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## Take This Moment: Sexual Violence Awareness and the Art Museum as a Vehicle for Social Change

Chelsea Schlievert

### ABSTRACT

*This article documents Take This Moment: Reflection Through ARTS, a sexual violence awareness project that took place in 2006 at the University of Kansas' Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, Kansas. The museum collaborated with the university's Office of Sexual Violence Education and Support Services and GaDuGi SafeCenter, a local service agency that provides assistance to survivors of sexual assault, to raise public awareness to issues of sexual violence through artistic expression, education, and community involvement.*

*Take This Moment demonstrated how art museums can address cultural violence and catalyze community awareness-raising efforts. By not only hosting but also assuming an active role in the project's development, the Spencer Museum made evident its commitment to being a part of the solution to end violence in the Lawrence community. It also repositioned itself as an organization devoted not just to the collection, preservation, and study of fine art, but as a vehicle for social justice advocacy and effecting change.*

*A month after I was attacked, I began to reject the word "victim." It made me feel bad about myself. Instead, I accepted the word "survivor." This word is full of hope and the will to overcome adversity. A victim continues to suffer at the hands of her attacker. I choose to be a survivor. I choose to heal. I choose to regain my power; I will not be destroyed by an act of evil or hate. (Daniels, presentation of "Healing Hands," April 6, 2006)*

## INTRODUCTION

On the evening of April 6, 2006, approximately 150 people gathered in the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. The gallery was silent except for the voice of painter and local high school art teacher, Cindy Daniels. Calmly and informatively, she recounted her experience surviving a brutal rape that occurred in her home on January 27, 1993. Rather than focus on the anger, fear, and guilt she felt after the assault, Daniels instead discussed her journey to self-rediscovery—a transition from self-acknowledgement as *victim* to *survivor*—a journey made possible through the practice of painting.

Daniels' presentation was one of many that took place as part of *Take This Moment: Reflection Through ARTS (Awareness, Renewal, Thought, Support)*, an educational arts outreach project that I oversaw and coordinated with three organizations based in Lawrence, Kansas: the Spencer Museum of Art, GaDuGi SafeCenter, and the University of Kansas' Office of Sexual Violence Education and Support Services (SVES). For Sexual Violence Awareness Month in April 2006, we collaborated to bring public awareness to issues of sexual violence through artistic expression and community involvement. The main event, which was a free public program, featured presentations by local artists in the forms of artist talks, poetry readings, and a group art-making project. All of these activities demonstrated how individuals and communities can heal through the production and appreciation of art. Further, *Take This Moment* became a collective educational experience. By situating it at an art museum, whose staff were active participants in its development, this project revealed not only that art can serve as an agent of social change, but also that art museums can, too.

The Spencer Museum of Art is the art museum of the University of Kansas. Its mission is to

[sustain] a diverse, global collection of art and visual culture to encourage interdisciplinary inquiry and to explore the ways in which people make and express meaning at the intersection of art, ideas, and experience. Engaging with these collections, the context of their creation, and their evolving cultural relevance, [the Museum] sparks curiosity, inspires creativity, and creates provocative connections involving art, artists, scholars, students, alumni, staff, and the public. (Spencer Museum, 2008)

GaDuGi SafeCenter is a Lawrence-based social service organization committed to the movement to end sexual violence through victim-survivor advocacy and support, community awareness, and prevention education throughout Douglas County, Kansas. In the Cherokee Nation, "GaDuGi" means "working together in a community sense." The University's SVES office educates the university community to prevent sexual assault and provides assistance when assaults occur.

In 2005-06, I served as a community outreach volunteer with the Spencer Museum of Art. The idea for *Take This Moment* arose from conversations I had with directors Saralyn Reece Hardy of the Spencer Museum, Sarah Jane Russell of GaDuGi (with which I had previously served as a crisis support advocate), and Kristen Abell, SVES Coordinator. *Take This Moment* coordinators (who are referred to throughout this essay) consisted of representatives from these three organizations and myself. We met monthly beginning in fall 2005 to brainstorm, problem-solve, and identify and resolve obstacles in preparation for the April event. Planning meetings were grounded in an agreement to understand and meet the needs of all involved parties.

