Espace Sculpture

Aidan Urquhart

Locked Knowledge

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Citer ce compte rendu
Locked Knowledge consists of twelve site-specific installations and a gallery exhibition. These installations question the accessibility of knowledge, referencing such issues as censorship, the dissemination of information, privilege and learning. In doing so, the artist, Aidan Urquhart, has intentionally raised some difficult questions. This is particularly significant given that the installations were located on the campus and in the gallery of a university, a setting he deliberately chose.

Locked Knowledge has been working on this project for almost two years now; its genesis, however, was a guerrilla installation project he undertook seven years ago in London, Ontario. At that time, he chose twenty-six used books and marked them each with a letter from the alphabet. They were then sealed so that they couldn't be opened, effectively becoming objects or symbols rather than "true" books. These twenty-six books were then taken by Urquhart to various unlikely locales in the city, arranged in random orders and then photographed. It was a private project, meant to be stumbled upon incidentally rather than having a public intention, and it was from this that the idea of Locked Knowledge came to be.

Locked Knowledge is divided into two components. The first is the installation within the gallery, and the second consists of twelve islands or "pods" (as the artist has named them) scattered about the university campus. Both the gallery installation and the pods consist primarily of used hardcover books. Each book has been sealed so that it cannot be opened. On the cover they have been marked with a letter from the alphabet. The letters are in different sizes, fonts, and colours. Urquhart custom mixed each colour such that each one is completely unique. The books are then chained together in groups that are then padlocked, further binding them and ensuring that the contents cannot be accessed.

Urquhart was unconcerned about the contents or titles of the books he used. The individual aspect of the book wasn't important — what was crucial to his installation was the symbolic, almost Platonic ideal of "book" as a repository of knowledge and understanding. This is particularly important within a university context. Books are an integral part of a university's raison d'être. They contain the experiences and discoveries of past generations, they stimulate present generations of students, and they convey information.

Yet, chained and bound, the books also remind one that this is not the case. They are masked, hidden, locked away. They cannot be accessed, they are guarded, they reside at the back of the room, at the base of the building, emerging from a dense ground cover of ivy, and valiantly struggling along a railing, up some stairs. The ground-level placement of the books metaphorically reinforces Urquhart's overall theme. Here, the books and the information contained therein are seen as being at root or foundation level. From the "roots" of what is contained within the books, knowledge and learning can grow. Likewise the books chained to the foundation of a building's pillar remind one that learning and information is what the university is predicated upon; it is the purpose of the university's very existence.

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