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This art work grows out of my personal history of incarceration and release. I encountered difficulties reentering society, like many incarcerated citizens. Attempts to repress and ignore the imprisonment experience, while common, were altogether unsuccessful and unproductive. I found liberation in sharing my story with family and friends, and discovered that others found a similar release when sharing their experiences in return. In an effort to ignite the conversation around issues related to incarceration I set out to perform a similar reenactment of my time being incarcerated. The performance challenged those who encounter it by encouraging them to address their own prejudices towards those incarcerated. All the while hoping to generate a safe space to process, question, and share.

A QUESTION IN LIFE, ANSWERED WITH ART

by

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Approved by

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **A QUESTION IN LIFE, ANSWERED WITH ART**

When I began graduate school in 2012, I wanted to communicate narratives from my personal history by creating drawings with recycled and found materials. I attempted to bridge the gap between the past, through my voice, to share with the next generation. All the while I was conflicted internally, concealing thoughts of my future being diminished. What if everything you worked for was taken? What if you couldn't do the things you were successful at and loved to do? What if it happened today? What would you do next?

#### **My Story Begins in August 2012**

My story begins in August 2012. I had just started the first year of my Masters program in Fine Arts at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, when I received a phone call from a detective in Washington, DC. The detective informed me that there was a warrant out for my arrest in the District of Columbia and suggested that I turn myself in. The phone call came out of nowhere and, while the threat of arrest was incredibly serious, I couldn't help but feel the detective had made a mistake. Over the next year, while doing my best to focus on school, I waited for an indictment. The prosecuting side was given nine months to reach an indictment. At the end of the nine-month deadline, I was informed that the felony charges were dropped and lowered to misdemeanor charges. Reducing the charges meant my case would not be heard in front of a jury and would instead go to a bench trial where a judge alone would

determine my fate. In October 2013, after a two-day bench trial, I was convicted and sentenced to 13 months in the DC City Jail.

From the courtroom, I was taken directly to jail where I spent the next 10 months. Thanks to good behavior and securing a job while inside, my sentence was reduced and I was released on August 22, 2014. The day I was released will be imprinted on my heart forever. I flew home to Asheville, NC to see my family and find refuge from the city that had imprisoned me for much of the past year. A week had passed when I received a call from a probation officer informing me I was on probation and needed to return to DC immediately. Once again I relinquished control of the life I had imagined for myself in exchange for one being designed for me. For the next six months, I found shelter in DC with an old high school friend who was gracious enough to let me share his futon with his dog.

After six months of probation, I was allowed to return to North Carolina in March of 2015. The following month, my sentence was vacated. In December of 2015, I went to trial again for my bill of innocence and to have my criminal case sealed on the grounds of actual innocence. I won the trial and was exonerated of all the charges. My record was cleared and my innocence restored. While my record no longer reflects the ten months I spent in jail, the experience is one that will never be erased.

It is nearly impossible to describe what it feels like knowing I had done absolutely nothing wrong as I stood naked in front of three correctional officers as other prisoners watched nearby. It was inconceivable and altogether heartbreaking as my world continued to change. I spent countless hours every day those first few months going over every word that was said at the trial. The truth is so simple I thought. There's only one way to tell the truth. What could I have done to deserve this? There had to be a reason,

otherwise, why was I here? I really started to question why I was living. That's when I hit my lowest point emotionally in my life.

I turned to the Bible and I asked for forgiveness for anything and everything I could remember happening in my life. I also prayed for the strength to forgive my accuser and the judge. I came across books that helped me escape my reality and find some mental stability. It was during this time I discovered Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness." We covertly passed around this book because it explained with such sophistication an experience many of us had lived one way or another. I remember sitting at my jail cell desk reading that "The racial bias inherent in the drug war is a major reason that 1 in every 14 black men was behind bars in 2006, compared with 1 in 106 white men. For young black men, the statistics are even worse. One in 9 black men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five was behind bars in 2006, and far more were under some form of penal control –such as probation or parole."-Alexander, Michelle. *"The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness."* The New Press, New York, 2011: Page 101. I instantly recognized that I represented the one incarcerated black male out of eight that are not. I later learned that in Washington, DC, 3 out of 4 black men will be behind bars at some point in their lives. The view out of my cell door into my block reflected those statistics. At that moment I realized my wrongful incarceration was not unique but an extreme example of an unfair justice system.