As the relevance of the art museum in the 21st century is continually challenged, the museum's relationship to its community is constantly evolving. Issues of access, authority, audience, and the production of knowledge have frequently been contested, prompting art museums to further consider how they define themselves, their missions, and their relationships to their communities. The scholarly dialogue here is expansive and ongoing, as evident in the work of Bourdieu, Darbel, & Schnapper (1966, 1991); Tucker (1992); Weil (2002); De Montebello (2003); McClellan (2003); Pitman & Hirzy (2004); Cuno (2004); Janes & Conaty (2005); and on social change, community involvement, and art/museum education, Irwin & Kindler (1999); Munley (2004); Jeffers (2005); and Garber (2006). Some, such as Fleming (2005), acknowledge not only the importance of but the necessity for museums to recognize their roles in and responsibilities toward social regeneration.

In this article, I explore how a museum such as the Spencer Museum can serve as a vehicle for social change through an analysis of the *Take This Moment* project. Certainly *Take This Moment* was not the first public art event to link sexual violence education to art, nor were the artists involved the first to identify the transformative power of making art and engaging with it. In the United States, many violence awareness organizations have developed notable creative projects with educational components, such as *Project Face to Face: Unheard Voices*, an interactive traveling exhibition based in San Francisco that features full-body portrait castings and audience-activated oral histories of sexual assault survivors; *The Voices and Faces Project*, a national survivor network based in Chicago that seeks to give voice and face to survivors of sexual violence through projects such as a narrative portrait book and exhibition of the same name; *Survivors Art Foundation*, a New York-based nonprofit organization that works with survivors of trauma through creative outlets such as an online art gallery, exhibitions, publications, and outreach programming; *A Long Walk Home: A Story of a Rape Survivor*, a project founded by sisters Scheherazade and Salamishah Tillet that combines performing and visual arts with spoken word and oral history to document rape and sexual trauma; *Breaking the Silence, Shattering the Myths: A Sexual Assault Awareness Art Project*, developed by the Indiana Coalition Against Sexual Violence; *Arte Sana (Art Heals)*, a nonprofit agency in Texas that works with underserved survivors of racial/gender violence and promotes healing through community education and arts such as *Corazon Lastimado (Healing the Wounded Heart)*, a traveling art exhibition of survivor art; *Voices Against Sexual Violence*, a mural designed by Xavier Cortada in 2005 for the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape; and *Interactive Theatre*, an organization that uses drama and performance in the New York area to educate on sexual violence.

Various museums and galleries have hosted exhibitions that shed light on sexual violence as well. Some of these include *The Subject of Rape* at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 1993; *Pulse: Art, Healing, and Transformation* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, in 2003; and *The Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness and Healing* at the International Center of Photography in 2005. However, *Take This Moment* marked the first time an event of this nature was made available to the Lawrence community; its taking place at the Spencer Museum signified the museum's commitment to being a part of the solution to end violence for the betterment of the community at large.

## WHY ART? WHY AN ART MUSEUM?

Art is an effective tool for engaging in sexual violence awareness. Making meaning with art benefits individuals and communities. As Edwards (2004) suggested, "Some

experiences and emotional states are beyond words" (p. 8), and art provides an alternative medium through which to convey feelings. McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks (2004) and Walker-Kuhne (2005) have outlined personal and communal benefits of the arts, and Brooke (1997); Cohen, Michola-Barnes, & Rankin (1995); Hagoood (2000); Lyshak-Stelzer (1999); Peacock (1991); and Wischild (1991) have written about the practice of healing through creative expression, particularly in the cases of sexual assault survivors.

Making meaning through art—either through creating art or interacting with it—is a multilayered experience. When one engages with art, multiple dialogues emerge simultaneously: internally, occurring within the viewer as he or she draws upon past experiences and expectations to understand the art being viewed; externally, among viewers as they experience a work of art together; and between the viewer and the artwork itself. McKay & Monteverde (2003) explained that in this process, called dialogic looking, "the exchange of all of these particular perspectives creates a multifaceted looking experience that is greater than any individualized perspective on its own" (p. 42). These different perspectives are valued and necessary to allow for richer, more productive ways of engagement with art. Art may also extend beyond a concrete subject or form, existing in social interaction, dialogue, and, in the case of *Take This Moment*, in settings and instances of creativity and generosity—when a space is offered to a public whose participation in creating the moment is integral to the moment itself. Jacob (2005) has referred to such events as "art-like moments" (p. 7). She continued:

Generosity exists in exchanges, like conversations, and within temporal experiences shared by a social or communal body, which are conceived as art, crafted by artists, though these generous acts might not look like art, or in fact be art but become art-like moments. (p. 7)

As a vehicle for social change, an art museum works to understand the issues affecting the larger community, and it uses its resources to address those issues. It becomes an awareness space, a communal environment, where *healing* and *learning* are intertwined if not interchangeable and where *education* is acknowledged as transposable with *awareness raising*—beyond traditional practice, formal pedagogical methodologies, didactic material and/or mediated museum experiences (such as docent-led tours). The museum as a vehicle for social change functions as a site of contemplation and action, with action taking the form of social justice advocacy.

