

Inner Sight

The Sightings satellite exhibition program was designed to invite artists and participants in the visual arts to reflect on issues related to the white cube as a modernist conception of exhibition space. Concordia University's Henry F. Hall Building, in which the satellite exhibition module is situated, was built in the 1960s in modern, cubic style, and featuring a refined architectural envelope composed of prefabricated concrete panels. At the time of its construction (1964–66), the new Sir George Williams University (renamed Concordia University in 1974) building was intended to house everything a university should offer: departmental facilities, offices, classrooms, auditoriums, laboratories, libraries, an exhibition space, a theatre, a garage, and a public area – where Sightings is installed.¹

Sightings is a transparent cubic exhibition module situated in the building's lobby, through which students, professors, support personnel, and guests pass. Around the cube are several elements allowing for circulation: revolving doors create a transition from outside to inside the building. A line of columns supports the mezzanine that overhangs the lobby. One end of the lobby contains a series of bronze busts and a commemorative work by Eduardo Aquino, Johanne Sloan and Kathryn Walter composed of granite tables, cement blocks, a light structure, and a tree in a container. At the other end, stairs descend into an underground labyrinth, and facing the cube a wide staircase, flanked by escalators, provides access to the mezzanine. In fact, these escalators were one of the modern attractions highlighted when the building was inaugurated. Floor-to-ceiling glazing forms the ground-floor façade on which article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, addressing the right to education, is displayed in several languages. Often, people waiting for others near the Sightings cube lean against a cube-shaped, white container that contains a tree. This tree is also part of the commemorative work situated at the other end of the lobby.

During my visit to the site, I was struck by the number of users who, as they enter the building, have their eyes fixed on a small screen (usually a smartphone) and seem to be indifferent to their environment. As I am interested in issues related to public space, modern architecture, and the transformation of urban spaces, I decided to work on a reflection of the context in which Sightings is installed.

My practice usually takes the form of videos, which I present in large format in dark spaces. Sightings, with its white edges and transparent Plexiglas faces, differs radically from the environments within which I usually project images. The stillness that the cube creates in the motion-filled space and its properties of *mise en scène* in a university context led me to propose an installation articulated around the idea of the study room with furniture commonly called mid-century modern, referring also to the time when the building was erected. Free of electronic apparatuses, this small study room is intended to contrast with today's learning context. As I was doing my research, however, I digressed and turned to the furniture of the

¹ Anja Borck, "Seen But Ignored: Concordia University's Henry Foss Hall Building in Montréal," JSSAC | JSÉAC, vol. 34, no. 2 (2009): 61–74.

Bauhaus. The great propensity of this movement for research and engagement appeared to me to offer the ideal principles to highlight in Sightings, as an experimental space.

I chose to reproduce a documentary photograph of the Bauhaus school in which design, photography, and theatre converge:² sitting in a chair designed by Marcel Breuer, a female figure wearing a theatre mask reaches out to us.³ I reproduced the image in black and white on a banner that I placed in the cube, along with a relatively recent copy of the Wassily chair on which the person in the image is sitting. At the same time, I searched for furniture at the university in order to introduce a piece that comes from the institution itself into the cube. In a storage space, I found a veneered wood desk made in Canada, probably dating from the 1960s, that had been cast aside – replaced by a more recent model. Finally, a black carpet on the floor unifies the composition and lightens the museological aspect of the installation. Thus, various temporalities are superimposed within this *mise en scène* related to the readymade. With this grouping, I am trying to evoke the values of emancipation, avant-garde, and social and political awareness associated with the Bauhaus movement, as well as hoping to reflect the university context and the place that the arts and culture occupy in the spaces that we spend time in.

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Translation by Kathe Roth

² Photograph by Erich Consemüller, Bauhaus scene, 1926, private collection in Bremen Club chair (or Wassily chair) by Marcel Breuer, 1925.

³ Lis Beyer, student at the Bauhaus, or Ise Gropius, who worked at the Bauhaus and was married to Marcel Gropius, with a theatre mask by Oskar Schlemmer.