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## Hysterical Spaces: Curatorship and Meaning in the Traveling Exhibition: A Case Study of the National Gallery of Canada's "Hysteria and the Body."

### INTRODUCTION

*Art historians...have rarely addressed the fact that a work of art, when publicly displayed, almost never stands alone. Seeing the importance of exhibition design provides an approach to art history that acknowledges the vitality, historicity, and the time-and-site-bound character of all aspects of culture.<sup>1</sup>*

**A**rt galleries are powerful in surprisingly covert ways. In conjunction with decisions made by the exhibition curator, messages are delivered through intention as well as through subtle nuances. Due to their changes in venue, traveling exhibitions provide us with the opportunity to draw comparisons between aspects of curatorship and space. This essay is a case study of a traveling exhibition entitled *Hysteria and the Body*, developed at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. The exhibition was first presented at this gallery in October 2004 and was subsequently displayed at the Windsor Art Gallery in March 2008, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in September 2008, and the Mendel Art Gallery in January 2009. The artworks in *Hysteria and the Body* are a mélange of mixed media, including drawings, paintings, photography, sculpture and video installation. The size and variety of artworks in *Hysteria and the Body* called for a new arrangement within each institution.

Through a comparison of one exhibition in multiple spaces, this paper will ascertain the intrinsic agency found within a gallery space as an exhibition is transformed through a collection of architectural minutiae. These details include, but

are not limited to, lighting, flooring, ceilings, artwork, wall colour and text panels. These details cannot be ignored, as they possess the ability to affect visitor perceptions and transmit messages to audiences. They are just as influential as the artwork itself, if not more so.

It is important that both art historians and gallery visitors recognize the power of the gallery space upon audience emotions, reactions and comprehension of the artwork. I will emphasize the effect of gallery space as separate from the artwork on display. This paper will also contribute to a critical appreciation for curatorial decision-making regarding exhibition design. It will bring awareness to the details which are directly altered by the curator and not the artist, thus emphasizing the importance of the curatorial role.

Scholars have identified a number of variables affecting the audience experience of art museum spaces, and so a review of their findings will contribute to a better understanding of the power of the gallery space. Following this, an examination of the history of hysteria and the way it is viewed today will familiarize readers with the theme of the exhibition. A detailed discussion of *Hysteria and the Body* will exemplify the exhibition's main theme and curatorial message. A description of the four galleries that exhibited *Hysteria and the Body* will illustrate the disparities between the spaces. A critique of each gallery space will indicate that the curatorial message of *Hysteria and the Body* did not and could not remain the same.

#### THE EFFECTS OF GALLERY SPACE

In "Art Museums as Perceived by the Public," George Nash, an employee of the Westchester County Community Mental Health Board, discusses the attendance levels of New Yorkers at local art galleries. The results of his study indicate that visitors to the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, New York appreciate the presence of both furniture and plants in the gallery space.<sup>2</sup> While the inclusion of furniture and plants may seem like an obvious addition in order to create a pleasant and comfortable environment, it is not a large stretch to discover that other features of a gallery space affect visitors as well.

Curator and architectural critic Jeffrey Kipnis has noted the influence of the physical structure of the gallery space upon an exhibition. In a published letter to Paula Marincola, the editor of *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Kipnis asks:

And what of the importance of the architecture of the physical facility in which an exhibition takes place? Terry Riley...is fond of showing the *Winged Victory* in the Louvre and making the point that...the melodramatic staging of the piece by the architecture produces the inescapable effect of assuring him – and everyone else – that it is the most important of masterpieces.<sup>3</sup>

While it may seem obvious that a curator should have an effect on the way in which artwork is presented, less apparent is the power of the architecture. Kipnis also notes that the space can affect an entire exhibition: “I see as many exhibitions as I can in multiple venues and the effect of the building on the exhibition – simply cannot be overstated....It is in that augmentation that the museum has a unique and coherent voice.”<sup>4</sup> Kipnis recognizes the power of the modern art museum and its ability to influence exhibitions that are staged either once or more than once.

In “Exhibits: A Production Checklist,” exhibition designer Eugene Bergmann looks at the logistics of exhibitions. He discusses how the process of display causes correlating changes.

