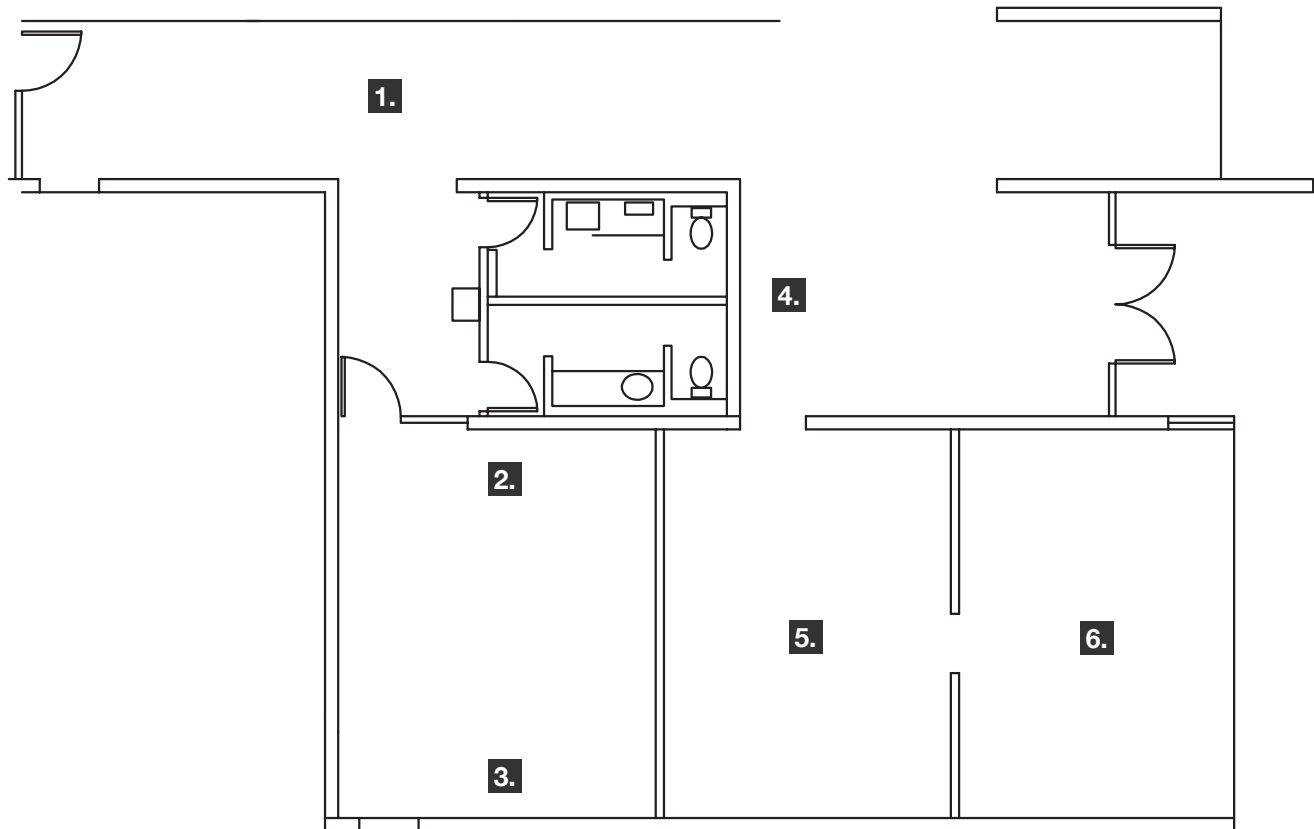


## SOUTH GALLERIES & CORRIDOR

### NICOLE MILLER *Every Word Said: History Lessons from Athens & Tucson*



1. **Death of a School** (2013) HD video
2. **Death of a School** (2013) HD video
3. **Death of a School (Requiem)** (2013) HD video 00:08:07
4. **Death of a School** (2013) HD video
5. **Death of a School** (2013) HD video
6. **Athens** (2016) HD video 01:07:00

