

Piercing Gaze: Public Art in Schools

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Paradigm of Silence

A gaze is a silent facial gesture while a piercing gaze suggests a shrieking sound. Unpacking the word, silence, allows one to look at the difference between the verbalizations hailing empowerment and the actual functioning of reinstatements of purpose in learning, teaching and mentoring in a public school. Silence, in the following article, signals a discomfort, sometimes solitude and, at times, an abyss perhaps indicating the disparity between expectation and implementation. The depth of research necessary by the school community to reach consensus for names of dignitaries and the in-depth archival photographic research on the part of the professional artists required time commitments and levels of perseverance that were unforeseen by the participants. The challenge of maintaining community-building activities underscored the problematic issues entrenched in areas of high poverty. The following article is grouped around nine sections, a post script and references: Paradigm of Silence, Tagging a Neighborhood, African American and Latino Diaspora, Developmental Stages, Convincing the Public, Aspects of Production: Multiple Visions, Whole School Reform: Language Arts and Visual Literacy, Aesthetics of Truth and Reconciliation and Teaching Tolerance: State-wide Commissions.

Tagging a Neighborhood

Inspirational murals of portraits of African American political and social history line some of the most unsafe streets in our urban areas. CityArts in New York City or the Mural Program in Philadelphia provide a visual reminder by warning city dwellers they have now entered crime zones. Such beautifully rendered murals enliven brick and plaster walls of buildings that often face abandoned lots, partially destroyed row houses and empty office spaces. Murals, in this context, are both a call 'to watch-your-step' because you are in a treacherous area of town as well as mark the redevelopment zones of hope, renewal and aspirations for residents of this street.

The history of painted and ceramic walls supports the political and social motivations for creating murals. Mexican murals in the 1920s encouraged improvements in social welfare and land reform. Murals depicting the ideals of the Russian Revolution of 1917 promulgated the Communist Party's agenda. And, the federal initiative in the United States in the 1930s known as the Workers Progress Administration (WPA), hired artists to create murals both immortalized American ideals of freedom and enlightenment and the American worker in post offices, train stations, office buildings, and other public places.

African American and Latino Diaspora

Towns in central New Jersey often have deceptive architectural facades, both luxurious and downtrodden, which underscore the need to describe and understand the experiences of African American and Latino diaspora populations. Plainfield, like Newark, New Jersey, experienced extreme racial tensions in the late 1960s which drastically changed the demographic profile and economic stability of the town. In the central New Jersey town of Plainfield, the superintendent of the high-poverty school district envisioned public art in the newly built Washington Community School (grades preK-5) as a way to celebrate its community-building mission. The School is a large red brick building

with clean large classrooms, two playgrounds, a large well equipped gymnasium, cafetorium, dance studio, health clinic, and library. The library has a large angled window that enables passerbyers to see into the school, again, a way of embracing community.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) was sent to prominent African American artists such as Mel Edwards, Glenn Ligon, Emma Amos, Alonzo Adams, Indira Bailey, Wendell Brooks, Faith Ringgold, and Lorenzo Pace. Those artists who chose to participate described their project to a committee of community members and school administrators, illustrating their vision through slides, maquettes, drawings, and models. Lorenzo Pace was awarded the funds to fulfill the designated proposal utilizing his children's book (based on a family history) *Jalani and the Lock* as the central wall imagery. Lorenzo Pace was born in 1943 in Birmingham, Alabama. He received his Bachelors of Fine Arts and Masters of Fine Arts degrees from the School of The Art Institute of Chicago and his doctorate from Illinois State University. Lorenzo Pace has been the director the Montclair State University Art Gallery for over ten years. The African Burial Grounds in lower Manhattan was honored in the year 2000 with the large public sculpture by Lorenzo Pace entitled *Triumph of the Human Spirit*. The two sidewalls of the stairwell at Washington Community School would integrate ten portraits each of important African American and Latino leaders/dignitaries/heroes embellished with Lorenzo Pace's interpretation of the individual's contribution to better humankind. In conjunction with Lorenzo Pace's stairwell installation that included mural painting and collage elements as well as framed portraits, the school's 5th grade art club of ten students, drew and painted concrete representations of careers/futures the students are planning for themselves. The student work has a distinguished portion of the half wall overhanging the stairwell.