The Spencer Museum of Art—a public place that seeks to make art relevant to people's lives—served as an opportune space for the *Take This Moment* project. The museum was not simply a physical space in which the event was held; by defining itself as a place where visitors could understand art as a means to approaching cultural violence awareness, it assumed the role of a "safe space" within the community. I borrow the term "safe space" from Kuribayashi & Tharp (1998). Though they have acknowledged "safe space" as a space created through art, I extend "safe space" to refer to an actualized physical environment.

By serving as a safe space, the Spencer Museum repositioned itself as a vehicle for effecting change and became a site where art not only offers an avenue for expressing and processing experiences, learning and working through ideas, and constructing knowledge of and meaning about those experiences, but also where active engagement with art creates a heightened sense of individual awareness and social responsibility.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES IN LAWRENCE, KANSAS

Sexual violence is a broad term with many layers of meanings. Similar to the internal meaning-making that takes place when an individual engages with art, how one interprets sexual violence is personal as well. Therefore, people define it in many different ways. Throughout this essay, I use *sexual violence* to include all of the following: rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, incest, and childhood sexual abuse. In addition to having multiple meanings, sexually violent behavior takes many forms: physical, verbal, emotional, or any combination of these. Its continued existence in society via the numerous cultural, political, and economic systems that perpetuate it is complicated, and it knows no boundaries. Regardless of sex or gender, people of all ages, races, social classes, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and abilities have been victims of acts of sexual aggression.

GaDuGi SafeCenter and the SVESS are the two primary support services for sexual violence advocacy and education in Lawrence. The SVESS office serves the university campus, and GaDuGi SafeCenter serves the many communities of and around Lawrence by offering 24-hour confidential support services.

There is a need for such support services in Kansas as there is in communities nationwide. While nationally the number of acts of sexually-based crimes has decreased greatly since the early 1990s, such acts still take place daily. In 2004-05, the number of reported rape and sexual assault victimizations across the country was 200,780 (Catalano, 2006). Further, the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (2007) reported that every two and a half minutes in the United States, a person is sexually assaulted, and that in their lifetimes, one in six women and one in thirty-three men will be sexually assaulted. In Kansas in 2005, there were 1,099 rapes reported to law enforcement (Kansas Bureau of Investigation, 2006). Yet nationwide, acts of sexual violence remain one of the most underreported crimes. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 2005, only thirty-eight percent of rapes and other sexual assaults were reported to law enforcement (Catalano, 2006). It is this quieted nature surrounding sexually-based crimes that *Take This Moment* sought to proactively address.

## TAKE THIS MOMENT THROUGH ART

*Take This Moment's* four primary objectives were to educate the Lawrence community about issues of sexual violence and local support services, demonstrate how art functions as a means of healing and a platform for awareness-raising, honor sexual assault survivors and community members who seek to end violence, and show how art museums can become sites of social justice advocacy. Subsequent goals of the project included developing new audiences by extending community knowledge about all involved organizations, broadening the knowledge base of pre-existing audiences by integrating the audiences of each organization, and establishing a strategic and maintainable alliance between the three primary organizations involved. Overarching these objectives was the fundamental desire to enhance attendees' intrinsic benefits—defined by McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks (2004) as the "effects inherent in the arts experience that add value to people's lives" (p. 37)—of engaging with art and offering a nurturing space for people to make meaning of art.

Project coordinators were deliberate in setting broad social goals for the project and were aware that in doing so, assessing the impact of *Take This Moment* on the greater Lawrence community would be difficult, if not impossible. Instead, coordinators looked

beyond quantitative analysis to determine whether such goals had been reached. The project provided significant evidence of active engagement and individual and communal meaning-making in several ways: the project itself was actualized, the art museum became a space for healing and learning that was made available to the community, and individuals who felt a need to explore the issues chose to attend and acknowledged that the program helped them do so. Further, the museum did not consider understanding in demographic terms *who* attended relevant to assessing the impact of the event; rather, organizers felt that any valid assessment could be determined by those in attendance only on a personal level through their individual meaning-making experiences.

