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SPECIAL PROJECT: *THE X-FACTOR: A POST-KATRINA NARRATIVE*

A DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION FISCALLY-SPONSORED BY THE SOUTHERN DOCUMENTARY FUND
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An introduction to an exhibition spotlighting New Orleans's Katrina X-codes

The X-Factor: A Post-Katrina Narrative

Organized by Davis-Moye & Associates

What: After Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, while the city of New Orleans was searched house by house and building by building, first responders developed a unified code that could be interpreted by others as they criss-crossed the city searching and rescuing residents from structures damaged by the hurricane and subsequent flood. The code consisted of a large X spray painted somewhere on the façade of each structure (door, siding, window, etc.) One piece of information was entered in each quadrant of the X. This information included the date, sometimes the time, the unit doing the searching, and sometimes other information. In the bottom quadrant was noted whether or not anyone was found there, alive or not. In some areas, animal rescuers later added spray painted notes such as “Dog sighted – runner” or “2 cats, food left.” These codes are a valuable record, expressed in an unforgettable graphic, and displayed on the unique architecture of the city. The codes are found art, in all probability developed spontaneously and expressed as a part of the architecture, and are even more powerful when considered in the stunning volume of their repetition.

Where: All over the city of New Orleans. The repetition of this code on house after house after house on mile after mile after mile of streets was a powerful narrative of the weeks following the storm, and is unique in that it is a narrative told ON the architecture of the city. The repetition of the codes demonstrated a graphic even handedness—they appeared on structures spanning the socioeconomic mix of the city, and reflected the fact that this was an equal opportunity disaster.

How: This powerful graphic and its overwhelming repetition was noted by both amateurs and professionals documenting the event and its aftermath, and many of these viewers recorded the markings photographically. The visual recording of the found art of the X-codes has by now become a found art itself—the images are held by both amateur and professional artists who were moved and impressed by the sheer volume of the repetition as well as the unique power of communication. As an exhibition, the photographic visuals will be expanded through texts and personal histories.

Proposed: to assemble and present an exhibition that will convey the sense of awe and the dawning comprehension that follows when confronted with this unique narrative of the storm and flood as told by a powerful graphic. This will be supplemented, and the significance of the visual shorthand emphasized, with the use of oral and written histories from residents, first responders, other participants, and observers, along with catalog essays examining various aspects of the phenomenon.

Why: Although the tale told by these codes is still raw in many respects, it is a graphic that should be significant in the long view of history. As a totality, this is both a found art installation and a significant historic reminder of a time that affected participants in every level of life in the city.

Background: although there have already been other photographic exhibitions documenting the storm and its aftermath, this will be the first to focus on the unique narrative of the X-codes. The objective fact of the code on the variety of buildings in the city also tells the story of how all segments of the city were impacted by the events of August 2005. This is to be reflected by the solicitation of images from both professional and non-professional photographers who were attracted to the strong visual presented thousands of times. The presentation will represent a community of documentarians.

Mechanics: a call for artists will be issued when funding is in place and institutional support is assured. Response is expected from a wide range of participants, both amateur and professional photographers and artists. The goal is to collect enough different images from enough locations around the city to create an installation conveying the scope, variety, and sheer numbers of locations affected. An exhibition design is available for review.

Other threads of investigation: Additional threads of the story that are being investigated are

- the power of repetition in art
- the process of development of a specialized disaster language
- how the specific code was developed and its current use in subsequent disasters

The X-Factor, Davis-Moye & Associates
Description

Description of the project:

The exhibition will consist of a series of transparent panels suspended from a grid of supports with up to thirty photographic images embedded in each. Each photograph will be printed to a 12”x12” size. The panels will have photographs on both sides so that they can be viewed from either vantage point. A plan of this hanging system is available for review.

The goal is to include in this format one thousand images in an arrangement that conveys the streaming impressions of traveling through mile after mile of buildings marked with the graphic telling the story of the storm’s aftermath. The photographs will be obtained through a Call for Artists to be sent to a range of professional artists and amateurs through a variety of sources and mailing lists. The use of transparent panels will enhance the repetition since the viewer will always be aware of layers of imagery seen peripherally. Ideally the images will be clustered by neighborhood. The purpose of this format is to take the viewer into the experience of the overwhelming numbers and geographic scope experienced when traveling through the streets of the city. These visuals will be supplemented, and the significance of the visual shorthand emphasized, with the use of histories from residents, first responders, other participants, and observers. The viewer will be reminded constantly that in this event, everyone has a story to tell and we who were not actively engaged have the job of listening.