In addition, four weekend community workshops were held for students and their families to create three 20' long by 6' high banners for the cafetorium of Washington Community School. The workshops varied in attendance from 100 to 5 students with decreasing participation as the weeks continued. Two local professional artists-Mel Holston and Caryl Henry-led the three-hour Saturday morning banner workshops. Mel Holston was born in 1939 and studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Jersey City State College and in Paris, France. His work has also been shown at galleries and museums throughout New Jersey and has been reviewed by the Newark Star Ledger, The Jersey Journal, Black Enterprise Magazine, Art Business News, and other prominent newspapers. Caryl Henry is a visual artist and educator who sees the healing aspects of art as pivotal to instilling change to the world. She has been awarded four California Arts Council Artist-in-Residence grants, two Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation grants and has been designated a Master Teaching Artist by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. In 1998 she completed eight murals and four banner projects for Newark, New Jersey; some of which have been shown at the Newark Museum and the Newark Liberty International Airport.

The local artists developed ideas for the banners closely related to Lorenzo Pace's installation. The banners spoke to the theme of the African and Caribbean diaspora, mirroring the ethnic population of Washington Community School, through images of cultural artifacts. Specific ethnic foods, clothing, music, and dance are referenced along with well known stories/characters and maps of Africa, Latin America, and the United States. The student artists were influenced in their artistic designs by the books, postcards, and posters the professional artists brought to the weekend workshops to assist students in solidifying their choice of subject. Challenging the students to think of their everyday lives as examples of ethnicity and a segment of American

society requires a bit of anthropological detachment that was difficult for students to understand. Two of the student artists, however, were new Americans from Guatemala. On a cold Saturday in March of 2003, the two sisters wore white straw hats with paper flowers, blue and pink dresses, and blue sandals. This wardrobe alone speaks to cultural artifacts of clothing and stages of assimilation into mainstream (North) American society. With the depictions of family meals, people's pants, shirts and sweaters, and hairstyles and characters of historical stories illustrated in books, the professional artists brought to life the type of pictures that the students were to draw on their banners.

Developmental Stages

As in many activities in urban school districts, the challenges of arranging personal time needed to complete school-centered projects with competing priorities such as juggled work times, childcare, entertainment, familial responsibilities, and self-improvement are monumental. The weekend banner painting workshops were designed to be three hours in length requiring steady perseverance in slowly creating large banners/mural. Many of the parents brought their children to the workshop one and two hours late and just assumed there was a place for them in the middle of the project. Washington Community School students, at times, were accompanied by siblings of varying ages or by parents who were more interested in drawing and painting themselves than assisting or encouraging their children to draw and paint on the banners. Some students were distracted from working on the banners by seeing their peers out of the classroom setting. Mel Holston and Caryl Henry, the local professional artists, of course, accommodated this non-traditional sense of time. The students understood that the banners, at completion, were to be displayed in the cafetorium. There were no snacks, certificates, or trophies for participation in the weekend project, just the self-empowering feeling of working on a public art project that would be visible to all students and visitors in the school for many years.

Young children's artwork has been source material for research aimed at understanding the psycho-social developmental stages of emotional and academic growth. Where to start on a black piece of paper, the use of cartoons as a reference to draw a human body, and tracing the professional artists' work are common hurdles for students unaccustomed to drawing and/or realizing their own ideas with art materials. One of the goals of these Saturday workshops was to see elaboration of an idea – in the form of a sketch, drawing or painting. This progression in elaborating on a work of art was encouraged individually or in a group of two or three students. Indeed, the question of drawing as a public or private activity arises in collective art projects such as this one. The weekend banner project provided insights into how individual students think, plan, draw, and reflect upon their artwork as well as noting developmental growth in groups.