The *Take This Moment* event consisted of three parts: creative projects presented by local artists, a gallery walk highlighting works in the museum's permanent collection, and reflection time. As plans for this event developed, several other artists and organizations throughout Lawrence grew interested and voluntarily created additional awareness-raising projects that connected to *Take This Moment*. Organizers saw the other campus and non-university community members' desire and development of their own advocacy projects as additional evidence of the impact that *Take This Moment* had on the greater community.

## TAKE THIS MOMENT: THE MUSEUM EVENT

For *Take This Moment*, representatives of the museum, GaDuGi, and SVESS invited local visual artists, poets, and musicians of various ages and backgrounds to participate in the project. They asked each of the participants to acknowledge the experimental nature of the project and to develop and share a creative project with event attendees. Some of the participants identified themselves as sexual assault survivors, but the theme of healing through creative expression was central to all of the presentations.

The location and seating arrangements for the event were key to reflecting the central messages of the evening. Organizers arranged chairs in a circle in the Spencer Museum's Central Court, a large gathering space in the center of the museum, so that the energy generated from the event would radiate from the circle within the center. This seating pattern also allowed the participants and the audience to sit on the same level. The audience consisted of students and non-university community members, and some, thought not all, self-identified as survivors of violence.<sup>1</sup> And while 150 might seem a small turn-out for a university museum event, for a first-time collaborative project that publicly addressed a topic as difficult as sexual violence, the Spencer Museum, GaDuGi, and SVESS were pleased with the number of attendees, as project organizers had initially anticipated an audience of fifty to seventy-five people.

Marty Stemmerman, a spiritual leader whom organizers invited to "call the circle," opened the evening. Stemmerman began working with shamanic journeying and other spiritual rituals twenty years ago to heal the brokenness she felt as a victim of childhood sexual abuse. She explained that "calling the circle" was significant to such an event because

<sup>1</sup> Determining a more specific breakdown of those in attendance is not possible. Demographic information of audience members—how they self-identified (as "survivor," "victim," "artist," "social service worker," "friend") and what motivated them to attend ("to heal," "to support," "to learn")—was not sought by event organizers, as it was not pertinent in assessing the overall success of *Take This Moment*. Further, due to the sensitive nature of sexual violence and to respect attendees who did not wish to be publicly acknowledged, all three organizations agreed to take steps to protect the identities of audience members. Attendees were not asked to register, nor were they asked to identify themselves or provide personal information in any way. No photographs or digital recordings other than those of the presenters (who had agreed ahead of time to be photographed) were allowed.

it was a way to unite all who were present. She elaborated that it was "about creating a safe and sacred place, for those who were sharing their experiences, as well as for those who were listening" (Stemmerman, personal communication, May 11, 2006). As Stemmerman spoke, her words were accompanied by the percussive instrumentation of Marty Olson. Olson commented that the rhythms of the *djembe*, a chalice-shaped hand drum, and the *rain stick*, a bamboo log filled with beans, reflected the evening's meditative nature. He selected these instruments because, to him, the *djembe* offered a rich, wide range of tones, and the rain stick, reminiscent of gentle waves, conveyed relaxation by simulating slow, cleansing breaths.

After this opening, teenagers affiliated with Van Go Mobile Arts, Inc., an arts-based social service agency that uses art as a tool to give young adults life-changing experiences, shared poems they wrote during a poetry arts workshop. Van Go works with underserved and at-risk teenagers in the community through after-school and summer arts programs, such as JAMS (Jobs in the Arts Make Sense), a youth job-training program that employs approximately ninety teenagers year-round who earn minimum wage for producing artwork commissioned by the community. For *Take This Moment*, Van Go was represented by six students, each of whom recited poems dealing with the existing realities of sexual abuse in their lives. "A bunch of us have gone through sexual abuse and sexual violence," stated one of the poets, "It's time for us to start speaking up about what's so wrong about it and how it hurts people" (as cited in Paget, 2006, p. 2D).