The absence of control while incarcerated increased my desire to hold fast to my passions, and to the person I was before jail. My friend's mother gave me a subscription to Art Forum magazine to be delivered to the DC jail. It meant so much to me to not lose sight of the person I was before my incarceration. I drew pictures that I gave to other

inmates and it provided me with a deeper belief that my talents could provide more than visual pleasure. In jail, small luxuries were taken away from me and I was left with the bare minimum. Two inch pencils without an eraser or sharpener. I used my shoe sole as an eraser and the edge of the desk as a sharpener. I wanted to create for others more than I did for myself. Those drawings were invaluable gifts because we had no other opportunity to send anything else to our loved ones from inside the jail walls. I had always known art was my passion, and felt my creative interests were undefined. Anticipating my release, I knew that being incarcerated would hinder employability, essentially making some of my previous accomplishments meaningless out in the world. Serving time forced me to reconsider my options for a future and upon my release I didn't want to pursue art academically anymore. I needed a new plan to provide a foundation for my new family while having a new criminal record and while being on probation.

Returning to life outside of the prison walls with my innocence restored was challenging. I encountered difficulties reentering society, like many incarcerated citizens. Attempts to repress and ignore the imprisonment experience were altogether unsuccessful and unproductive. After my release and eventual exoneration, I felt completely depleted. There had been a point where I gave into defeat and no longer maintained hope for having my name cleared. To stand now as a free man again, I often wondered why no one believed me from the beginning. When released, I was immediately faced with the difficulty of disclosing my story to people. Not everyone knows what happened, not everyone knows you've been in jail. Do you tell people? Do you dodge the subject? How honest can I be, how much do I hide? I had to face these questions every day. I found it hard to find a place to talk about my incarceration. Those

who had been incarcerated didn't want to speak about their past and preferred to move on. Those I spoke with who had never been incarcerated couldn't relate to my recent struggle with the justice system and my loss of confidence in humanity. I was exiled from my loved ones for nothing. Contained and isolated in conditions designed to dehumanize us. I lost two grandmothers during this experience, one when I was incarcerated and the other when I was on probation. Both times I was not allowed to attend their funerals. My family decided not tell them I was incarcerated due to their age and health conditions. My daughter was born one month after I went to jail, three months before her projected due date. The first time I saw my daughter she was 9 months old. The next time I saw her was on her first birthday when she came to Washington DC during my probation. It's hard to keep count of how many important life events I missed. And there were other things that happened to me, things that I saw while I was inside jail. I was told I could pick up my life again where I left off. But how could I go on a job interview and explain my trust issues, as well as the new jail habits I was trying to lose? Could I even be the person I was three years ago? I knew I had to work. I had to find something, but I was changed. It wasn't just the time I'd lost, the person I was didn't exist anymore.

I found liberation in sharing my story with family and friends, and discovered that others found a similar release when sharing their experiences in return. Within these moments of sharing, I realized it was a first opportunity for many of these people to share what my situation had meant for them. Once I started interviewing my friends and family about their experience with my situation, I learned how incarceration had a ripple effect on those who are closely connected to stories of imprisonment. The stories before, during and after incarceration are usually the ones we don't share, as there are few places to do so.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **AND THUS, THE JUMPSUIT PROJECT WAS BORN**

I wanted to generate a safe space for others to process, question, and share their experiences with and perceptions of incarceration. The Jumpsuit Project is a socially engaged art project being conducted at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro during the 2016 - 2017 academic year. In an effort to ignite the conversation around issues related to incarceration, I decided to wear an orange jumpsuit, like the one I had worn in DC jail, on campus everyday beginning in August of 2016 until my graduation in the spring of 2017. Introducing an orange jumpsuit, an outlier in an otherwise familiar public setting such as a university, challenged those who encountered it by encouraging them to address their own prejudices towards those incarcerated. UNC Greensboro's diversity ranges across campus through students, faculty and employees. It's a community within a community. It provides a culture that encourages learning, networking and exploring new ways to construct a better future as individuals. I want to give the orange jumpsuit an opportunity to be viewed differently by being placed in an unlikely environment. I felt that a university setting would be the better environment as opposed to doing this project out in the public city streets.