Students were best motivated by seeing imagery of ideas i.e. freedom, slavery, exile, diaspora, salvation, comfort, praise, redemption, and love, etc. as viewed by mature artists. With the springboard of established images, students were able to be empowered to design and draw their own pictures of ideas. But, it was unclear if the students in the community workshops saw their work linked to Lorenzo Pace's stairwell installation, though they were told the projects are thematically tied together. To have the opportunity to draw pictures on large banners with professional artist mentoring, which happened to be a unique experience for students who only draw on 8"x11" size paper, was intended to be a liberating arts experience. At best, there was a goal to lessen the feelings of artistic insecurity in students. Nevertheless, social tension arose within the group project. Some students distracted other students from the work at hand, while comparisons between students who were self-motivated and those who needed constant supervision and correction were often quite visible. Prodding, energizing, and verbal praise were instructional-type methods conducted by the professional

artists. One of the initial motivations for the creation of the stairwell art installation that needed to include portraits of historic and contemporary African American and Latino diaspora leaders was to reinforce the weight of history, meaning the expectation of on-going academic accomplishment for today's students, supported by the gaze of these accomplished male and female heroes who are role models for overcoming adversity. The portrait installation in the stairwell underlines the direct need to see oneself as a progeny of accomplished ancestors/dignitaries. As the superintendent anticipated in first designing the components to the art installation, the concreteness, compassion and inspiration of the human face offer renewed hope for tomorrow.

Mel Holston, one of the local professional artists, had taught elementary school-age students in an urban area for over twenty years. He knew the push and pull of process vs. product. Initially scorned by Caryl Henry, the other professional artist, and the arts supervisor as being too programmed and uninventive, Mel Holston offered his elongated silhouetted African figures, African animals and pottery templates for students to copy. The students' contributions were intricate lace-like repeated designs that were created inside of the silhouettes. The resultant three 20' banners were composed of silhouetted figures arranged by Mel Holston. Caryl Henry had painted appropriate sky and land settings for the figures. When possible, she had students assist her in painting the backgrounds for the figures. As the student body dwindled over the four weekend workshops, Caryl Henry did most of the painting herself seeing the need for a final product. The students who attended the workshops saw the impressive progress of the banners. However, this did not translate into their valuing a continued participation in the project nor in soliciting their friends to join them in a Saturday workshop.

Convincing the Public

Community-building, seeing beyond the facades of homes into the dynamics of family is an on-going process. It took two evening events to enable the adult community to begin to understand the purpose for and the breadth of the art-making endeavor in the stairwell. A general flyer taken home by students combined with Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) phone calls produced a very small turn-out of parents for an initial 'meet-the-artist' evening meeting. Working with the rituals and routines of the Washington Community School schedule, a second evening event was planned but this time tied to a Book of the Month club reading of *A Dinner at Aunt Connie's House* by Faith Ringgold and serving a community-prepared dinner at a regular PTO meeting. The second 'meet-the-artist' evening produced over 150 people to hear Lorenzo Pace's evocative description of his vision of the stairwell project. Introducing the local professional artists, Mel Holston and Caryl Henry added a family-friendly dimension to the evening; participants were able to experience the personalities of the artists who would be interfacing with the students. The first community-building

meeting provided a better understanding of the goals of the stairwell and banner project for the principal, vice principal, family liaisons, community coordinators, and PTO president. After a second community-building meeting, the school administration



could articulate, with a unified confidence, the importance of inserting visual representations of African American and Latino history cultural diversity, and academic achievement into the ambience of the school.

Aspects of Production: Multiple Visions

Lorenzo Pace started painting the 40' walls of the stairwell two months after he community-building meetings took place to recruit students for the weekend drawing and painting projects. He left some paint droppings on the linoleum steps, but more importantly, painted one wall lime green, one wall lemon yellow and one wall salmon. The principal politely asked the arts supervisor to come over to the school to see what was taking place. With any history in dealing with the public, the nay-sayers speak first and speak loudly. All the people approving of the changed color of the walls, including the school's art teacher, were quiet. In this instance, silence is understood as an approved acceptance. The belief in Lorenzo Pace's vision that was a multi-tiered art-making process was wrapped in the necessary silence of waiting by some members of the school community. But as grimaces and genuine fear spread throughout the school community members wary of change, Lorenzo Pace was invited back to speak and reshow his maquette to the administrators to soothe their trepidations and to speak of his new idea to paint the gray railing either violet or red. The community coordinator, vice principal and principal initially squealed at thinking of the violet or red railing. They were assuaged, however, when Lorenzo Pace put a long red leather coat over the railing to mimic what it would look like, generating a hum of approval. Ultimately, the



railing was painted violet, catching the electricity of color that careens from the images and panels of the dignitaries' portraits and the story book pages from *Jalani and the Lock* and the students' futures on the walls.

