



VAN FORUM NOTES

April 11, 2006 Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005

“From when I was a child, my mother would say, Trust your intuition, trust your inner voice, trust that.”

--Kiki Smith in an interview with Lynne Tillman, March 2006

Welcome

Sue Meyers, forum host and member of the Vital Aging Network Leadership Group, welcomed everyone to the forum. Sue thanked the Walker Art Center for hosting the forum.

Setting the Stage – Hearing from Kiki Smith

A video was presented in which Kiki Smith talked about her art and her life. Excerpts of her remarks include: “art is something that moves from your insides into the physical world, it is a representation of your insides in a different form. Art is just a way to think. I just have this inventory of images and I can mix them up. They get to have this life outside of this one version. Always pay attention to your intuition – you get into trouble if you don’t trust your intuition. I’m just trying to have as many experiences as I can.” If you go to the internet, Google “Art21,” and click on Kiki Smith’s name you can see the complete video.

Introductions

Sue asked for all participants to introduce themselves and provide a one word description of what they expect will be their experience during the tour of the Kiki Smith exhibit. Participants responded with the following descriptions:

- Enlightened
- Ideas
- Exhilarated
- Inspired
- Curiosity
- Physiology
- Moved
- Intrigued
- Enlarged
- Puzzled
- Motivated
- Interested
- Emotional
- Freedom

- Alive
- Challenged
- Skeptical
- Broadened
- Discovery
- Curious
- Pensive
- Reflective
- Intrigued
- Surprised
- Challenged
- Fascinated
- Awe struck
- Immersed
- Tickled
- Introspective
- Appreciated
- Curiosity
- Curious
- Learning
- Enriched
- Surprised
- Curious
- Broadened
- Challenging
- Sharing
- Excited
- Informed
- Enlightened

Tour of Kiki Smith Exhibit

The participants divided into three groups to tour the exhibit.

Large Group Discussion

The participants reconvened as a large group to discuss what surprised them about the exhibit. Participants responded with these descriptions:

- Extraordinary range of materials
- Uniqueness and
- Spilling of guts – gutsy-ness of it
- Very revealing
- Range of materials and topic
- Obsession and consuming interest in the body and all its function and forms, etc.
- Depression
- Visceral

- Family history
- Anatomy
- Death
- Very powerful
- Daughter was most depressing
- Originality
- Diversity of features that she chose to emphasize
- Unhealthy
- Very intellectual
- Fascination of body
- Interpretation
- Archetypal
- Pretty morbid
- Variety of media
- Energy of the artist
- Multitude of venues, materials
- Mix of materialism and mythology
- Ideology
- Just amazing – the diversity, how she thinks and what she does
- She helps to bring expression to the subconscious
- Brilliance – and how much I don't know about so much
- I would love to meet her – what must go on in her head all of the time to create this broad range of art?
- She touches on humor but is also crying

Sue asked participants if the exhibit was seen differently by men versus women?

- Yes, the exhibit leaves it a bit open but it definitely provides a feminist perspective.
- The group's comments reflected a lot of overlap in experiences between the men and women in the audience.
- The exhibit is a lot about the stages of life and not just death, from the womb to the tomb.

Sue asked the tour guides for their reactions and any questions they may have for participants.

- I am impressed by the enthusiasm and interest of the group.
- I learned so much from my group's discussion. People came up with things that I never thought about. I want to thank everyone for broadening my opportunity to share this with others now.
- I want to thank everyone for sharing ideas and being willing to speak up. One question that I have is "if Kiki Smith were to walk into this room right now, what would you ask her?" Participants responded with the following questions:
 - Does she dream when she sleeps?
 - What was her vision?

- Can you tell me more about the sculptures and drawings of the wolf and the woman?
- Was she sad that she'd never borne a child? (It was noted that Kiki was a surrogate mother for her niece so she may not have been sad about this.)
- Was she ever married? (Participants didn't know for sure but thought she probably hadn't been married before.)
- Was she ever on psychotropic medication?
- Where is she right now with her work? (It was noted that she is still working with animals and fairy tales and some mythology. She doesn't know where she's going because she is governed by moods as they hit her. She has no knowledge of where it comes from – it just pops into her head. She commented that she wanted to do some work with Macy's.)
- Has she run into trouble with people calling her art pornography or otherwise raising serious concerns with her art? (It was noted that Kiki would not have a problem with any of these reactions and welcomed them and all other reactions to her work.)
- A participant commented that Kiki Smith turns her free association into something tangible.

Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging (MN CAAN) – Description of Activities

Sue announced that at the VAN Leadership Group meeting yesterday, MN CAAN was approved as a VAN Way designated entity. Sue introduced Pat Samples who is one of the founding members and leaders of MN CAAN.

Pat described MN CAAN and their core activities. MN CAAN is a statewide network to foster engagement of older adults in the arts in any place that can happen. A small group of individuals (10-15) gets involved to set the stage for network activities. Three core activities of the network include:

- 1) Two annual conferences on creativity and aging have been held by MN CAAN so far. The conference brings in speakers to share ideas about how arts can be brought to older people and provides opportunities for participants to have creative experiences.
- 2) MN CAAN received grant funding to create arts panels as part of the National Center on Creative Aging's *Art of Aging – Creativity Matters* initiative. One panel was displayed at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. The panels were created by older adult groups in four sites around the metro area. They will be displayed next at a library in Hennepin County. MN CAAN has funding to do one more panel in greater MN. If anyone has any ideas of who might be interested in participating in this process please let Pat know. Her email address is patsamples@agingandcaregiving.com.
- 3) MN CAAN is also involved in bringing arts into a senior center in downtown St. Paul. The results of this effort will be displayed as a part of the St. Paul Arts Crawl in Galtier Plaza in Lowertown.

MN CAAN Website Demonstration

Representatives from the Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging Network provided a demonstration of their new website. Marian Belle, who has spearheaded the effort to create the website, provided an overview and description of the sections of the website.

Bill Dobbs, who is the webmaster of the site, provided explanations of key components of the website.

Marion described the diverse audiences for MN CAAN:

- 1) Older adults interested in undertaking artistic experiences;
- 2) Professional artists who want to work with elders;
- 3) Family caregivers; and
- 4) Service organizations who lead creative arts activities with older adults.

Professional Resources Section

- Replicable models of projects and activities that have successfully engaged older adults in arts activities are highlighted. Individuals can add information about their model project to the website. Individuals who want to find a model can download information about any particular model.
- Blogs will be attached to each project to discuss replication, modifications, etc.
- The billboard areas (advertising areas) are reserved to highlight news, events, people, etc. It will be targeted to a specific audience related to each section. In the future this could also be used a source of revenue by allowing external organizations to advertise in the space.
- The funding section explains how to find funding, how to write a grant, etc.
- The artists roster includes artists who choose to work with elders on a volunteer or fee-based arrangement. The artists will be reviewed and approved before they go live on the site (and will pay a fee).
- The events and news section is organized in a calendar format to highlight events of interest to professionals

Creative Aging Resources

- The artist roster will include the same individuals as under the professional resources section.
- The family caregivers section provides caregivers with resources, tools and supports to engage elders in creative expression.
- The “get involved” section provides concrete ways to enrich the lives of older adults through creative arts in MN. It will be organized in a newsletter format.
- The events and news section is organized in a calendar format to highlight events relevant to older adults interested in creative expression.

On every page of the website there will be toolbar navigation and global navigation so that it will take just one click to get anywhere that a person would want to go. It will also enable people to easily get back to the home page from anywhere on the site. The home page will include MN CAAN history and descriptions of opportunities to work with MN CAAN. A contact form could be added. There is also a partner page, “contact us” page, site map, and an option to subscribe/unsubscribe to an e-list.

MN CAAN needs people resources at this time to finalize and populate the website.

Please let Marian know if you’d like to join their team. Her email address is

mbelle@mn.rr.com.

Please join VAN at the next forum!

Topic: Thinking About Ageism

Presenter: Robert Yahnke

Tuesday, May 9, 10 a.m. – noon

Metro Area Agency on Aging Offices

(note: New Location!)

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