Making an exhibition involves a host of options. Virtually every aspect is affected by all the others and should take each of them into account. All through the production process there are likely to be additions, deletions and changes....This may lead to situations where an item would like to push and shove some other item that [was]...determined previously.<sup>5</sup>

It is routine when creating a traveling exhibition to plan the design in advance so that curators at borrowing galleries are not required to make any decisions.<sup>6</sup> However, despite the intentions of the original curator, the gallery architecture and decor will inevitably dictate the arrangement of artwork, as each space is unique. As Bergmann indicates, installation decisions unavoidably will affect the final outcome of

the display and its curatorial message.

#### A HISTORY OF HYSTERIA AND A CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING

Hippocrates (c. 460 – c. 370 BCE) is often identified as the father of medicine, and he developed the term *hysteria* based on the belief that a woman's uterus could move upwards in the body and lodge itself in the chest area. He claimed this happened after it became light and dry from lack of sexual intercourse.<sup>7</sup> Other scholars, such as Plato (c. 428 – c. 347 BCE) contributed to the writings on hysteria. In one text Plato described the condition as occurring in “the so-called womb or matrix of women.”<sup>8</sup> He continues,

The animal within them is desirous of procreating children and when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time...drives them to extremity, causing all varieties of disease.<sup>9</sup>

These statements and ideas were expressed by respected and educated men. This led to a disease which largely affected women, but was entirely defined by the male gender. The result was a discipline of physicians who rarely challenged the diagnosis. Harold Merskey, professor of psychiatry and author of *Analysis of Hysteria*, recognizes that there are intrinsic issues with the early explanations of the disease.

Not all Greek medical writers believed in it and some of the seemingly wild flights of fancy which would have the womb cause choking need qualification...[however] Despite the skepticism of prominent medical authors, the idea of the mobile uterus persisted quite strongly.<sup>10</sup>

The symptoms of hysteria were copious and included severe cramps, abdominal pain, chest constriction, difficulty breathing, epileptic-like fits, headaches, clenched teeth, tense muscles, urine retention and paralysis. In the twentieth century, the causes of hysteria were thought to include stress, idleness, sexual repression, perverted thoughts, nervousness, worry, depression and prolonged sickness.<sup>11</sup> The diagnosis

could therefore be applied to the medical concerns of many women. This may have led to misdiagnosis in many cases.

The diagnosis of hysteria became widely popular in Europe in the mid nineteenth century. Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot brought hysteria to the attention of society and his peers as “a so-called general neurosis.”<sup>12</sup> Many of the artworks in *Hysteria and the Body*, such as Nicole Jolicoeur’s *Woman in Hysteria* and Louise Bourgeois’ *Arch of Hysteria*, were directly influenced by Charcot’s studies. Although the doctor was dedicated to examining the many symptoms of hysteria, and believed that he was contributing to the field of medicine, he lacked interest in truly understanding the women he studied. This is evidenced by his emphasis on physical causes and symptoms and a lack of interest in the psychological aspects of the condition.

As the medical profession advanced into the twentieth century, studies surrounding hysteria began to decline in number and fewer patients were diagnosed as hysteric. Although the condition of hysteria departed from the medical profession in 1980<sup>13</sup> and is no longer considered a viable diagnosis, it has not totally receded into the background of history.

#### THE EXHIBITION

*Hysteria and the Body* was developed by Josée Drouin-Brisebois, the Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada.<sup>14</sup> The exhibition was not originally intended to travel. It was not until a year after the show had been exhibited in Ottawa that its popularity encouraged curators to market it as a traveling exhibition. *Hysteria and the Body* was designed as a thematic exhibition using pieces from the National Gallery’s permanent collection. A 1999 Art Metropole donation contained a number of pieces created by female artists, and the curator also wanted to incorporate her own interest in hysteria, a topic that she researched while completing her Masters degree.<sup>15</sup>

*Hysteria and the Body* is described as follows in the National Gallery of Canada’s *On Tour Brochure* from 2006, which is provided for Canadian galleries looking to rent a traveling exhibition:

The exhibition focuses on contemporary works – mainly by women artists – investigating representations of the “hysterical” body, stereotypes of femininity and the performance of the self. As it explores stereotypical images of women, the exhibition seeks to disrupt traditional ways of viewing the figure and our preconceptions of “normal” behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

The variety of media and artists in this exhibition play a large role in offering viewers diverse understandings of the self. The exhibition also documents the 1970's feminist response to the studies of hysteria at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of the artworks can be perceived as shocking, which may be due to their graphic nature. A number of pieces include nudity, such as Louise Bourgeois' *Saint Sebastienne* and *Arch of Hysteria* as well as Vito Acconci's *Trademarks*. Other works, such as Nicole Jolicoeur's *The Perfect Path* and *Woman in Hysteria* use original sketches and photographs of women affected by the symptoms of hysteria.