Two weeks later, Lorenzo Pace started marking the wall with royal blue tape to indicate where he was to put the portraits. Another group of nay-sayers started voicing their disapproval and the school started receiving phone calls asking Lorenzo Pace to stop work. At this point,



there was recognition for the need to hang signs saying 'work-in-progress' to be posted on each of the stairwell walls. The challenges of a 'work-in-progress' is similar to the complexities of doing art in a community setting, like the Saturday student workshops

versus working in the privacy of one's studio or home. Is making art ever a public activity, where there is always interpersonal chatter, and not the silent dialogue the artist has with the artwork?

The unheard conversations going on between Lorenzo Pace, Caryl Henry and the arts supervisor revolved around who was researching and reproducing the images of the personalities who would ultimately confront the students on a daily basis with their piercing gaze so as to act as inspiration to them. Though handsomely rewarded in the Request for Proposals (RFP) parameters, Lorenzo Pace refused to do his own research. Thirteen school librarians were then mobilized to look through books and posters to find 11" x 17" color and/or black and white photographs of the designated African American and Latino leaders. The designated leaders/dignitaries/personalities/heroes were: From the past-Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Barbara Jordan, Tito Puente, Lewis Latimer, Harriet Tubman, Alex Haley, Madame C.J. Walker, and Mary McLeod Bethune. From the present-Muhammed Ali, Rosa Parks, Milton Campbell, Colin Powell, Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey, Guion Bluford, Jr. Ray Blanco, Dr. Mae Jemison, and Rigoberta Menchu Tum.

The process to choose these leaders went through several permutations until their final selection. First, the selection community for the professional artist was to choose personalities. There was, however, no follow-through perhaps another kind of silence, on this request. Washington Community School students and administrators



were then going to select twenty personalities through a group vote, which through some manipulation, ensured the inclusion historical and contemporary figures, men and women, and a variety of professions. The massaging of the list of personalities took

two months longer than imagined which can be interpreted as a brief silence. The two month delay on the selection supposedly delayed Lorenzo Pace two months in his locating and redesigning of the portrait panels. It was assumed that Lorenzo Pace would put the necessary time in the library and the copy store to find the correct size and type of portrait-ultimately duplicating it for the stairwell. This was a misunderstanding since school districts do not have studio assistants on their payroll that do this kind of work and Lorenzo Pace was not prepared to do this type of work himself. Surprised by the uncompromising stance of the artist, the arts supervisor recognized that the pictorial and textual research area of the project was tapping into an uncomfortable and perhaps forbidding area work zone. What is not said is often more powerful than what is said in conversation or interviews. Silence and/or intermittent silences in this case portrayed an aspect of the artists that was unseen by the selecting committee. The multi-vocal participants on the Washington Community School banners and stairwell installation provided an opportunity to employ

Caryl Henry, one of the local professional artists, in a new role since she was personally motivated to find images of the African American and Latino diaspora heroes. She reproduced almost all of the heroes' portraits with the exception of one personality who was impossible to locate (Milton Campbell), though an Olympic gold medal winner and truly a local celebrity. The Milton Campbell's family was eventually cajoled into bringing in an appropriate portrait. A local record producer (Ray Blanco) had his office send in an actual photograph of himself that had to be enlarged and changed from black and white to color. Lorenzo Pace had decided on making a differentiation on past and present heroes by using black and white and color photographs, respectively. This seemingly small request by Lorenzo Pace made the hunt for the photographs that much more time-consuming. For instance, the Guatemalan Embassy did not readily have a color photograph of Rigoberta Menchu Tum. With no evidence of artwork on the walls, the convincing of the public of the worthiness of the project was slightly derailed with the shift in work load from artist to pick-up artist.



The portraits with brief biographical statements simultaneously were undergoing vigilant triple checking of the spelling and text recognizing word and image were both storytelling components.

