

Morgan Presents

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Fraternité

Ana Benaroya, Mike Shultis, Blair Whiteford

Curated by Morgan Aguiar-Lucander



The French word *Fraternité* finds its etymological origins in the Latin word *frater*—brother. *Fraternité* is most commonly propounded via the phrase ‘*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*’; a notion originally conceived by theologian François Fénelon at the close of the 17th century. The expression came to characterize the republican ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

In December 1790, in a speech on the organization of the National Guard, Robespierre advocated for the phrase to be inscribed on all uniforms and flags. This inspiring rallying call acquired a darker association under Robespierre’s Reign of Terror in 1793, yet can today still be found on the facades of French public buildings and even the preamble to the French Constitution of 1958. This conflicting double nature of brotherhood and terror, of intimacy and violence, can be identified in American society today.

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In this exhibit Ana Benaroya, Mike Shultis and Blair Whiteford, three Yale MFA graduate colleagues, explore this duality and internal tension captured in the void between the American promise and its lived reality. Fraternities, a uniquely American social convention, abound college campuses, revealing and obscuring certain facets of the fabric of American society.

The locating of this exhibit in a private residence on a college campus seeks to parallel the residential structure and remove of fraternities, while also recognizing a shift in the dialogue and motivations of today's art world. A shift from the dominance of formal criticism, associated with the mid-twentieth century, to the commercial and residential concerns of the collector whose hand rests upon the tiller of the art market today.

Brian O'Doherty immortalized the term 'White Cube' in his trio of Artforum essays 'Inside the White Cube' of 1976. MoMA is recognized as the institutional pioneer of this exhibition form, championing it in Alfred Barr's 1936 exhibit *Cubism and Abstract Art*. This served perhaps as a refutation of older European institutions, the lingering influence of the Parisian salon style, and in an aim to dislocate the artworks from the practical realities of the world. Characterizing the motivations behind the display, Abigail Cain writes, "The works were arranged to trace an art-historical narrative that ignored any political or social context; Barr wanted the visual impact of each painting or sculpture to speak for itself."¹

Today we are forced to reconsider whether Barr's approach remains appropriate. Are we able to isolate and elevate form above social and political context? Can we continue to understand art displaced from the world we live in and still claim to fully understand it? As contemporary America grapples with its own ideals and shortcomings, the promise of the American Dream and the violence inflicted upon her own people, *Fraternité* rings as both a stark reminder of our loftiest ideals and our most pressing betrayals.

—Morgan Aguiar-Lucander

¹ <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-white-cube-dominate-art>