Elizabeth Schultz and Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg gave additional readings. Schultz, a retired University of Kansas Professor of English, shared poems grounded in themes of survival and heroism, citing examples of everyday heroes from her own life. Mirriam-Goldberg, a certified poetry therapist and a breast cancer survivor who uses writing as a means of coping with her personal struggles stated,

[Poetry] allows readers and listeners to enter into the poem and see what they find while dwelling there. Poems that tell (and mostly, show) important truths in true voices can help listeners more clearly see their own experiences, and perhaps see their experiences in a new context that gives them a bit more freedom, lightness, understanding. (Personal communication, May 15, 2006)

Having led numerous sessions to help others grow through poetry, Mirriam-Goldberg has witnessed the power of healing discovered through writing. Most affecting to her has been observing how participants in her writing workshops, when dealing with personal experiences with violence and suffering, use writing as a way to "navigate through their own healing" (as cited in Paget, 2006, p. 2D). For Mirriam-Goldberg, poetry serves multiple functions as a healing agent: as a vessel for personal expression, it enables writers to explore their feelings; when shared with an audience, it inspires others to tell their stories, value their voices, and know they are not alone.

Cindy Daniels and Margaret Weisbrod-Morris led individual and group-interactive visual presentations. Daniels spoke from personal experience about how the act of painting was a catalyst for personal healing. Just as violence may result in a "disorganization of the self" (Bard & Sangrey, 1979, p. 35) for the victim, the process of creating art may lead to a self-reorganization or rediscovery. She explained,

On the path from victim to survivor, I learned that pain can destroy or pain can transform one's life. Painting helped begin this transformation for me. Before the attack, I had been a potter. After it, my creative light

just blew out, and I could not touch clay. Not being able to create threw me into a deep depression. In frustration, I picked up my old watercolors from a class I took in college. Through painting, I was able to express my pain, and only through painting for me, did the expression of this pain finally begin to feel like healing. (Daniels, presentation of "Healing Hands" at the Spencer Museum of Art, April 6, 2006)

As a result of her engagement with painting after the attack, Daniels created *Healing Hands* (see Figure 1), a multi-media-based work rich in symbolism that she shared with the audience.

A golden triangle, symbolizing unity, houses tornado-like figures, perhaps reflecting the destructive forces produced by humanity. Pink folds appear within as soft and vulnerable. However, these figures are encompassed by hands, representing the ability to heal; jewels to remind viewers of the daily beauty and gifts to be treasured; and fabric, seemingly stitched through the pain, holding the entire work together.

Margaret Weisbrod-Morris, an art therapist and the Director of Education at the Lawrence Arts Center, discussed the use of art as a treatment method for survivors of trauma. She organized *It's in Our Hands*, an artwork that engaged audience members as creators, during the *Take This Moment* evening (see Figure 2). Each person was given a marker and a 5x5-inch square sticker imprinted with an image of a hand. The hand images varied—some were children's hands, some were older and wrinkled, some were adorned with jewelry, some were formed into a fist, others were fully extended, and all were of diverse skin tones. Weisbrod-Morris asked attendees to write a message on each sticker. As people wrote, she read the following text:

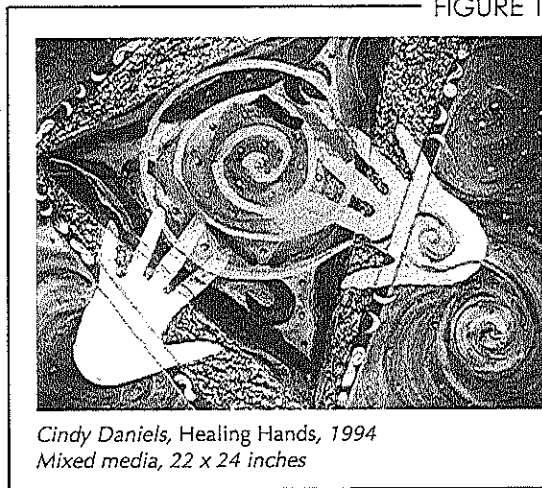
Take this moment to find your voice, or lend your voice to someone else not here tonight.

Take this moment to think about being in this place tonight, together.

Take this moment to reflect on the message you, we, and our community wants to, or needs to, remember about tonight.

Take this moment to give yourself permission to write a word, sentence, or paragraph on one of the papers provided to you. Please choose whichever hand you prefer.