The use of the support grids and the panel system, as shown in the design included in this package, gives this exhibition a great deal of flexibility. It can be adapted to varying venue sizes and running feet – the grids and panels can be configured within a gallery in a number of ways to customize the presentation for many types and sizes of venues.

A catalog will be designed to accompany the exhibition including a sampling of the oral history quotes, at least one comprehensive essay, and the images presented in a uniquely designed format. Chris Rose, columnist for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and author of *One Dead in Attic* has agreed to be an essayist for the catalog, helping to tell the story of the codes. Both the installation and the catalog are conceived as works of art in themselves.

This exhibition will also be available for a traveling schedule and has been designed for flexibility as a traveling package. It has not been determined yet if this schedule will be developed through Davis-Moye & Associates’ resources or proposed to a traveling exhibition service.

The X-Factor, Davis-Moye & Associates
Audience and Distribution

Projected Audience

The primary audience for this exhibition is outside the city of New Orleans. Museums and exhibition venues in the city have already presented a variety of exhibitions documenting the storm and its aftermath. The story being told here is quite familiar enough to residents of the city, and this show will strive to convey one aspect of the story to those who were not there. The X-code graphic and the memories it invokes are often raw to those who experienced the event, but documentation and remembrance of this one element seems imperative. The basic philosophy and goal behind this exhibition is to tell residents of other places one facet of the story of what happened in the city of New Orleans in August 2005.

The plans include offering the exhibition as a traveling exhibition that would be budgeted separately, but it is emphasized that this should be an important component and wide exposure of the documentary materials is a goal of the project.

Dorothy Moye has worked with traveling exhibitions in the past and has collected an extensive list of possibilities to solicit if necessary. However, at the moment it seems more productive to offer the package to a traveling exhibition service to avoid reinventing the wheel. The services have a wider range of exposure and an administration in place to handle all the details. The exhibition should be attractive to a variety of museums, art centers, and other appropriate venues.

The X-Factor, Davis-Moye & Associates
Status and Timetable

Project Status and Completion Timeline

August 2006 – began investigation of an exhibition centered around actual X-code artifacts, to be collected as demolitions proceeded.

October 2006 – met with New Orleans based advisors

January 2007 – met with museum personnel, demolition companies, advisors, preservationists

Continued exploring contacts of all sorts: potential funders, potential venues, potential networks. It was becoming increasingly clear that sponsorship through a New Orleans institution was not going to happen.

July 2007 – on site tours led to the conclusion that the window had closed for obtaining quality and quantity of artifacts needed for the exhibition as originally conceived. Private demolitions had been proceeding (although the schedule for other demolitions has been sporadic at best.) X-codes had been painted over to erase reminders and to clean up properties. Sun, wind, and weather had taken a toll as the remaining painted codes had often begun to fade.

Fall 2007 – reached the inevitable conclusion that for funding purposes it would be necessary to find a nonprofit umbrella to give legitimacy to this independent project.

November 2007 – researched fiscal sponsors. Concluded with the advice of informal advisors that the Southern Documentary Fund would be the best fit.

December 2007 – sketches for exhibition design completed by Amy Landesberg Architects.

January 15, 2008 – applied for fiscal sponsorship to Southern Documentary Fund.

The above points have been reached through the investigations and research of Dorothy Moye, with a lot of help from her friends. So far it has involved four trips to New Orleans from Decatur and has all been accomplished through in-kind contributions.

Ongoing timeline:

February, 2008

– met with New Orleans advisors and explored possibility of museum acquisition at the end of the exhibition, secured preferred author for catalog essay (Chris Rose, *New Orleans Time-Picayune* columnist and author of *One Dead in Attic*.)

– researched requirements for an exhibition traveling with SITES.

– approached first venues for proposed opening

April 1, 2008

– approved for fiscal sponsorship by the Southern Documentary Fund.

– began grant applications.

Ongoing

- research on appropriate grant making institutions.
- researching and approaching exhibition venues.

