

CIVIC ENDURANCE

Bradley McCallum & Jacqueline Tarry

Civic Endurance is Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry's series of life-size color photographs and a video that together document a 25-hour endurance performance with homeless Seattle teenagers. The portraits were taken minutes before each youth took part in the endurance performance, and after they gave their testimony during an audio taped interview.

The performance took place on a Seattle public sidewalk from 6:00pm August 5th, 2002 until 6:59pm the following day. The action was simple: 26 homeless youths stood still looking directly into the camera for an hour without speaking. As each completed the hour-long performance, there was a transitional moment in which the next youth walked into the frame of the camera, and then directly behind the first performer. They overlapped for a few moments and then the initial performer walked off camera while their replacement stepped forward into the same position, again looking into the camera. As they stand still for the hour, the video is rendered with a time-lapsed effect in which traffic and pedestrians pass by and light fades into night and back again; during the transition from one youth/performer to the next, the video is slowed down. The audio tracks on the video combine street sounds with edited sequences of the interviews that were recorded prior to the performance. Each hour of real-time performance is compressed to 5 minutes, creating a finished work of two hours.

Although the performance occurred in a public setting, it was not audience-oriented. The video camera was placed across the street with minimal production equipment so that the general public walked pass the youth without acknowledging their presence. The video captures the theoretical invisibility of the youth and the poignancy of this evidence is accentuated when combined with their testimony.

The goal of standing motionless for an hour is a significant act of endurance for youth that face drug addiction, attention deficit and health related issues. The act of

standing still combines two ideas. Each youth that participated in this collective action dedicated their participation to the memory of friends who died from life on the streets, and thus “stood for” those individuals who were absent. They were also engaging in a quiet act of civil disobedience in opposition to the Seattle Civility Laws that make standing or sitting motionless a crime.

McCallum and Tarry were commissioned by the Seattle Arts Commission to work with Peace on the Street by Kids from the Streets (PSKS), a homeless youth advocacy organization, to create a work that gives voice to the issues that face the homeless youth in Seattle. The artwork has received major financial support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

As the project unfolded, the daily challenges that these youth face became more evident, and thus so did the need for them to have a forum to recount their experiences. A common thread among their recorded testimonies was the loss of someone close due to the nature of living on the streets. Coincidentally, and likewise tragically, on March 20th, 2002, one of the three audio interns, Steven Greenberg (a.k.a. Filth), whose energy and participation had been critical to the early phase of *Endurance*, died of a heroin overdose. Two weeks after Filth’s memorial service PSKS suffered a second loss of Nicholas Helhowski (a.k.a. Rooster), as a result of homicide through street violence. Rooster, a core member of PSKS, was in the final stage of transitioning off of the streets. Their untimely deaths have inevitably shaped the McCallum and Tarry intervention and the underlying metaphor of standing for someone who was lost.

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The artists give special thanks to the subjects, Stacy, David, Wicked, Fish, T-Bone, Della Rose, Bill, James, Tony, Frank, Billy, Frost, Nicole, Jaclyn, Gimp, Jarred, Mike, Momma Sara, Janaea, Johnny, Raven, Maria, Vanessa, Richard, Jessica, and Kim, for their collaboration, and to Tiffany, Laura, Filth, Dirty, Elita, Bugg, Melissa, Elaine, and Rooster for their support. The artists also give thanks to Roy Wilson, Brendan Reed, Mark Luttrell, Studio 62 (Andrei Kalour, Matthew McGuinness, and Morgan Sheasby), the Beijing Jinglida Image Picture Technology Group, Jack Straw Productions, and 911 Media Center for their design and production support.

ConjunctionArts continues its long-standing support of McCallum and Tarry's work with this project. Based in Brooklyn, New York, ConjunctionArts endorses progressive and compelling public art, which through metaphor and image, engage divergent communities on civic issues. Established in 1989 by Bradley McCallum and joined in 1996 by collaborating artist Jacqueline Tarry, ConjunctionArts has sponsored their site-specific public artworks (www.conjunctionarts.org).