Lorenzo Pace's creativity is showcased in the inventive use of toys and miniature replicas of symbols associated with certain professions. The chosen African American and Latino diaspora leaders depicted on the walls of the Washington Community School stairwell as mentioned were divided into two categories –historical and contemporary. The

legacy of the dignitaries is evocatively symbolized in relief sculpture encircling the black and white or color photograph of the individual. A set of percussive instruments are positioned next to the image of Tito Puente, an astronaut helmet is situated near Guion Bluford, Jr., a bible is included in the Martin Luther King, Jr. panel, and indigenous flora surrounds Rigoberta Menchu Tum. A youthful figurative representation of Jalani, an African youth taken into slavery retells the Roots-like story utilizing a drawing style of an early elementary school-age student. The colorful multi-paneled retelling of Jalani on the widest of the stairwell walls calls out to the pre K through grade 5 students in the school. The placement of portraits in a checkerboard pattern, arranged in a triangular fashion, on an incline or decline according to how one walks the stairs, the relief surface of the portraits so enlivened by the three dimensional objects, all became a final installation decision. With scaffolding in place, Lorenzo Pace needed to experiment with various wall compositions of the framed portrait panels for several days. The elaborate scaffolding reaching to the top of the 40' ceiling allowed for a full view of the visual arrangement of panels. Final consideration of placement of the portraits was determined best to be along a straight readable line parallel to the second landing.



Whole School Reform: Language Arts and Visual Literacy

Lorenzo Pace's art installation, in part, incorporates through enlargement and mixed media the text of his book *Jalani and the Lock*. The art installation fuses words and images in a developmentally appropriate and visually exciting manner. Ensuring that students could read from a distance of a stair or landing, the size and clarity of the text next to the panels of the heroes and the enlarged pages of the storybook *Jalani and the Lock* were a concern in hanging the art. Lorenzo Pace understood from the initiation of the project that student learning in the area of reading, writing, listening, and speaking were vital to student academic success. Nurturing the individual imagination as well as conveying the cultural legacy of African American and Latino diaspora, Lorenzo Pace along with Caryl Henry and Mel Holston designed the installation and banners to be read literally and aesthetically. There is a deliberate attempt by the professional artists to cognitively engage students as they climb the stairwell going between the first and second floor of the school and when seeing the community banners displayed in the cafetorium to pull meaning from the images in the artwork. Silence can accompany this engagement as if the student is putting



together pieces of a visual puzzle. The visual puzzle embraces ideas associated with visual literacy; art can be found in the world around us, a general visual acuity makes for more productive learning, art need not be hierarchical divided between consumer versus high culture, and multicultural artifacts offer important interpretative tools to global understanding.



Whole school reform efforts have assiduously planned literacy and mathematical blocks of times with individual and group projects, timed readings and scorings, sharing and solitary thinking times, activities centered on manipulatives and cerebral abstractions, while little thought has gone into the class structure of visual arts classrooms in urban settings. The language of reforming schools such as "feedback," "ramp-up," "push-back," and "going to one's strong side," are each necessary aphorisms to signal the monumental effort that is required to move literacy and mathematical achievement forward as well as coordinate the display of community cohesion in urban areas. The balance of addressing the nationally mandated core curriculum content standards has, to date, not found parity between subject areas. Projects like those at Washington Community School, however, provide some opportunities to see the affect of motivating text and image on student

learning. With the emergence of visual literacy as a new lens on arts education, researchers working with whole school reform models might more readily incorporate the arts into the center of the student learning.



In the context of No Child Left Behind, there are over 25 university and other data-based research centers that have refined rituals and routines, reading lists, questioning strategies, and Book of the Month

selections to move underachieving students forward. Even before President George W. Bush's push for early literacy, the following comprehensive reform programs were in place in recognizing the national literacy problem: High Scope K-3 Model, Association for Direct Instruction, Accelerated Schools Project K-8, High Schools that Work 9-12, Modern Red Schoolhouse, Paideia, Roots and Wings, Success for All, Urban Learning Centers preK-12, Talent Development High School 9-12, Basic School Network, Center for Effective Schools, Child Development Project, Different Ways of Knowing, America's Choice,

Ventures, and the Coalition of Essential Schools K-12. The intensity and proliferation of research activity in early reading and continued literacy programs underscores the vitality of the problem that is centered in urban areas in the United States.