Take this moment to give yourself the courage to add your paper to the canvas – if you wish, you can hand your paper to someone else to add it for you. (Weisbrod-Morris, presentation of "It's in Our Hands" at the Spencer Museum of Art, April 6, 2006)



Cindy Daniels, *Healing Hands*, 1994  
Mixed media, 22 x 24 inches

FIGURE 1

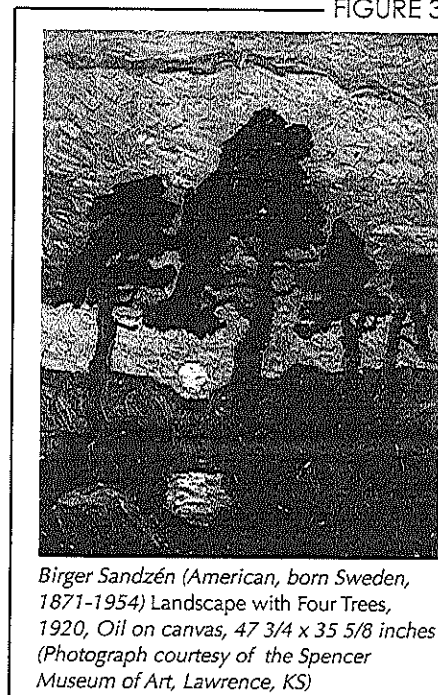
FIGURE 2



*It's in Our Hands* [detail], 2006 Mixed media, 49 x 64 inches

After they wrote their statements, they added their stickers to a 49x64-inch teal-painted canvas. Through this process, the canvas became a physical record of the evening, documenting the memories, voices, and feelings of those present. Examples of some of the messages included "Where there is fear, let healing begin. Where malice resides, let compassion creep in," "I am a survivor, too, and I need to learn to forgive," and "Our most fragile moments help us discover strength and power." Each person's message marked an individual and unique statement. Combined, they became a powerful testimony of unity, strength, and transformation through participation.

After the stickers were added to the canvas, *Take This Moment* attendees were invited to take part in *Nighttime*, a self-guided gallery walk organized by the museum that highlighted selections from its permanent collection. Included works, such as *Landscape with Four Trees* by Birger Sandzén (1920), Jonas Lie's *After the Concert* (1900), and *Nuns in the Certosa Cloister* (ca. 1823) by Franz Ludwig Catel, focused on the theme of night in ways reflective of the violence awareness theme of reclaiming the night. The featured images presented night as a serene time in which light, in the forms of candles and moonlight, not only



Birger Sandzén (American, born Sweden, 1871-1954) *Landscape with Four Trees*, 1920, Oil on canvas, 47 3/4 x 35 5/8 inches (Photograph courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS)

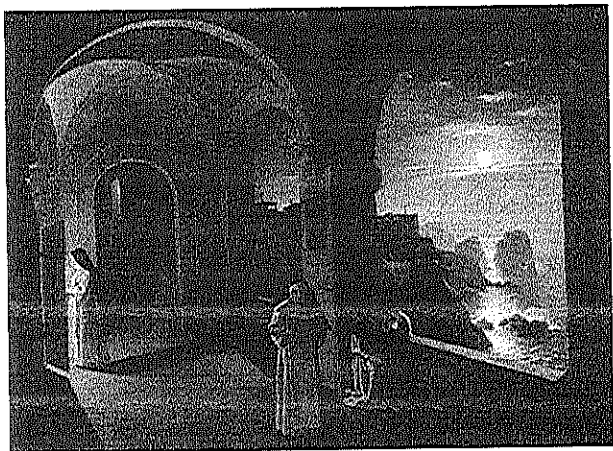
FIGURE 3

illuminates but also offers a sense of warmth and invitation — a time not full of darkness but of color (see Figure 3), a time for community (see Figure 4), and a time of meditation and tranquility (see Figure 5). Juxtaposing these images and these interpretations with *Take This Moment* allowed viewers to reconsider their own understandings, associations, and definitions of night. The tour focused on the aesthetics and art historical contexts of these works, and it also



Jonas Lie (American, born Norway, 1880-1940) *After the Concert*, 1900, Oil on panel, 10 x 12 inches (Photograph courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS)

FIGURE 5



Franz Ludwig Catel (German, 1778-1856) *Nuns in the Certosa Cloister, overlooking a Moonlit Sea towards the Faraglioni, Capri*, ca. 1823 Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 38 5/8 inches (Photograph courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS)

for those affected by acts of sexual aggression were present to answer questions.

To close the evening, carillonneur Elizabeth Berghaut, who plays the bells of the Campanile on the University of Kansas's campus, rang the bells to acknowledge the event. The bells, which were audible well beyond campus, rang 170 times, signifying the 170 people who had been served by GaDuGi SafeCenter in the previous year.