Drouin-Brisebois believes that this exhibition offers a resistance strategy, and this is an important part of the curatorial message of *Hysteria and the Body*. She asserts, “It is important to think about hysteria and women in this context. Representations of woman have been controlled for one reason or another.”<sup>17</sup> Linda Jansma, Curator of *Hysteria and the Body* at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa expands on this description of the exhibition's theme: “It is an historic concept seen through the lens of feminism about a particular time in history. It looks at the feminist notion of women's role in society, whether in the arts or in society in general.”<sup>18</sup> Cassandra Getty, Collections Manager at the Art Gallery of Windsor, explains that the exhibition is “a roughly chronological, thematic exploration of gender roles.”<sup>19</sup> *Hysteria and the Body* is a unique presentation of a subject that, in many ways, still holds relevance today.

## THE SPACES

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

The National Gallery of Canada has created a series of rooms with the intent that they be neutral for the display of artwork. One large room and three smaller rooms were used to display the *Hysteria and the Body* exhibition. All of these rooms consist of well-finished ceilings with parallel rows of track lighting. The ceiling in the main gallery is higher than those in the other rooms. This ceiling also has two large rectangular cavities, which act as a skylight when opened. The flooring in the National Gallery of Canada space consists of small, closely joined slats of polished poplar-coloured wood. The combination of the high, finished ceilings and the polished wood floors give the space a fresh, light and modern feeling.

This fresh and modern feeling was emphasized even further when the space was used to present *Hysteria and the Body*. For this exhibition the type of lighting and wall colour was changed dramatically. Despite only displaying artwork against the walls within the main gallery, a large number of pot lights were installed on the center tracks and directed towards the floor. In addition, the two rectangular skylights were opened, allowing natural light to enter the room. Drouin-Brisebois worked with a graphic designer to develop a contrasting red and grey colour scheme. Both the title panel and one wall in the second and third room were painted a vibrant red. The rest of the walls in the large room were painted grey and the walls in the remaining rooms were left an eggshell white. In two of the rooms the white wall colour was chosen by Drouin-Brisebois, while the fourth room required it as part of Nicole Jolicoeur's *The Perfect Path* installation. This room was lit brightly, which enhanced the white paint, the white acrylic lettering on the walls and the white drapery of the artwork.

Both the second and third rooms were darker than the first and fourth. The purpose of this was to provide theatrical lighting for the curator's two favourite pieces, Louise Bourgeois' *Arch of Hysteria* and Jana Sterbak's *Seduction Couch*.

Both *Seduction Couch* and *Arch of Hysteria* maintained a powerful presence within the gallery space. By darkening the room and placing light on the objects, the curator created an air of drama and accentuated their importance. There is a distinct difference in atmosphere between the larger room, which has a light, almost playful feeling, and the second and third rooms, which lend an ominous air to the exhibition.

The video artworks were installed within the main room. The videos were presented on black monitors in front of the grey painted wall. There was little space and demarcation between the video monitors, the glass topped vitrine, and Vito Acconci's *Kiss Off* and *Trademarks* prints. While the other artworks in this area, such as Shelagh Keeley's *Writing on the Body*, Louise Bourgeois' *View from the Bottom of the Well* and Nicole Jolicoeur's *Woman in Hysteria*, were given a proportionate amount of space on either side, all of the works in this room were presented against the same grey backdrop and under a similar amount of light. This suggests that the curator expected the works to be viewed equally, and not as an overly dominant part of the exhibition (unlike *The Perfect Path*, *Seduction Couch* and *Arch of Hysteria*).

#### NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA CRITIQUE

There are a number of factors that contribute to the overall atmosphere and curatorial message of *Hysteria and the Body* at the National Gallery of Canada. As described above, many factors within the space contribute to a fresh and contemporary appearance, including the colour scheme chosen by Drouin-Brisebois. White walls in contemporary galleries have long been accepted as the norm because they provide a neutral foundation for the display of artwork. Artist and writer Brian O'Doherty describes colour in the twentieth century gallery space: "The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white....The art is free, as the saying used to go, 'to take on its own life.'"<sup>20</sup> However, coloured walls have the ability to persuade visitor perceptions. It has long been known by graphic and interior designers that colours can affect human emotion. The authors of *Design for Modern Living: A Practical Guide to Home Furnishings*

*and Interior Design* write: "Colours are often associated with particular moods, though here exact relationships are impossible to pin down because much depends on... light or dark tonalities, the proximity of other colours....Generally however, yellow tends to be cheerful and even radiant; blue is deep, cool, and transparent...."<sup>21</sup> In the same regard, the tonality of the red developed by the graphic designer who worked with Drouin-Brisebois causes viewers to feel apprehensive, excited and even manic.

While the addition of red paint reminded viewers of the shocking subject matter, the room still maintained a light and airy feeling. This feeling was ultimately created by the amount, and type of lighting within the exhibition space. Extra lighting heads were added to the tracks on the ceiling for *Hysteria and the Body*, and natural light was let into the main room through two large skylights. The pale-coloured, highly polished wood flooring reflected the ceiling light and the white colouring of Shelagh Keeley's *Writing on the Body*, enhancing the size and brightness of the room. In this way, the subject matter was made approachable in the space

There was less light in the second and third rooms, and this curatorial decision accentuated the importance of certain artworks. Louise Bourgeois' *Arch of Hysteria* and Jana Sterbak's *Sulking Room* and *Seduction Couch* were shrouded in relative darkness and highlighted by direct spotlights. These artworks were segregated in different rooms and were placed far from each other, allowing viewers to concentrate solely on one piece at a time. This design undoubtedly emphasized the artworks and viewers will have assumed that these pieces were the most significant.

It is important to note that some pieces in the National Gallery presentation did not travel at all. Jana Sterbak's *Seduction Couch* was not transported to any of the other spaces because of safety concerns.<sup>22</sup> Also, Marina Abramovic's *Art Must be Beautiful* was not shown at the other institutions. As the exhibition traveled, Abramovic's video was switched for another by Pipilotti Rist entitled (*Entlastungen*) *Pipilottis Fehler*. *Art Must be Beautiful* was part of a larger compilation of videos by Abramovic and Ulay entitled *A Performance Anthology: Ulay & Marina Abramovic 1975-1980*. Further correspondence with the artist revealed that she did not wish

for the videos within this compilation to be separated.<sup>23</sup> Finally, *Arch of Hysteria* did not travel to The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Overall however, this exhibition succeeded in bringing the subject of hysteria and its later feminist interpretations into the twenty-first century. The curator achieved this by displaying the artwork in a bright environment with an excess of both natural and artificial light. The artworks in *Hysteria and the Body* were most effective when they left viewers feeling mildly uncomfortable and Drouin-Brisebois emphasized this using bold colours. The implications of hysteria and its effects on women are a solemn subject matter. Therefore, the curator achieved a balance of accessibility and an air of drama by using the gallery space to her benefit.

#### ART GALLERY OF WINDSOR

The Art Gallery of Windsor was the second location to host *Hysteria and the Body*. Curated by Cassandra Getty, the exhibition was available for viewing from March 29 to June 15, 2008. The ceilings at the Art Gallery of Windsor are uncommonly high in almost every room, including that used to display *Hysteria and the Body*. The height of these ceilings exceeds those in the National Gallery of Canada. In the room used to display the exhibition, the ceilings appear unfinished at first. However the exposed and functional black pipes are an intended part of the building's design. In some areas, floating ceilings have been hung in order to hold the track lighting necessary in a gallery setting.

Three large windows offer multiple sources of natural light. This is in addition to light which streams from stairwells at either end of the main thoroughfare on the floor in question. The floors are brushed cement and are polished to a high shine, emphasizing the height of the room by reflecting both the ceiling and the walls. The floors are a scuffed light grey, although their ability to reflect the room alters their colouring to that of the current exhibition. Many of these details, such as the flooring style, the ceiling height, and the direction of the lighting are subtle in themselves but send distinct messages when grouped together.

