

Divergent Consistencies

The Studio and Community Art of Hugh Merrill, 1969-2009

Presented by Leedy-Voukos Art Center, September 4-27, 2009
2012 Baltimore Street Kansas City, MO 64108, 816-474-1919
www.leedyvoukos.com www.hughmerrill.com 816-686-8626

PORTRAIT OF SELF

Portrait of Self is an arts and educational process to help people talk about the many influences that create their sense of self. A self-portrait in the most traditional sense is the reproduction of one's own reflection in a mirror. Portrait of Self is an archive of drawings, poetry, writing, photography, daily lists and other documentation. The participant creates an archive as a representation of the complexity of life. Portrait of Self is an investigation of the sources that make us who we are.

This process is designed to help challenge habitual ways of approaching issues of social and personal content. The process is a means to react and investigate heritage, families, lifestyles, memories, and values using artistic practice. It allows communities to investigate difficult personal and social issues such as race, consumer culture, sexual orientation, gender, and religion. The text is not meant to solve social or personal problems, but to provide the participant with an ongoing means for investigation.



Hugh Merrill was invited to create a community art project as visiting artist for the Christian Boltanski Exhibition at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City 1997. Merrill developed the archiving project Portrait of Self, a collaborative community and conceptual artwork. The process grew out of a conversation between Boltanski and Merrill to develop the

collaborative community arts project, *Our City Ourselves*. *Our City Ourselves* used a tabloid insert placed in the Sunday paper of the Kansas City Star to invite metropolitan area residence to bring their family photographs to the Kemper Museum, copy them and place them on the wall of the gallery. Thousands of people participated placing their family archives on the walls of the museum thus turning the museum over to the general public.



Merrill built on this collaboration and produced Portrait of Self (POS), a process for individuals to make art out of their daily lives by archiving and



documenting their activities. The exhibition of the archives produces complex and insightful works of community art. Merrill originally worked with 30 high schools students from inner city schools in Kansas City, Sumner Academy and Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing. The students' produced vast personal archives documenting in detail 16 weeks of their lives. The archives were then exhibited simultaneously at the Kemper Museum and at Paseo Academy.

Portrait of Self has since been the core process in over 30 community arts action internationally and was selected by the National Endowment of the Arts Millennium Community Art Grant candidates. It has been facilitated with incarcerated youths through a grant from the Missouri Juvenile Justice System, the Kansas State School for the Blind and for inter-generational projects with Holocaust survivors and elders of an inner city nursing home. POS has



been used as a creative thinking and visual literacy curriculum at the Missouri Academy of Fine Art, Manchester Craftsman's Guild Pittsburgh PA, Eagle Rock School, Estes Park Colorado and the Kansas City Art Institute. POS was the community arts process for installations at Western Sydney University, Australia, Academy of Fine Arts Dublin Ireland and the Goddard Gallery/ Daum Museum at the State Fair College Sedalia, MO. It is the foundation for 1% public art commissions including Graphic

Murals for Dania Beach Elementary School sponsored by the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, Florida, The Art of Memory the Sanford-Kimpton Health Facility in Columbia Missouri and Roeland Park Skate Board Park, Roeland Park Kansas.

The full text and Portrait of Self Workbook/curriculum can be downloaded from www.hughmerrill.com.