**Nicole Miller** (b. 1982, Tucson) received her M.F.A. from the Roski School of the Arts, University of Southern California, and Los Angeles. Solo exhibitions of her work include: Artists' Film International: Nicole Miller, Ballroom Marfa; The Conductor, High Line Channel 22, New York City; Believing is Seeing, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Death of a School, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva; and The Conductor, LAXART, Los Angeles. Miller has also participated in prominent group exhibitions such as: Made in L.A. biennial, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2012); Dallas Biennale, Dallas Contemporary (2012); and The Bearden Project, Studio Museum in Harlem (2011). Her work is represented in public collections including The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others. Miller has been the recipient of the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant (2013); the Artadia Award (2013); and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Biennial Award (2012), among others. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

# Curator's Essay

## **SOUTH GALLERIES & CORRIDOR**

**Nicole Miller *Every Word Said: History Lessons from Athens & Tucson***

**13 February – 29 May 2016**

Tucson-born, Los Angeles-based Nicole Miller's installation consists of six video projections, transforming the southeast wing into a darkened, immersive theatre. Whether it's architecture or people talking about themselves, Miller deploys intimate detail to tailor exceptionally moving portraits and vignettes. The rooms, silently, and the individuals, verbosely and enthusiastically, relate their lives, providing the audience with a heightened cognizance of how moving images transmit ideas and information. Miller's accomplishment in an oversaturated media environment is showing us things and people we haven't encountered before, true to her stated wish that, "I still feel that I am making images that I've never seen, like there's work that I need to do and can do," which results in revealing, possibly cathartic, occasionally sublimely subjective self-representation.

Miller's videos specifically zero in on the interrelationship between preconceptions and reality in terms of the African American experience's uniqueness, with a powerful narrative arc that can furnish psychic and filmic reparation for lost histories and identities. What goes on in her vivid or prosaic, yet poignant, testimonials is an exploration of empowering self-actualization. These are decidedly not documentaries, instead operating in a sphere beyond binary cut-and-dry notions of veracity and falsehood. A nuanced conception and distinction, well described by Werner Herzog, who has said that he is on a quest for "a kind of truth that is the enemy of the merely factual. Ecstatic truth, I call it." Varying stylistically on many fronts from that protean and eminent filmmaker, Miller arrives at a similar goal, managing to get at a "truth" about what it means to be an individual, alone yet ensnared in society's rules, regulations, and rituals, as well as its prejudices and constraints. A clear-eyed, even tone predominates, a desire to authentically represent others, with correspondences to August Sander's early 20th century photographs of archetypical German citizens, or James Agee's painstakingly recorded accounts of sharecropper life in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, an observant, patient, compassionate chronicling of the human condition.

The four-channel "Death of a School," is a predominantly quiet and meticulously observed chronicle of two Tucson elementary schools shot right before their permanent closings. The topic is personal, as Miller's mother taught at one of them for many years, but also broad in scope, a portrayal of the effects of political ineptitude and anti-immigration policies. Not overly ideological, but bearing witness with melancholic resignation. In Miller's words, the school's shuttering precipitates "the death of thought in the pictured space." An element of "Death of a School" entitled "Requiem" features Miller's mother's back and forth with her students on the school's last day open, exhibiting an obvious love for pedagogical interaction, and kids running and playing outside, with an elegiac mood evoked by selections from Robert Schumann's "Kinderszenen" (Scenes from Childhood) for piano. Also on view will be the work "Athens," consisting of interviews with students at the Athens High School in south Los Angeles. From the tragic to the trivial, the participants' tales are resplendent with the individual's agency in characterizing themselves, with the important caveat that a collateral phenomenon to such an endeavor is both a subconscious and often overtly conscious reliance on clichés learned from the movies, television, and social media. An underlying theme here is that the people in these works, and all of us by extension, are constantly confronted and influenced by depictions made by others even though they might have extremely negative connotations. This whole brew, civilization's loaded history, the implication of the camera's presence, and the audience, is the underlying reality Miller deals with and also an opportunity for her subjects to throw the shackles off, to break through, and break down the conventions of delineation. Therein lies the "sublime subjectivity," from mute humble infrastructure, to "just" another human being describing their travails and triumphs, rendered substantial, consequential, and even radiant.