotional understanding of an environment. Her refined modifications have included making a window flutter with Mylar and illuminating an abandoned building with lights set on timers.

Abdalian earned her BA at Tulane University and her MFA from California College of the Arts. Her work has been included in numerous national and international exhibitions including *Zarouhie Abdalian / MATRIX 249* at the Berkeley Art Museum (2013), the *9th Shanghai Biennial* (2012), the *3rd Moscow International Biennale for Young Art* (2012), and the *12th Istanbul Biennial* (2011). In 2014 Abdalian will participate in *Prospect.3*, New Orleans. Abdalian is a recipient of SFMOMA's 2012 SECA Art Award.



Photo: Andria Lo