FIGURE 4

placed them in a topical, social framework that was relevant to the subject of the event.

Attendees were encouraged to use the museum's galleries as reflection spaces as well. Blank journals were placed throughout the museum for those compelled to express themselves further through writing, and, for those interested in talking, advocates from GaDuGi SafeCenter who were trained to provide information and support

## "SPIN-OFF" PROJECTS: EXPANDING THE DIALOGUE

*Take This Moment* created a ripple of awareness-raising efforts throughout the Lawrence community, and several individuals and organizations developed spin-off arts projects. These on- and off-campus projects included a print exhibition of Charles Hall's *This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* awareness campaign; a student-organized poetry slam; *Goodnight Moon*, an art benefit organized by local artists; an on-campus display of the *Panty Line Project*; and a panel presentation by sexual trauma survivors as part of the University of Kansas's annual Oral History Workshop.

Charles Hall's print series, *This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, was displayed in one of the main hallways of the University Student Union from April 3-17, 2006. A rape awareness initiative intended to combat the myth that women ask or deserve to be raped, the series consists of a collection of provocative black-and-white images, each a snapshot of a potentially dangerous or vulnerable situation. To introduce the series to the public, Hall joined with the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women (LACAAW); his prints were first exhibited in 1996 at the Kreckhoff Art Gallery at UCLA (Tanaka, 1996). The images, diverse in their subjects and stories, are all tagged with the same caption in bold red letters: "This is not an invitation to rape me."

During the 2005-06 school year, the University of Kansas' Student Union Activities Board hosted monthly poetry slams during which readers presented five minutes of original poetry and spoken word compositions. For Sexual Violence Awareness Month 2006, this slam was devoted entirely to the themes of sexual assault, survival, and expression.

*Goodnight Moon*, an art benefit held on April 8, 2006, featured the work of six artists: Carley Doores, Becca Ramspott, Sara Rich, Paula Richardson, Elizabeth Rowley, and Shana Rossi Talley. This benefit for sexual violence awareness support services was held off-campus, and participating artists created works of various media that drew on themes of night. Ramspott, organizer of the *Goodnight Moon* benefit, chose the title from the book of the same name. She explained,

[*Goodnight Moon*] recalls a favorite children's book that celebrates how magical and beautiful night can be, and the sense of innocence, safety, and love we associate with childhood. Similarly, the goal of the *Goodnight Moon* art benefit is to honor and celebrate those same feelings and experiences throughout our lifetimes, in the context of personal empowerment, creative expression, and community support of sexual violence awareness and prevention. (Ramspott, personal communication, February 6, 2006)

The *Panty Line Project*, a controversial display of women's lingerie decorated by sexual assault survivors and strung across a clothesline, was originally created by Lori Minick to allow survivors a creative outlet through which they express themselves by embellishing and writing messages on women's undergarments. This project, similar to the *Clothesline Project* that was initiated to raise public awareness of issues of domestic violence (Russell, 1997), was on view in university dormitory hallways and campus green spaces to remind passers-by of the prevalence of sexual violence in our communities.

The theme of the seventh annual University of Kansas Oral History Workshop, *Healing Narratives, Undying Words*, centered on stories of healing and health care. Sherrie Tucker, Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Kansas, who was also one of the workshop's coordinators, approached *Take This Moment* organizers to suggest

that the workshop, which was sponsored by the University's Hall Center for the Humanities, could provide a platform for local sexual assault survivors to share their stories. On April 10, 2006, women from the Lawrence area recounted their experiences with rape and sexual abuse. Their panel was called "Remembering Who We Are: Survivors Telling Their Stories."

By raising awareness of rape and by challenging people's perceptions about violence, these projects asked people to reconsider their assumptions about rape and how current social structures exist and perpetuate sexual violence. In this way, all *Take This Moment* spin-off projects offered powerful examples of additional dialogues that conveyed awareness of violence.