I hoped this visual representation of incarceration would shed light on these issues, raise questions about incarceration and start conversations about how it affects our lives. "I want to initiate a conversation. I want to say, look, I was a student here and I thought the world was one way. I thought I was in control then this thing happened to me. We live in a certain world, but there are other things going on. There are things we

never see. Things I never saw. I want to say, you think it can't happen to you? I was you and you could be me. These things happen every day. The reality of the world once you leave this place [UNCG] is not what you think it is." - *Mitchell, Steve. "Sherrill Roland's Wrongful Conviction Drives His Art." YES! Weekly, November 1, 2016. Womack Newspapers: Page 4.* I wanted to return to the UNCG community with a story to share that could strengthen others so they are better prepared for what's out there.

This is a very forthright and transparent way of sharing my story but the more I share, the more liberated I feel. I've always been a private person and this project will keep me in a vulnerable position. I find the strength and courage to take on this project by reflecting on my survival of my DC jail experience.

Safety was a major concern for me in the conceptualization of this idea. My family's concern for my safety made them question if this was the best way for me to return to graduate school. In no way did I want to place myself in a position where I could be accused for appearing to be something I'm not. Informing both the campus and district city police was my first priority before wearing the jumpsuit on campus. "My mom was worried about my safety," Roland said. "These days in this world, you don't have to wear an orange suit being an African American male to get attention in the wrong way." - *Newsom, John. "The Jumpsuit Project: UNCG Grad Student calls attention to incarceration." Greensboro News & Record, November 12, 2016. BH Media Group, Inc.: Page 6.*

I gave a lot of thought to the specific qualities of the uniform I would wear. I knew I wanted this project to be taken seriously. Wearing an "inmate costume" would bring an unnecessarily playful aspect that would influence the conversations I was hoping to initiate. Acquiring an authentic county jail jumpsuit would be too realistic and

present a challenge of differentiating me as a student from an actual inmate. I found a workwear utility orange jumpsuit online that finds a place in between the two extremes of fake and real. I preferred not to display any jail identification numbers or Department of Correction acronyms across the front or back. I wear regular clothes during my coming and going commute to UNCG. Once I've arrived at my studio, I change into the Jumpsuit. My t-shirt, undershorts and socks remain restricted to white only, as if I was still under the rules of the DC jail. I allow myself freedom to wear hats, any type of shoes, and accessories. The bright orange Jumpsuit is enough to produce the desired effect.

Within the Jumpsuit Project, I work under strict conditions based on my time within the DC jail. In an effort to mimic that system, there are rules on my movements and interactions while I'm on campus or at any school related event. The Gatewood Art building and the Kaplan Recreational Center are the only two locations on campus that I operate under the rules similar to my housing block within the D.C. jail. In my block I was able to move and converse freely. Wearing orange shorts was another dress option outside of the orange jumpsuit that was allowed, but only while working out in the block. The Gatewood Art building is my "so-called" block, which makes my studio space on the third floor my "cell." Within this building I can wear orange shorts in addition to my jumpsuit. I also wear orange shorts at the Kaplan Recreational center when I'm working out. In any other university building or facility I can only wear my orange jumpsuit. Within those buildings and any other campus building or restaurant I can also stop and talk with whomever, which take on the rules similar to the other places I was allowed to travel within the jail.

Traveling outside, between any of these buildings or facilities, will replicate the rules I had traveling within the hallways of the DC jail. Traveling between buildings, I

cannot stop my movement. If stopped, I must return to the building where I started from. While I was in DC jail I could not stop and congregate in the hallways or passageways. If this occurred, we would be turned around and sent back to our blocks. If anyone wants to talk with me while walking outside, then they must escort me along the way. I can speak while walking but I cannot stop and hold a conversation. Once I'm in a building then I'm free to stop and talk. These rules are the performative aspect of my artwork. It is an inconvenience to me but definitely lacks the harshness of the DC jail experience.

My intentions in implementing these rules was not to convert an academic institution into a correctional institution for the purpose of making me feel incarcerated. I mimic the jail guidelines to place the participants or those who engage with me into a role of someone who is close to incarceration. With my restricted movements, I hope to achieve slight interruptions for others who wish to communicate or interact with me. My family and friends were forced to adjust their lives for my situation. What my restrictions provide is a disruption to the luxury of our freedom to easily move around and communicate freely, somewhat like the jumpsuit disrupts the normalcy of college life. What I'm trying to achieve is a small ripple of change, relative to the major and abrupt changes that family and friends of the incarcerated are forced to confront. "Since my world has changed, it changes your world and how you move when you try to connect with me," Roland said. "That's exactly how my friends and family — or the friends and family of other incarcerated people — have to change their lifestyles."- *Newsom, John. "The Jumpsuit Project: UNCG Grad Student calls attention to incarceration." Greensboro News & Record, November 12, 2016. BH Media Group, Inc.: Page 7.*