Aesthetics of Truth and Reconciliation

One enters the town of Plainfield, New Jersey, where the school population is 65% African American and 35% Latino, through the gates of Chicken Holiday, Planet Chicken, Friendly's advertising 'free sundae with chicken item,' and Popeye Chicken and Biscuits. Perhaps the painted murals are not needed to tag the neighborhood. The only long lasting businesses are funeral homes and locksmith shops. The teenage adolescents on the streets are dressed in oversized white tee shirts and blue jeans, an unofficial uniform. Wearing clothes that are too clean and nice to paint in was an initial issue for the students at the Saturday workshops. White pantsuits, dresses, and good navy blue pants are not clothes for painting. Easing parents and students into the hoped

for routine of weekend painting workshop were met with telling comments by parents saying "I do church and revival meetings but I do not paint or go to theater."

Set-up for disappointment or set-up for success was perhaps an unspoken question for students who were involved in beyond-the-school-day projects. After a student gave up a portion of a lunch hour for an extremely well ordered art club class, the student realized he/

she was one of only ten students selected for the favored position of working on one wall of the Pace installation. Is this punishment or reward to do more work? While the artist was reworking the portraits/dignitaries, the art club was creating depictions



of professions/futures. Other concerns were: will parents come to see the final product? Will students be embarrassed by their parents' lack of interest in their accomplishments, so they are, at times, hesitant to set themselves up for emotional disappointment? The required verbalizations of the student artists' pictorial intention in the art club projects, the tight controls on handing out and packing up art materials, the separation of students from each other ensured no possibility of disharmony within the art club classroom. There was an orchestrated silence and discussion in this regulation of student behavior to promote productivity. These preventions and class structuring are saved for classrooms where students have few of their own controls. Silence, as it encourages academic productivity is favored by African American parents. African American parents want from their schools high standards, competitive test scores, and a well trained and dedicated

teaching staff along with racial integration and sensitivity towards issues of diversity.

The art club students were told their assignment was to depict professions/futures in law, medicine, and business; professions requiring years of education. The initial set of drawings and paintings were ironically both prosaic and abstract. With a newly understood mission by the teacher, the students painted on pristine white canvas squares 15"x15" with iridescent and matte paint. The art club children's final project shows fashion models, basketball and football stars, a president of the United States, a nurse, a teacher, a cook, and other professions. There was a deafening silence from the principal regarding the renewal of the art teacher's teaching contract as the art club had completed its work. During the last day of classes the art teacher disguised her immense disappointment in not being rehired and relayed to the administrative staff of the school that the finished painted canvas squares were neatly rolled and stored with the community liaison of the school. However, the canvas squares could not be located for over a week during the time of installation in late summer 2003. Suspicion and silence were coordinates in various collaborators' minds wondering where the student artwork was being kept. The well preserved student canvases were found in a locked cabinet in the main office erasing any disingenuous motivations of the dismissed teacher.

Dividing turf responsibilities, when working with a professional artist, was an area of contention. At a late date, Lorenzo Pace had not scheduled an installation time for the school district to rent and put up scaffolding and had not revealed his intention on how to bolt the numerous painted panels to the cinderblock walls-though there had been some discussion and demonstration of actual possible attachment devises. The head custodian of Washington Community School had requested that the stairwell public art project be completed before school began in early September 2003, since blocking the stairwell would

disrupt all student movement in the school. It was the combination of doubt, hope and belief in the project that kept everyone moving on, knowing in the back of everyone's mind the powerful unveiling would make the journey all worthwhile. At one o'clock in the morning on a Saturday night and then again at four o'clock in the morning on a Sunday morning in August 2003, the school's motion detector rang in the head custodian's home. He came to the school looking for possible falling or fallen objects. After careful inspection, he saw that the newly attached raffia strands glued to the newly installed wood borders around the central wall's plaques telling the story of *Jalani and the Lock* were occasionally being blown by wind from the air conditioning vents.



