

The press release for the exhibition Not Here begins, "The Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University is very pleased to announce that we will not be presenting the augmented reality artwork of the art collective, MANIFEST.AR from June 4 through November 27, 2011." It turns out MANIFEST.AR isn't featured in the Venice Biennale either. Even more of a coincidence: the same works not featured in the Biennale are not featured in the Samek show, during the exact same period!

If you're confused, blame Augmented Reality: software that allows enterprising artists to overlay virtual versions of their works in real spaces, at least on AR-enabled smartphones. What's not (here) to like?

For the Samek show, newly named museum director Richard Rinehart, formerly of the Berkeley Art Museum, tapped the same irreverent crew that hijacked the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art in 2010 for the exhibition "We AR in MOMA". We can forgive MoMA guards and unaware gallerygoers for scratching their heads when they saw clued-in visitors pointing cell phones at blank walls and chattering about their favorite works.

The collective's AR Intervention manifesto bends some quotes by Biennale curator Bice Curiger to their own purpose:

As "one of the world's most important forums for the dissemination and illumination about the current developments in international art" the 54th Biennial of Venice could not justify its reputation without an uninvited Manifest.AR Augmented Reality infiltration. In order to "challenge the conventions through which contemporary art is viewed" we have constructed virtual AR pavilions directly amongst the 30-odd buildings of the lucky few within the Giardini. In accordance with the "ILLUMInations" theme and Bice Curiger's 5 questions our uninvited participation will not be bound by nation-state borders, by physical boundaries or by conventional art world structures.

The Venice Biennale has not invited MANIFEST.AR to exhibit these artworks. The Samek Art Gallery has invited the artists to not exhibit the works. MANIFEST.AR's Venice Biennale 2011 AR Intervention descends from the artistic lineage of Salons des Refusés and Institutional Critique. This project imbues healthy critique with a sense of play and offers a new lens through which to view questions of absence and presence, of center and periphery. Artists from Marcel Duchamp to Michael Asher to Andrea Fraser have shown that when an artist gestures beyond the limits of the current art world, they do not leave that world behind; instead they expand its borders. MANIFEST.AR is expanding the art world in a discursive sense as well as technologically and spatially.

Of course, Augmented Reality doesn't do away with spatial coordinates, like net art often does. Rather, it maps new information and imagery onto existing coordinates—in this case, latitudes and longitudes in the city of Venice and the environs of Bucknell University. So you have to be standing at one of those coordinates, as registered by the mobile phone in your hand, to see one of the works. As the Samek press release notes snarkily, "These artworks can be viewed from only two places on Earth: Venice, Italy and Lewisburg, PA. They can be not viewed from anywhere."

Some of the artworks on "display" echo the theme of who's not there, such as German artist Tamiko Thiel's Shades of Absence:

In these Pavilions of Absence images of contemporary artists whose works have been censored in this century are reduced to gold silhouettes and placed in the midst of terms of transgression. Each erased silhouette stands for countless unknown or lesser known artists who face censorship or persecution with no public support. Touching the artist silhouettes brings the viewer a website with information on censored artists, and instructions on how viewers can add new names and information via the web or Facebook.

http://manifestarblog.wordpress.com/thiel_venice-2011/