## **Campus Reactions and Conversations**

I activate every space I enter wearing the jumpsuit on campus, and at any moment an interaction can be provoked. I've found myself in random conversation with many individuals on campus. Faculty, students and university employees all have had conversations with me. When the jumpsuit is being worn, the performance is initiated and I am open for dialogue. The disadvantage for me is that these interactions between myself and the campus community are not controlled. So my personal privacy is restricted in the jumpsuit. As the popularity of the project grew through word-of-mouth, I've been sought after and chased down by some members of the campus community. Conversations during these encounters range in topics from incarceration to the sharing of personal stories of overcoming difficult life situations. I do not record these conversations in any way. All documentation of my work has been through photography. I found that recording through video or audio changes how the audience engages with me. It prevents them from opening up and sharing their stories. While I was incarcerated, all of my communications with people outside the jail were monitored. For the Jumpsuit Project, I elected to create a space to connect without distraction or intimidation. These ephemeral moments become experiences that only we share and do not take on a physical form that can be taken away or destroyed.

Every day that I step out in my Jumpsuit is an adventure into the unknown. I have no idea what will happen from the start to the end. "There's been a lot of interest, a lot of questions, but a lot of fear too ... I was scared to wear this suit, but I'm more afraid of the perception of being viewed as someone scary, as someone I'm not. I've had people avoid me, run from me. Not talk to me, not make eye contact."- *Mitchell, Steve. "Sherrill Roland's Wrongful Conviction Drives His Art." YES! Weekly, November 1, 2016.*

*Womack Newspapers: Page 4.* As the project progressed I developed a better understanding of the negative reactions. I knew that these reactions were not towards me, Sherrill Roland, but towards the image I display. These are just reactions to the confrontational nature of the project. I'm forcing you to address this image of incarceration and confront the stigma of an African-American male in an orange jumpsuit. Ultimately we as a society are more inclined to learn about these issues from a safer encounter through books, television shows, movies and the internet. The jumpsuit is a catalyst for many different responses, one that supports and affirms experiences of people impacted by incarceration, and those who have been misled and continue to believe the false façade of an unbiased justice system.

Once I understood that, the more I could further the conversation by asking more questions. Why do we react the way we do to this image? Is it our upbringing? Is it the media influence? What does it take for us to look inward and address these questions about incarceration? What does it take for us to question ourselves in general? Creating an opportunity or opening to address these questions is what the Jumpsuit provides. As the audience grows, so does the network of participants.

### **Controlled Campus Conversations**

Once a month I set up a low-tech visitation booth in Elliott University Center which houses an Art Gallery, University Bookstore, food courts, student lounges and a Multicultural Resource Center. I set up this visitation booth in the corridor between the food court and bookstore for 45 minutes. That time-limit is the same duration I was given in DC jail for my video visitations. I was not allowed to have face-to-face visits while in DC jail. The low-tech booth I've created is a way to isolate the participant from

this crowded student-occupied environment. There is no advertising on or invitations surrounding the booth to clarify any details on what it is or what I'm doing. It is an opportunity to challenge the viewer's comfort and curiosity. DC jail was a terrifying experience for me and I was never comfortable. The visitation booth is only meant to be uninviting, not menacing. Some of my visitors describe the booth as nostalgic, taking them back to when they visited friends or family members in Federal Prisons. For many it only takes a small similarity to recall these heavily repressed memories. Others can't figure out how to accept the booth. Many walk around the back rather than speak through the visitor's window to ask me questions. Every other table in the hallway of the EUC is occupied by student organizations, greeting passersby and introducing themselves. The booth is the opposite of that and forces one to seek out the information.

All UNCG community members (students, staff, faculty, administrators) I encounter are invited to share the information about the project through social media networks. UNCG is the immediate audience. Extending the project to social media platforms expands the conversation to a wider secondary audience by providing them with photographic documentation. It provides the secondary audience, outside of the campus, a window inside. Audio from group talks, panel discussions, and radio interviews are uploaded to the Jumpsuit Project Facebook group, which allows another form of participation.