## CONCLUSION

*Take This Moment* and its related projects revealed that individuals and groups, art, artists, and art museums are all able to address cultural violence and catalyze community awareness-raising efforts. Of course, there is always room for further development. As this was the first collaborative project between the Spencer Museum, GaDuGi, and SVESS, organizers identified three primary ways to grow the program in the future: expand the project to other university campuses throughout Douglas County; generate more programming geared toward younger audiences; and develop a digital/web component. In addition to the University of Kansas, Douglas County is also home to Haskell Indian Nations University (Lawrence, Kansas) and Baker University (Baldwin City, Kansas). While both had been informed of the project, more could have been done to encourage involvement from these two university communities (for example, organized transportation from their campuses to the Spencer Museum). Further, through the poetry presentations of Van Go Mobile Arts students, the often unheard voices of sexual violence survivors were heard—those of youth and teenagers. Working with them in mind, organizers were eager to develop a violence-awareness-through-art program with area middle and high schools that would actively engage students to consider issues of sexual violence through art. Finally, having a Web presence could extend the themes of healing and learning through art as well as the role of the art museum as an advocate for social justice to a broader, global audience.

But despite the potential for improvement, this first-time project broke ground in Lawrence by providing a new, unique opportunity for the community: a collaborative sexual violence awareness art experience that was educational, aesthetic, and healing. For example, one attendee, a female rape survivor who attended *Take This Moment*, provided the following testimony of what the project meant to her:

This event was a real turning point in my life. I have begun to feel very empowered by the experience. In response to that experience, I have decided to go back to graduate school. This was something that I quit after [I was attacked] because I was just so fearful of being alone, driving alone, [and] going to class at night . . . I felt an opening in the universe and stepped through it into something new. I am exhausted but feel really alive. (Personal communication, May 16, 2006)

Museums exist to engage the public with works of art, and as cultural institutions, they are able to reflect current changes affecting society as a whole. David Fleming, Director of the National Museums Liverpool, has stated, "Museums are social constructs, and powerful ones at that, and they need to assume their place in the mainstream of contemporary life, not sit eccentrically on the margins" (2005). Today's art museums have

become increasingly multifunctional. At their core, they are sites devoted to the collection, conservation, and the academic study of fine art. They also have become multi-use recreational spaces and entertainment venues. Further, as presented in this essay, they may serve as agents of change toward more just socio-cultural practices. In particular, through *Take This Moment*, the Spencer Museum demonstrated that it is an organization that is not only dedicated to the collection and preservation of works of art, but also one that is committed to improving its community by providing an awareness space where experience and understanding are made available as a framework for individuals to heal and learn through personal engagement with art.

Victims and survivors of sexual violence deserve the opportunity to know that they are not alone; while the past cannot be changed, individual and communal healing processes can be initiated, and art museums can function as important sites of instigating such social transformations. At the beginning of this essay, I asked how a museum can actively initiate social change. *Take This Moment* at the Spencer Museum demonstrated how this is possible. The Spencer offered a place for people to make meaning of art, actively promoted social change through education and awareness-raising, used its collection and resources, and by partnering with social service groups, became a powerful vehicle for effecting change that impacted individual lives and communities.

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## Contents

Editorial Introduction <i>Kristin G. Congdon</i>	1
Balancing Love and Rage: Lived Cultural Violence and an Art Teacher's Hopeful Possibilities <i>Julie Crowder and Sara Wilson McKay</i>	5
The Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Creating Space for Intercultural Learning and Understanding <i>Audrey M. Ambrosino</i>	22
Developing Multicultural Intelligence through the Work of Kehinde Wiley <i>Melanie L. Buffington</i>	33
Memory and Erasure: Applying Visual Narrative Power Analysis to the Image War Between Dow Chemical Corporation and the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal <i>Carolyn Erler</i>	42
<i>Take This Moment</i> : Sexual Violence Awareness and the Art Museum as a Vehicle for Social Change <i>Chelsea Schlievert</i>	63
Enough.?!: The Violence Inherent in Stereotypes and Apathy <i>Deborah K. Snider</i>	77
Beyond Violence, Serious Video Games, and Youth Culture <i>Nancy S. Parks</i>	82
Memoryscapes: Witnessing the Crisis of Internal Refugees Through Visual Practice <i>Munira Bootwala and Dipti Desai</i>	94
(Over)Turning the Tables: <i>Aliens in America</i> as a Curriculum of Identity Construction and (Multi)Cultural Violence <i>Ludovic A. Sourdot and B. Stephen Carpenter II</i>	107
Spirituality in Holistic Art Education: Preventing Violence Among Youth in the United States <i>Laurel H. Campbell</i>	122
White Folk in Black Spaces <i>James H. Sanders III, Karen Hutzler, and Jennifer M. Miller</i>	132
Workplace Violence in Higher Education <i>Sheri Klein</i>	145
Getting Real: Toward Pedagogy for a Love of Mediated Violence <i>Paul Duncum</i>	154