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BLANTON COMMISSIONS ARTIST LESLIE MUTCHLER TO CREATE INNOVATIVE ART MAKING STATIONS

WorkLAB Satellites to Enhance Visitor Experience, Facilitate Creativity

AUSTIN, Texas—April 10, 2014—To further its efforts to serve as a hub for inspiration and site for creativity, the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin has commissioned artist Leslie Mutchler to create new works of art to be used as art making stations within the museum. Titled WorkLAB Satellites, the project represents current thinking about the role of creative problem solving, and how art can be used to facilitate learning.

“Leslie Mutchler has been an amazing collaborator on this project,” remarked Ray Williams, Blanton director of education and academic affairs. “The new WorkLAB Satellites embody the Blanton’s commitment to encouraging creativity, dialogue, and play among our visitors, and they highlight how collaborations across the university can benefit campus and community alike.”

The 40 x 90 inch mobile and flatpack workstations will supplement the Blanton’s WorkLab program—a series of open studio experiences offered to children and their families each summer. Cut from birch plywood on a CNC router in the Department of Art and Art History’s new Digital Fabrication Lab, each of the workstations is designed to be configured and reconfigured in a multitude of ways; changing the look of the work environment in conjunction with new projects. Window-like openings will enable visitors of all ages to engage in conversation as they create. The stations will be stocked with everyday materials such as tape, paper, pencils, stencils and chipboard. Simple directives in English and Spanish will offer instruction for creating paper sculpture, collage and weaving, among other projects.

A departure from traditional museum creativity stations (generally a table and some basic art supplies), Mutchler’s satellites are first and foremost a discrete work of art. The artist, who currently serves as Director of the Foundations Program for UT’s Department of Art and Art History, is interested in allowing viewers to create works that are temporal and non-precious; thus reinforcing the importance of creative and communal art making.
experiences, such as play, exploration and dialogue. She explains, “WorkLAB Satellites emphasizes the Blanton’s Educational programming objectives of participation, reflection and intentionality by engaging viewers in projects that use their hands. Projects are designed to teach and reinforce formal design principles and aesthetics in relationship to rotating exhibitions. The works made will be archived in a virtual gallery space as participants will be asked to share their work with a wider audience through social media (tumblr, twitter, etc.)”

The Blanton's project was inspired, in part, by Mutchler’s TrendFACTORY (2012), an installation comprised of workstations with printed and pre-scored chipboard substrates accompanied by directions for creating simple sculptures. (In fact, it was this project that prompted Williams to invite the artist to collaborate with the museum.) TrendFACTORY has been exhibited at Elon University Gallery in North Carolina, the Indianapolis Art Center, UT Austin's Visual Arts Center, the Lawndale Art Center in Houston, and ARPRIM Gallery in Montreal. Once visitors completed their sculptures, they were asked to document the work (using their smartphones) and email the results to a tumblr project blog. Similarly, visitors to the Blanton’s satellites will be encouraged to snap photos of their creations for a tumblr site that will act as an online archive of the piece.

The WorkLAB Satellites serve as a model for the type of unique collaborations that are possible within a university setting. Tapping the talents of UT faculty allows the Blanton to develop inventive new projects of substantial depth. More than just a space to create, the workstations also function as works of art in their own right to be viewed alongside other contemporary pieces in the Blanton’s collection. But unlike most works within a museum setting, Mutchler’s satellites provide hands-on opportunities for collaboration and exchange, offering visitors a personal experience and, perhaps most importantly, an entry point into the creative process.

WorkLAB Satellites will be located within the Blanton’s Michener Gallery building beginning in June. They will periodically be moved to other locations in the museum, and supplied with different materials and instructions.

WorkLAB Satellites are made possible by a grant from Texas Women for the Arts.

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**About Leslie Mutchler**
Leslie Mutchler is the Director of the Foundations Program for the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. She received her BFA from Kent State University and MFA from the Tyler School of Art. Her multi-disciplinary installations are experiments in faux-functionality and imperfect design. Utilizing the material language of our everyday, Mutchler engages with issues of hand(craft), labor, sustainability, and commodity. Recent solo shows include TrendFACTORY, Elon University Gallery, NC, Indianapolis Art Center, IN, ARPRIM Gallery, Montreal, Canada, and Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX (2012), TumblrEAL, Gensler Global Architecture, Austin, TX (2012), ASTRAL pop-up, VA Gallery, University of Wyoming, WY (2012), Geometry of Labor, Poliglota Gallery, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2011), and (F)utility Kitchen, Snowflake, St. Louis, MO (2011).

About the Blanton Museum of Art
Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art is one of the foremost university art museums in the country and holds the largest public collection in Central Texas. Recognized for its modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and baroque paintings, and encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, the Blanton offers thought provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

The museum is located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue and is open Tuesday though Friday from 10 AM – 5 PM, Saturday from 11 AM – 5 PM, and Sunday from 1 – 5 PM. Thursdays are free admission days and every third Thursday the museum is open until 9 PM. Admission Prices: Adults $9, Kids 12 and under FREE, Seniors (65+) $7, Youth/College Students (13-21) $5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders. For additional information call (512) 471-7324 or visit www.blantonmuseum.org.

Images
An ArtLab Satellite in production
Installation view of TrendFactory at UT's Visual Arts Center, 2012, photo courtesy of Sandy Carson
Leslie Mutchler in her studio