A number of these messages become clear when we look specifically at *Hysteria and the Body* within the space at the Art Gallery of Windsor. The lighting for

this exhibition was used to accentuate the objects as well as the space around them. The pot lights were aimed in wide soft circles, casting radiance not solely on the objects but on the floor as well. The light on the floor altered the normally grey hue to a bright white, contributing to a stark and colorless décor. For this exhibition the walls were also painted a severe white, which emphasized the white pigmentation found within the cement flooring. This colouring is distinctly different than that used at the National Gallery of Canada. The curator at this gallery chose not to repeat the theme of grey and red, which radically altered the exhibition. Similarities between both exhibitions can be seen only in the generous amount of space between each larger piece of artwork.

Aside from (*Entlastungen*) Pipilottis Fehler replacing *Art Must be Beautiful*, there were considerable discrepancies between the video presentations at each gallery. The curator at the National Gallery of Canada presented the videos in a very inclusive way, positioning them equally amidst other artworks in the main room. However, at the Windsor Art Gallery, the videos were presented in an isolated, darkened room. In correspondence between the curatorial team at the Art Gallery of Windsor and the traveling exhibition coordinator at the National Gallery of Canada, it was decided that the video room would be painted black.<sup>24</sup> There was no explanation for why this decision was made, but Drouin-Brisebois, despite being present at the Windsor installation, did not take part in this correspondence regarding wall colour.

#### ART GALLERY OF WINDSOR CRITIQUE

It was in its second incarnation that *Hysteria and the Body* was altered the most. The ceiling at the Art Gallery of Windsor is an expanse of blackness, penetrated only by small sections of white suspended ceilings with track lighting. This immense stretch of darkness immediately brings a solemn air to the exhibition. In addition to the height and colour of the ceiling, there was a considerable amount of space between each of the artworks and this made the room appear vastly larger than it already is.

Like the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Windsor used a number of ceiling lights to illuminate the exhibition. In addition, various windows throughout the space allowed natural light into the rooms. However, because the walls were painted white, the space appeared subdued and melancholic as opposed to radiant and approachable.

The space used to present the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Windsor epitomizes the term *white cube*.<sup>25</sup> “Black and white are the levelers. They’re both emphasis and outline colours: white is the most ‘reflective’ colour of all; black disciplines [and] dramatizes...the greater the contrast, the greater the drama.”<sup>26</sup> The white colour on the walls, contrasted with the black of the ceiling, caused the environment to appear cold and foreboding. This cold feeling was emphasized further still by the cement flooring. The ominous atmosphere no doubt forced patrons to view the subject matter and artwork as ominous as well.

In a discussion of her curatorial considerations, Drouin-Brisebois indicated that she required both of the videos to be shown on separate television monitors. In this way they could be deliberately displayed as singular artworks.<sup>27</sup> Positioning the videos in a separate room sends a similar message to the viewer: the works should be given separate consideration. However, it could also emphasize the value and importance of the videos in relation to the entire exhibition. This is a very different message than the one of equality communicated by their installation at the National Gallery of Canada (where they were displayed in the main room with a number of other works). Furthermore, the shadowed space and the concrete flooring surrounding the videos at the Art Gallery of Windsor greatly increased the seriousness of the exhibition’s theme.

Much of the artwork in *Hysteria and the Body* inevitably made some viewers uncomfortable, and in fact docents at the Art Gallery of Windsor claimed that school programming had to be altered, and some elderly visitors chose to avoid the exhibition all together.<sup>28</sup> Though much of the artwork was disconcerting, it was still intended to educate viewers as it did at the National Gallery of Canada, not alienate them.

While the Art Gallery of Windsor was immensely successful in creating an overall ambiance, the space did not properly relay the curatorial message. The amount of uninterrupted space, in addition to the expanse of white pigmentation, communicated a sense of desolation and melancholy. With all of the changes in lighting, wall colour, and the layout of installation, the message in this traveling exhibition cannot be expected to have remained the same.

