BORDER SKIRMISHES: BOUNDARIES AS A LENS TO CONTEMPORARY VIEWERSHIP

ADD + ART 2021

Mike Miller + Brian Gillis

As a collaborative team, Mike Miller and Brian Gillis have produced a diverse body of creative work spanning the last 14 years. Since 2006, the team has created a variety of projects ranging from editioned multiples to site-specific installations and actions. Their work together has incorporated primary source material, industrial and scientific processes, and novel technology in the exploration of a variety of sites and themes from the American rust belt to China's northern border.

Notable joint exhibitions include "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" at the Illinois State Museum, "Free Radio" at the Cue Foundation for the Arts in New York, and "Mapping Harbin" at the Academy of Art and Design, Heilongjiang University, China. They met as colleagues in the Visual Arts Program at the University of Illinois Springfield in 2005.

Gillis is currently a Professor of Art and Director of the Center for Art Research at the University of Oregon.

Miller is a Professor of Art at the University of Illinois Springfield.

PREMISE:

With the acceleration of globalization, new immigration patterns, and social media's blurring of public and private identity, borders and boundaries of all kinds have been complicated and problematized in contemporary society.

This poster presentation will first explore artists and art practices that recognize, reveal, and exploit various societal boundaries. Further, the presentation will pose a series of questions regarding the nature of borders as existing functional devices capable of challenging conventional definitions of the viewer.

QUESTIONS:

- What are some useful definitions of "border" or "boundary" that allow for recognition of multiple viewpoints?
- How do cultural stories, national narratives, and personal witnessing of events and issues function in cooperation with each other to produce meaning at these sites?
- Is public art, architecture, and other physical sites capable of absorbing and reflecting multiple stories and viewpoints simultaneously?
- Does a productive method exist for challenging ownership of these sites and that incorporates multivalent narratives and leads to consensus?
- Is it possible to produce inclusive monuments, public art works, and architecture that allow for a comprehensive reflection of community?

GATEWAY ARCH NATIONAL PARK, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI. CONSTRUCTION BEGUN: FEBRUARY 12, 1963, ARCHITECT: EERO SAARINEN

GATEWAY TO THE WEST

- The conventional story of the Gateway Arch is that it stands as a symbol of the American spirit, a doorway to western expansion and the harnessing of the promise and riches of the North American continent by a reourceful people.
- The arch was conceived as a tribute to Jeffersonian ideals and accomplishments and marked the foresight of the Lousiana Purchase as an unrivaled coup for American soveriegnty.
- The purchase ignored the current Native American population and transferred the land from a European power to the new American government for roughly four cents an acre. The "accomplishment" that the Gateway Arch symbolizes launched the complex and tragic history of the slow and steady disenfranchisement of Native peoples that continues to this day.
- According to Tracy Campbell, author of The Gateway Arch: A Biography, another aim of St. Louis city leaders was to rid the city's waterfront of "blighted" property and bring in federal construction dollars. The city engineer, W.C. Bernard, presented the plan as "an enforced slum-clearance program."

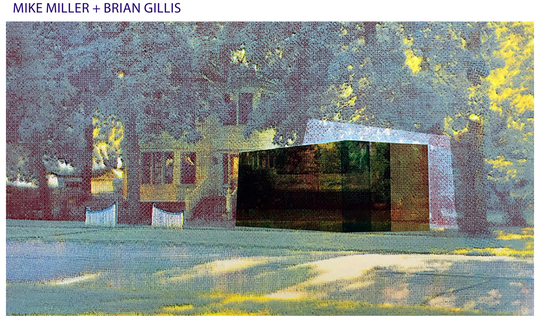
MAP OF THE UNITED STATES, 1818, CARTOGRAPHER: JOHN MELISH

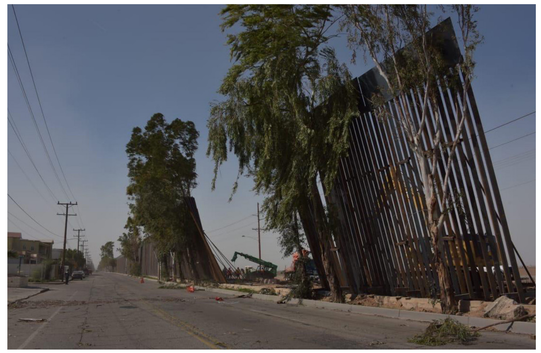
NEIGHBORHOOD INTERVENTION

- During Summer and Fall 2019, the authors of this presentation sought to envision and produce a concept for inclusive public art for the city of Springfield, Illinois. As part of the International Terrain Biennial, the neighborhood of Enos Park, a site of mixed interests and stakeholders in Northeast Springfield, was selected as the site for what would become Limen: Enos Park.
- In preparation for creation of the public work, Miller and Gillis collaborated on a body of screen printed images and objects entitled Limen: A Nonstandard Edition. The prints served as a visioning exercise for the public work.
- The following statement accompanied the work: A limen is a threshold of physical or psychological response, or a boundary of perception where one side of a stimulus is perceivable while the other side is not. Enos Park is a boundary space in Springfield, Illinois that is complexly situated between history and modernity, socioeconomic classes, racial demographics, and municipal and neighborhood stewardship. This project affords the possibility of considering this site through multivalent perception, understanding, or associations by visitors and residents alike.

ABOVE: LIMEN: ENOS PARK, SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS. FALL 2019, ARTISTS: MIKE MILLER + BRIAN GILLIS

BELOW: LIMEN: A NONSTANDARD EDITION, SCREENPRINT ON PAPER, 2019, ARTISTS: MIKE MILLER + BRIAN GILLIS





FAILED BORDER WALL, MEXICALI, MEXICO. JANUARY 29, 2020, CONSTRUCTION COMPANY: FISHER SAND AND GRAVEL COMPANY

BOUNDARY OWNERSHIP

- Borders and boundaries have assumed a prominent role in recent political debates, controversies, and projections of national power. The representation of border issues has increasingly been communicated in aesthetic terms, particularly in the case of the southern border wall in the United States.
- American leadership has blurred the lines between desired policy outcomes and physical descriptions of beauty. The proposed boundary between the U.S. and Mexico has alternatively been described as "great", "big and beautiful", and "powerful".
- Positive aesthetic descriptions of the border wall foreground the policy aims of exclusion, safety, and otherness for those promoting them, yet have a starkly different meaning to those on the "outside", either politically, socially, or legally.
- This aestheticization of the border wall and the ideology that accompanies it has even led to the "signing" of the physical structure, as if it were a sculpture.

TRUMP SIGNS WALL IN ARIZONA, JUNE 23, 2020