The secondary audience is met with restrictions in how they communicate and interact with me. Secondary audience participants can communicate amongst themselves within the social media platforms for the Jumpsuit Project. However, they cannot connect directly with me through these platforms. This project challenges the accessibility that social media provides by connecting a person with someone else from

anywhere in the world. When I was in jail, I was completely hidden from the world. You couldn't even see me if you drove by the jail. No calls were allowed inside and outgoing calls could only be made during certain hours if you had funds to purchase a call. Handwritten letters were the best form of communication. In order to communicate with me regarding the Jumpsuit Project, you have to hand write your response and mail it to my University address. This is a very difficult adjustment; with today's technology we have the capability to communicate across large bodies of water with only our thumbs. "... I'm asking you to do a little something different in order to give you the realistic version of how you'd have to change if you met someone in that situation."- *Newsom, John. "The Jumpsuit Project: UNCG Grad Student calls attention to incarceration." Greensboro News & Record, November 12, 2016. BH Media Group, Inc.: Page 7.* I'm providing all participants with a choice to step into the role of someone who is closely affected by incarceration. My friends and family members did not have that choice; they lives were forced to readjust their lives.

### **Video Interviews**

Reconnecting with my friends and family, after my innocence was returned, gave me the opportunity to explain what I had experienced face-to-face. These conversations also allowed those closest to me, to share how my incarceration had changed their lives. I realized that my experience had changed their lives in ways I could never have imagined. It was also one of the first times they reflected on it all and explored how things changed. I invited those who came to visit me in D.C. at the Department of Corrections to speak about their experience in front of a camera. I asked them to read a letter that they'd received from me and describe what it was like to take the long trip to Washington, D.C.

from N.C., to visit me. Everyone had their own story and different way of processing the experience, and their emotions. My challenge was to present many point-of-views as one narrative. I chose to combine multiple videos together, edited to show smaller clips from the larger videos, one at a time to be a single linear story. I wanted to provide the audience a different perspective of my incarceration with an opportunity to see and hear it from the people who were close to it.

### **Cell of Letters**

When someone is able to have an encounter with me in the orange jumpsuit, they are able to hear about my experience from hindsight. I want the audience to have an opportunity to hear my story from the most difficult moments when I was in a jail cell. When I was incarcerated the majority of my communication were screened, recorded and limited. Handwritten letters were the only form of communication I had that would not be interfered with. It was my only outlet for expressing my true feelings. I recorded my thoughts and emotions during those moments on paper sent out to my mother. During those times I had to write extremely small because paper and writing instruments were very hard to come by. At times my mother couldn't read my hand writing and I knew if I displayed the actual letters, it would be difficult for others to read as well.

All my letters to my mother exceeded a length of 5 pages and I explored simple and affordable ways to displayed the lengthy content. Eventually I came across material that I didn't want to disclose, things that were too personally sensitive information that I can't legally disclose. I decided to rewrite the letters at large scale on Mylar. That way I controlled what I put within the letters without anybody knowing what I left out. I

created frames using black  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch water piping of many different lengths that are screwed into concrete blocks at the base, for my life-sized handwritten letters to hang off of in multiple panels. Those panels were placed next to one another, creating four walls. The length and height of the four walled space of panels were based off the original measurements from my D.C. jail cell of 6' x 9' x 8'. With these frames I created a small space within the gallery. I wanted this space to displace the viewer from the gallery and to ground them and bring them closer to the moment when the actual letters were being written. I wanted viewers to feel a brief sense of isolation within the gallery space. The enclosed space had two openings on each of the short ends so the audience was able to enter and exit from both ends. The text of the letters is not viewable from the outside of the "cell," only from within.

### **Jumpsuit Absence**

Many supporters of the Jumpsuit Project have asked to wear an orange jumpsuit in an effort to garner more attention for the project, but I've always declined. I believe that nobody should voluntarily want to wear an orange jumpsuit when others are being forced to wear them unjustly.