#### THE ROBERT McLAUGHLIN GALLERY

*Hysteria and the Body* was displayed at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario from September 17 to November 9, 2008, and was curated by Linda Jansma. The Robert McLaughlin Gallery spaces are strikingly different from those at the Art Gallery of Windsor and the National Gallery of Canada. Certainly the height of the ceiling is not as dramatic as that of the ceiling in the Windsor gallery. The ceiling in the one room used to display *Hysteria and the Body* is coffered with six large indentations, separated by track lighting on expansive support beams. At Oshawa, there was less lighting used than at the National Gallery of Canada. Soft spotlights were focused on the art objects. Natural light enters from the foyer as well as a back exit from the room which connects to a sitting area with six windows with white blinds. These blinds are often closed so that the nearby exhibitions are not flooded with additional light, although this control is not entirely successful. In this space additional light would not be an issue (the National Gallery had skylights as well), but it is clear that the curator used less artificial light in order to create a more dramatic atmosphere. Also, the space next to the back exit was darkened specifically in order to display the video installations. The most defining feature of this gallery space is the floor, which is covered completely by dark grey carpeting.

#### THE ROBERT McLAUGHLIN GALLERY CRITIQUE

With the type of décor and amount of space available, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery did a commendable job of exhibiting *Hysteria and the Body*. Unfortunately, this gallery was unable to display Louise Bourgeois' *Arch of Hysteria*. The

ceiling at this gallery could not support the weight of the piece, which is approximately three hundred pounds. There was debate about whether the exhibition could be displayed without the sculpture. After careful consideration by Drouin-Brisebois, it was finally decided that the exhibition would convey the same message without the piece. However, the sculpture was important because it encapsulated a number of important messages, including a commentary of the work on Jean-Martin Charcot and a twentieth century feminist interpretation. Louise Bourgeois sculpted a male figure but posed him in an hysteric arch, a position which was traditionally viewed in females diagnosed with hysteria. The sheer size of *Arch of Hysteria* gives it a powerful presence, and creates a memorable experience for visitors. Because of this, its exclusion at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery lessened the integrity of the curatorial message.

The lighting for the third manifestation of *Hysteria and the Body* was entirely different from that of the previous exhibitions. The lights maintained a warm beige undertone, softening the metaphorical sharp edges of the exhibition. This type of gentle, limited lighting may have been intended to create drama, but instead worked to make the room feel intimate and comfortable. This negated the slight uneasiness generated by the exhibition's subject matter. Looking at this artwork, and thinking about this subject, should not be soothing. This type of atmosphere detracted from the forthright curatorial message.

The ceiling in this gallery was much like that at the Art Gallery of Windsor in that it had a floating ceiling as well. At the Art Gallery of Windsor this caused the roof to appear much higher, but at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery it had the opposite effect of making the room appear smaller (perhaps because the ceiling was white and not black). The reduction to the actual size of the room was also effected by the carpeted floor. Paul Goldberger discusses the agency of architecture, and specifically flooring, in his book *Why Architecture Matters*:

the nature and the feel of the space within a building can mean as much as anything else about the building, and sometimes more. Space can feel...small and confining. It can feel

soft or hard; a space that is carpeted and paneled in wood will treat you more gently than a space of exactly the same dimensions that has a terrazzo floor and solid walls.<sup>29</sup>

It is inevitable that the carpeting in The Robert McLaughlin Gallery space will contribute to a gentler atmosphere. This type of flooring is a very domestic material that gives viewers a feeling of comfort. Therefore, the space at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery was not supportive of the message of the artwork, and in many ways, contradicted it completely. Flooring is an important aspect of décor and carpeting is not conducive to a neutral gallery space. Non-neutral flooring can overpower the artwork on display, and detract from its role as the primary element of the décor.

#### **MENDEL ART GALLERY**

The Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon was the final location in the *Hysteria and the Body* traveling exhibition. It was displayed from January 16 to March 29, 2009 and was curated by Dan Ring and Jen Budney. The most remarkable aspect of the main gallery space used to present *Hysteria and the Body* is the ceiling construction. The ceiling here is made up of parallel dark wooden beams that have been installed horizontally. The ceiling in the second gallery space, which is approximately two feet lower, is a simple expanse of flat black paint. The lighting in the main gallery space has been installed on tracks, which are both parallel and perpendicular to the wooden beams. There is almost no intrusion of natural light into this space. The entrances from the foyer are protected by a frosted glass door, which allows only minimal light to enter the room. The second gallery also has the same type of track lighting, though it is centered in the middle of the ceiling, rather than along the edges near the walls. The walls in both galleries are painted with a standard white gallery colour.

Although the floors appear to be wood, closer inspection reveals that they are made of cork. Like the wood floors at the National Gallery of Canada and the cement floors at the Windsor Art Gallery, the cork flooring at the Mendel Gallery is highly polished.