Lorenzo Pace came to the school the next day with a glue gun to secure the raffia, a material used on West African huts as depicted in the storybook. The fire code regulators had been alerted to the elements of the art installation with its wood bolted panels and various types of paint and plastic and cloth objects. Ambiance enhancers and safety regulations are sometimes mismatched dance partners.

Teaching Tolerance: State-wide Commissions

In February 2003, the New Jersey legislature passed the Amistad Bill empowering the newly established Amistad Commission to promote and implement education and awareness programs concerned with the African slave trade, slavery in America, and the depth of the impact of slavery on the fabric of American life. The Amistad Commission facilitates workshops, institutes, seminars, and other teacher training activities on a regular basis throughout the state of New Jersey

regarding the mission of making African American history an integral part of American history. The Washington Community School stairwell art installation and cafetorium banners completed in fall of 2003 received a proclamation from the Secretary of State who was co-chair of the Amistad Commission. The proclamation honored the art installation as an instructional vehicle to enhance understanding of African American contributions to all aspects of society in the state of New Jersey. The ceremonial unveiling highlighted the school district's mission to go beyond the rhetoric of achievement and to work towards reaching high academic performance for all students. Intellectual quandaries of seeing curricula issues surrounding multiculturalism as a process, a philosophical orientation or as an instructional theory were an essential part of Lorenzo Pace's installation and the creation of the community banners. The students' cultural identity was enhanced through arts activities and acknowledged by representatives of state government.



The Pace installation at Washington Community School, though not visible from the street but bathed in natural light from its upper windows, allegorically approaches issues of facades versus realities of communities on multiple levels. Engaging all visitors to Washington Community School are the painted panels of the storybook *Jalani and the Lock*, a family history through the Middle Passage, living and past legacies of African American and Latino peoples shown through portraiture and contemporary student artwork foreshadowing their aspirations and futures. When Lorenzo Pace first presented his idea for the school installation, he played a flute to conjure up immediate

and distant memory of his deceased ancestors, perhaps those who had suffered as slaves. The stairwell installation by Lorenzo Pace provokes a multi-level understanding of cultural identity through meditation



on the piercing gazes of the historic and contemporary heroes and through reading texts written for children of all ages. Looking at the children's glowing faces as they inspect and become accustomed to living with art has answered Lorenzo Pace's daughter's question, "Dad, do we come from slaves?" Everyone can now answer her and say "yes," but "we have moved on to better places." The discomfort, the solitude and the abyss of silence has been transformed into hope and security in one's cultural identity.

Post Script

Cable and public television stations covered the opening event (October 28, 2003) with broadcasts that extended for over three weeks. State-wide and local newspapers had photo essays depicting the student artists, Lorenzo Pace, Caryl Henry, Mel Holston and the school district organizers. The students in Washington Community School performed the play "If a Bus Could Talk, The Story of Rosa Parks" adapted from the Faith Ringgold book of the same name in February



2004. The portrait of Rosa Parks, part of the Pace installation, was therefore brought to life by the student performance in celebration of African American history month celebrations for 2004.



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Three Silences: Infection . . . Abjection . . . Art Education

Bob Sweeney

"fucking fagot"

The students were waiting for the bus that would take them home after Drama Club, Intramurals, detention. Some students were sitting on the steps, as instructed by another teacher and myself who had either been assigned or volunteered for 'bus duty' that afternoon. The majority of the students were in various states of agitation, fueled by hormones that had just recently been switched into overdrive by developing pituitary glands. Buying sodas, 'athletic' drinks, and junk food from the vending machines, chasing each other around the bathrooms that separated the cafeteria from the exits, most of the students seemed like a research group which had been recently injected with near-lethal mixtures of sugar and Ritalin.

Arthur (note: names of students and school have been changed) had ingested his share of caffeine, beginning to work on a body which was forced to sit in a room of mandatory quiet, punctuated by the bellowing of the room monitor, the giggles of students seeing an adult lose it over a kid tapping his pencil, the occasional 'bullshit' coughed out, resulting in yet another day in detention. This body, seated in a molded plastic chair-desk combo, had been still for long enough. The bell rung, the room monitor shouting "The bell did not dismiss you..." as students poured out of the room, out of the school, to walk along the four-lane road where students were occasionally hit, one infamously