I was not able to attend the MFA show at the Weatherspoon Art Museum and I wanted the jumpsuit to have a presence there in my absence. I decided to hand pick a number of individuals to wear an orange jumpsuit during my absence at the MFA gallery opening. I needed a stand-in for the jumpsuit but not my experience. I didn't want a diverse group of men wearing the jumpsuit. I'm addressing the stigmas that are associated with my image, which is of an African American male in an orange jumpsuit. Maintaining the focus of the Jumpsuit Project on these issues is why I wanted young

men who fit a similar visual description to myself to wear the orange jumpsuit in my absence. I have learned the power of one jumpsuit and how it can alter the comfort level within a space where it is uncommon. A large number of jumpsuits would suffocate the gallery space. I thought that five African American males showing up in jumpsuits would be plenty to disrupt the routine of viewing art within a gallery space. While in the jumpsuits they were allowed to move freely around the gallery and view the artwork. However, they were not allowed to talk with anyone or amongst themselves. If I was there, many would find comfort through communication by obtaining information about why I am wearing an orange jumpsuit. No communication will help maintain a small amount of uncertainty and allow individuals present to decide what significance they believe the jumpsuit holds. Anyone that attempts communication with the men wearing the jumpsuits will be handed a postcard about the Jumpsuit Project. The five men in jumpsuits entered the Weatherspoon together, stayed for 45 minutes and left together. The 45-minute performance was documented through the use of photography. The men who wore the jumpsuits had their mugshots taken, and will be asked to reflect about their experience.

### **After the Wake Up**

I shared many stories when I'm wearing the jumpsuit. I'm looking to convert these experiences into tangible objects or participatory activities. One of my responsibilities while I was incarcerated was to repaint the vacant cells during the midnight shift before new inmates were moved in the following day. We were not asked to wash the surfaces of the cell or scrape off the older paint before we started. We just went in and painted one coat over the bed frames, desks and walls. I discovered carvings

on, underneath and behind remaining surfaces. While the gestures were small, I found great significance in the carvings as they represented how we as incarcerated individuals, needed to leave a mark in a place that was created to hide us from society. Even after I painted over those surfaces, the marks were not entirely erased. At the Greensboro Project Space, I converted the upstairs into a space where this activity can be reproduced in a new way. I isolated the surfaces for carving by painting them gray, I wanted to invite visitors to be in the role of an inmate without feeling incarcerated. To participate in leaving their own marks only to have me come in behind them and paint over them overnight. The visitors are asked to use handmade tools; screwdrivers with duct tape handles to carve their answers to questions that I wrestled with every day while wearing an orange jumpsuit.

### CHAPTER III

#### SOCIALLY ENGAGED PERFORMANCE ART

As avant-garde artists pursued change in the world through the canvas, social art chooses to change the world, by being out in it. Emma Sulkowicz is an artist who makes work that pushes for change. Her *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)* in 2014, was a yearlong project only performed at Columbia University. Emma carried a fifty-pound mattress wherever she went on campus for the entire duration of her senior year until graduation. Her performance was an act of protest she continued until the student she accused of raping her was either expelled or left the University. Many stood by her in support and others did not. Emma's experience pushed her to find a way to survive. Her performance opened up dialog within the community that changed the campus environment. The *Jumpsuit Project* is my attempt of finding a way to survive with my own experience. I want to know who I am, as both an exoneree and an African American male who now has a history of incarceration in the United States. This project is a way of engaging the community around me by disclosing my story.

Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal created a performance installation titled *Domestic Tension* addressing his identity in the United States and that identity's position in the world. Wafaa's family had been attacked with bombs by drone aircraft in Iraq and he afterwards sought to create dialogue about the Iraq War. Wafaa Bilal locked himself within FlatFile gallery in Chicago for thirty-one days. His performance restricted him from leaving that space entirely. He was under continuous internet surveillance for the entire duration of the installation. Accompanying Wafaa in the room

was a high powered paintball gun that internet users could use to shoot him remotely and anonymously. Multiple users created a community that could control the paintball gun simultaneously which created confusion and chaos for both the user and Wafaa. That confusion sparked dialogue within the community exposing both hate and compassion for Wafaa.

Both Sulkowicz and Bilal disclosed their stories by making themselves vulnerable through interaction, and challenged the perception of a community by sparking dialogue and exchange. It is assumed “that the work of art should challenge or disrupt the viewer’s expectations about a given image, object, or system of meaning and that the viewer, in turn, requires this disruption to overcome his or her reliance on habitual forms of perception.”—17pg Chapter 1 The Eyes of the Vulgar. Conversation Pieces Community + Communication in Modern Art. Grant H. Kester

Neither project would have had this outcome if conducted through a different medium. Not only were the artist changed by the projects but so were their targeted audiences. Emma Sulkowicz’s primary and intended audience was the campus community. Wafaa Bilal’s primary and intended audience expanded to the world-wide-web. My target audience is both, the campus community engaged through personal interaction and a larger audience engaged through social media platforms.

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