As at Ottawa, the pieces in the main gallery of the Mendel were spaced far apart. There are other similarities in the curatorial approaches to displaying these objects. Though the curators brought attention to the *Arch of Hysteria* as well by hanging it in the centre of the room, they also emphasized Shelagh Keeley's *Writing on the Body* (1988). The piece was installed on a large detached wall near the room's entrance. This wall was extended upwards by three feet in order to provide the piece with extra space.<sup>30</sup> This location brings attention to the work, enhances its size, and therefore implies its importance within the exhibition.

#### MENDEL ART GALLERY CRITIQUE

The ceilings in this space are both grand and unique. They are so well designed and positioned that they could be considered art themselves. It is very possible that they distract viewers who enter the space and pay more attention to the magnificent wooden beams and spend less time reflecting on the artwork. The ceiling treatments are also inconsistent, changing to a smooth black roof in other areas.

The vitrine that was placed in the hallway between the main room and the second room displaying Nicole Jolicoeur's *The Perfect Path*, may have compromised the significance of the contents within. Hallways are areas that many visitors walk through without stopping and this can cause some artwork to be overlooked. The anticipation of artwork in the second room may have created a sense of tunnel vision in visitors, causing them to walk straight through the hallway, past the vitrine of smaller artworks and Vito Acconci's *Kiss Off* and *Trademarks*.

However, these concerns are minimal and for the most part the Mendel Art Gallery provided a space for *Hysteria and the Body* which was neutral but not dull. The rooms were also balanced between sterility and warmth, making it an ideal space for the exhibition because the atmosphere of the space would not sway viewers, and instead the artwork was able to speak for itself.

## CONCLUSION

*Hysteria and the Body* is an exceptional exhibition with a powerful curatorial message. As the original marketing for the exhibition described, *Hysteria and the Body* depicts artists “investigating representations of the ‘hysterical’ body, stereotypes of femininity and the performance of the self...the exhibition seeks to disrupt traditional ways of viewing the figure and our preconceptions of ‘normal’ behaviour.”<sup>31</sup> This message is achieved through the artwork itself, and a number of curatorial decisions regarding exhibition plan, wall colour, lighting and didactic material. Most importantly, the exhibition’s message was largely affected by the gallery space in which it was displayed. It can be said that the display was so altered within each new space that it could be considered a different exhibition all together. The strongest reason for this argument is that the artworks in the exhibition did not remain the same in each space.

Aside from simply creating awareness of the issues discussed here, a solution to the problem of altered traveling exhibitions is to develop more programs similar to the Smithsonian Institution’s Traveling Exhibitions Service. By combining Smithsonian artworks and exhibition ideas with the permanent collection of a borrowing gallery, there is no pretense that the exhibition will remain true to its original design.

The National Gallery of Canada displayed *Hysteria and the Body* in a contemporary gallery space with clean lines, modern colours and a vast array of lighting. A dramatic display in adjacent rooms emphasized certain pieces, and bold sections of red and grey paint informed visitors that the subject matter was extreme but that the artists represented were offering a modern day interpretation.

When *Hysteria and the Body* was exhibited at the Art Gallery of Windsor in 2008 the combination of white walls, white cement floors and black ceilings created a sense of coldness and foreboding. The subject of hysteria was unapproachable within this space, which contradicted the original curatorial intent.

The space at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery was far more welcoming to visitors. Much of this was due to the warm lighting<sup>32</sup> and the expanse of grey carpeting. However, the atmosphere was too comfortable for visitors to suitably contemplate

the issue of hysteria.

The Mendel Art Gallery was a successful space for the *Hysteria and the Body* exhibition. It was aesthetically pleasing and provided an impartial foundation for an exhibition that featured effective and compelling artwork. The space was attractive and the elements of décor did not overwhelm the artwork on display.

While the exhibition was fascinating for viewers in all four spaces, the Art Gallery of Windsor and The Robert McLaughlin Gallery offered a visitor experience that reached too far in opposite directions. The Windsor gallery appeared uncomfortable whereas the décor in the Oshawa gallery was too intimate. This study of one exhibition in multiple spaces supports the contention that subsequent curatorial decisions and variations in the architecture of the gallery space will undoubtedly alter the curatorial message of a traveling exhibition.

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## END NOTES

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