

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.

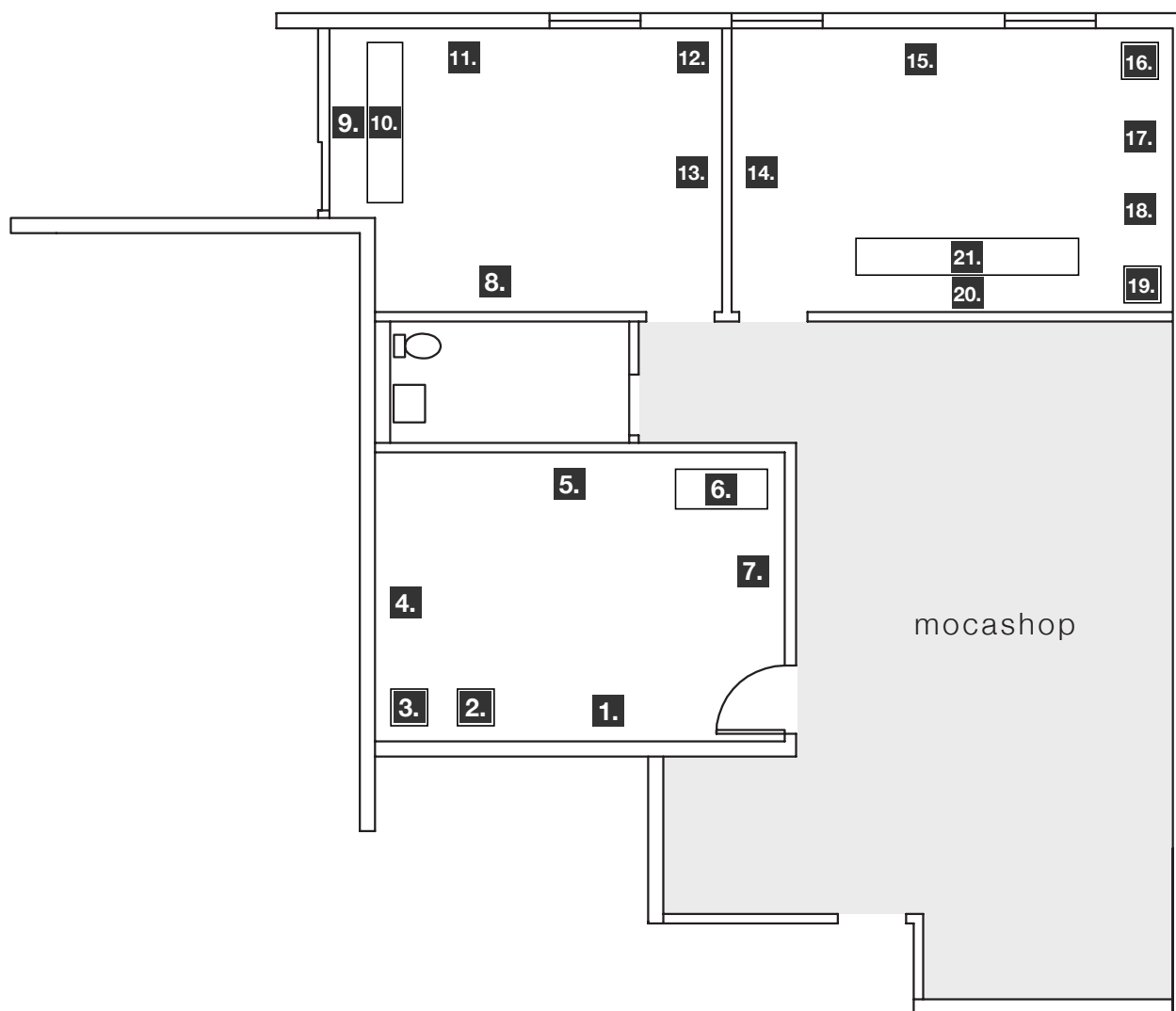
Miller's videos specifically zero in on the interrelationship between preconceptions and reality in terms of the African American experience's uniqueness, with a powerful narrative arc that can furnish psychic and filmic reparation for lost histories and identities. What goes on in her vivid or prosaic, 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.

NORTH GALLERIES

SELECTIONS FROM THE ARTS FOR ALL ARCHIVE

For All



- 1. Kevin Charles Judith** (10) works on paper
- 2. Stacy Stokes** (1) ceramic
- 3. Brent Quihuis** (1), **Jon Green** (1) ceramics
- 4. Steven Scott** (1) work on paper
- 5. Brenda Lewis** (10) works on paper
- 6. Brenda Lewis** (4) ceramics (below art on wall)
- 7. Brooke Foster** (4) works on paper
- 8. Janet Morgan** (3) works on paper
- 9. Bryan Briggs, Michelle Buscemi, Antonio Childress, Thomas Stone, Anne Reber, Stephanie Lopez, Alex Marquez, Nick Waldron, Brooke Foster, Arts For All Staff** (1) collaborative painting
- 10. Left to right: Olga Michaels** (1), **Brian Mondeau** (1), **Vanessa Graves** (1), **Michelle Buscemi** (1), **Brian Mondeau** (1), **Brenda Lewis** (3) ceramics (below art on wall)
- 11. Jason Baker** (4) works on paper
- 12. Megan Froehling** (1) work on paper
- 13. Julio Cocio** (5) works on paper
- 14. Colin Whetsel** (18) works on paper
- 15. Colin Whetsel** (11) works on paper
- 16. Colin Whetsel** (2) ceramics
- 17. Stephanie Lopez** (2) works on paper
- 18. Steven Fimbres** (2) works on paper
- 19. Stacy Stokes** (1) ceramic
- 20. Alex Marquez, Nick Waldron, Stephanie Lopez, Thomas Stone, Arts For All Staff** (1) collaborative painting
- 21. Left to right: Steven Fimbres** (1), **Christian Pereida** (1), **Antonio Childress** (1), **Stacy Stokes** (1), **Brenda Lewis** (2), **Kevin Charles Judith** (1), **Jon Green** (1) ceramics (below art on wall)