With fiscal sponsorship assured, and when an opening venue is secured and first grant is obtained:

- apply for as many appropriate grants as it takes to cover the projected budget, following a schedule dictated by varying deadlines.
- the schedule for many of the next steps will be dependent on the requirements of the opening venue. Projected dates for the opening will be the driver for most of the rest of the schedule.
- issue call for artists. Allow one hundred twenty days until response deadline for full distribution of the call.
- research best means of contacting first responders who developed the code.
- simultaneously solicit oral histories and written thoughts on the reactions to and significance of the X-codes from residents, first responders, relief workers, observers, reporters, artists, photographers, and others who have over the three-year period responded to the code.
- allow sixty days to organize entries and data
- select up to one thousand images to include in the exhibition
- begin catalog production
- production of the installation hardware, graphics production, and preparation of wall texts

The remainder of the time line will be dependent on all of the above steps and consists of the opening exhibition, extended traveling schedule, and ultimately the donation of the installation to a New Orleans museum. However, the target date for the opening exhibition is August 2010, the fifth anniversary of Katrina's landfall.

The X-Factor, Davis-Moye & Associates
Personnel

Key Personnel

Principal organizers are the following:

Dorothy Moye, project director. Principal, Davis-Moye & Associates. An Atlanta area art consultant and a former resident of New Orleans, who has organized numerous exhibitions and placed art work in corporate collections throughout the Southeast.

Amy Landesberg, exhibition designer. Principal, Amy Landesberg Architects, Decatur, Georgia. An artist/architect whose designs for public buildings and exhibition spaces have won awards, and whose public art works are prominent features of the Atlanta cityscape.

Judith Schonbak, editor. A freelance writer with a varied corporate clientele, who also writes regularly about the arts. She will be working primarily with wall texts and the catalogue.

Resumes of the above are available upon request.

Advisors:

Thomas Mann, New Orleans artist, with an international following. Mann has already organized an exhibition of his work in response to the Katrina's destruction, titled Storm Cycle.

Elaine Clement, a deacon in the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, who has been actively involved for the past three years in all aspects of disaster relief operations.

Rob Amberg, noted documentary photographer, Marshall, North Carolina. He has worked with student photography trips to New Orleans through the Center for Documentary Studies, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Jenny Bagert, New Orleans photographer, documentarian, former evacuee, and universal networker.

Leslie Harris, associate professor, Department of History, Emory University; New Orleans native, author.

In addition, an informal group of exhibition designers, architects, historians, and New Orleanians advise the project.

The X-Factor, Davis-Moye & Associates
Supplementary Materials list

Materials available on Request:

- Letters of support from Andrew Glasgow, director of the American Craft Council and Sam Stephenson of the Center for Documentary Studies.
- Davis-Moye & Associates brochure
- Exhibition design
- Mock up of sample display panel
- Typical photographs
- Resumes of key personnel

Personal references:

Temme Barkin-Leeds, retired art consultant and frequent exhibition collaborator, active studio artist. Atlanta, Georgia. 404.816.0086

Bob Wolfe, vice president Washington Nationals Baseball Club, Washington, D.C. Former client for large-scale projects (with Atlanta Braves.) 202.541.1606.

Karen Messina, principal designer, MSTSD (architecture firm), Atlanta, Georgia. Client for several large-scale projects. 404.962.9680.

Kendall Simpson, former colleague at Emory University's Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, Atlanta, Georgia. 404.727.7804.

The X-Factor, Davis-Moye & Associates
Fundraising Plan

Fundraising Plan

A total budget of \$75,000 must be raised for this project. There are possibilities under negotiation that will provide significant in-kind contributions. The remainder of the funds necessary for this project will come from grants from a variety of sources. A list compiled from sources is being researched for the following criteria:

- Focus of the granting institution (arts and culture)
- Geographic coverage (includes Southeast)
- Media funded (includes photography)
- Funding for collateral materials (catalog)
- Workable deadlines
- History of support for similar projects

The ability to apply for the majority of this funding is dependent on having been approved by a non-profit fiscal sponsor. Without this level of institutional support the ability to attract the required amounts of funding would be questionable.

Once a venue for the opening exhibition is secured, some assistance with grant applications and possible funding from the venue will be negotiated, along with certain in-kind contributions.