

A review of “HIV through their Mind” 12/12/16

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The effects due to AIDS complicate the normal growth and development that children undergo. The HIV/AIDS narratives of children show that children may be left isolated due to this process. Andrew Wang seeks to address this issue and the efforts working to assist children in a piece utilizing pastel and actual puzzle pieces entitled “HIV through their Mind.”

Mr. Wang utilizes the technique made famous by Tom Phillips’s *A Humument*, which focuses on excavating new pieces from documents of text. To do this, Phillips commonly utilizes artwork to cover over parts of text while leaving behind connected bits of text that together form new meaning.

The original piece, that Wang utilized, is from the Maria De Bruyn collection called “Through their Eyes,” which was a collection of photographs from children involved in the project of Picturing Hope. This project was focused on empowering children through self-expression in photography and relationships with other children (Picturing Hope). After examining both the artist’s work and the underlying document, it appears that the artist selected the work because of an optimistic message that it holds for the future of the intervention it details. Wang expressed previously that he desired to inflate an optimism for AIDS-affected children as a whole based off of sentiments expressed in the original piece. At the same time, the artist recognized the realistic view of the original document on the difficulties of a children’s’ development and sought to create a dynamic between this optimism and realism.



”HIV through their Mind”

In a multi-step process, it appears that the artist integrates a 3-dimensional element with a Humument-like usage of pastel to re-contextualize the original document. According to Tom Phillips, “One thing never quite explained is that the art

element, so to speak, is both provoked and conditioned by the words and what joins them, which has its own visual energy and — because I almost always link by following the rivers in the type — is a kind of scaffolding. Sometimes itself being the drawing” (King 2012). With this idea, Andrew Wang harnesses this visual energy by purposeful construction of a puzzle backing around the new ideas excavated from the piece. The puzzle is actually a children’s 100-piece puzzle fit to the dimensions of the project itself, as to re-emphasize the focus on children within the original document and the newly created piece. In an interview with Mr. Wang, he makes clear that the puzzle is supposed to symbolize the growth and development of the child’s mind and the progress that is being made. In a subtle play on personal experiences of the difficulties in completing the sky sections of puzzles, Wang states: “the puzzle portion of the piece itself is colored sky blue to emphasize the difficulty in its completion” as a way to show that children’s minds are complicated and development is complex. At the same time, it appears the black coloring was used to contrast the completed section and show that the rest of the puzzle remains incomplete.

At first glance, a viewer can see a clear separation of one set of texts surrounded by black space from another set of texts that lie surrounded by the sky-blue of the puzzle that has already been constructed. Upon evaluating the integration of the puzzle metaphor and the Humumentism re-contextualization of the original document, it becomes clear that Andrew Wang built the completed puzzle to surround a variety of positive statements around the successes in the development of children. Examples of these newly formed and excavated ideas include “in children lives future hope” and “information and dialogue keep Hope, children not alone” as well as “community open feelings relate perceptions opened engaging their own children.” This is then contrasted to the incomplete sections of the puzzle which themselves possess negative statements representing the barriers to progress in the growth of these AIDS-affected children. Examples of these barrier statements include “AIDS children underdeveloped or even ignored” or “left at-risk without a sense of belonging.” These negative statements possess a depressing effect given that no person desires that children remain “ignored” or “without a sense of belonging”. At the same time, the rising positive statements create a sense of hope of the possibility that these children can be integrated back into the community. For this reviewer, this contrast also creates the idea that if the puzzle were to be continued, the text within the negative space would be concealed. And while the construction of the piece around these contrasting statements is not immediately evident for all reviewers, careful reading of the text shows a clear positive and negative dichotomy.

The piece demonstrates the invested hope that lies within the development of children as well as the unsure barriers that must be overcome especially in the case of AIDS-affected children. Overcoming these obstacles must be accomplished through the information, dialogue, and engagement that the piece advocates for. Despite great success and contributions from programs like Picturing Hope, greater efforts must be made to support and raise these children. Together, in collaboration with children, Wang shows we can make progress piece by piece.

References

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