

October 20, 2018

A Response to the College of the Arts (COTA) Dean Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, California State University Long Beach (CSULB) Spokesperson Terri Carbaugh, California State University Employees Union (CSUEU) Chapter 315 President Jennifer Moran, and whom else it may concern:

Since the firing of the University Art Museum (UAM) director Kimberli Meyer on September 11, 2018 there have been growing concerns among CSULB students regarding the handling of race-relations and inclusivity within the UAM, the College of the Arts, and the School of Art.

The following is our response and reaction to the communication from leadership. It is our hope that all those in positions of leadership listen, internalize our questions and concerns, and act accordingly.

[Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, COTA Dean, statement released September 17, 2018:](#)

“The installation is designed to provoke open and free discussion. Our campus is a place for civil discourse and artistic expression.”

Response:

The installation is designed to enable change. Free discussion means nothing to the people in the line of fire if there is no direct action taken by people like you in positions of leadership and power. Are we meant to civically (politely) discuss the mass murdering of black people by police and law enforcement agencies in the United States and feel content with only being permitted to speak but not be heard, affirmed, or helped? What is the point of free discussion if you, Dean Parker-Jeanette, are not free to address certain issues and concerns? Furthermore, what good is discussion if there is no action? We want to see demonstrated interest in implementing long-term solutions to the problem at hand. Current leadership and museum staff have been inadequate at handling issues regarding race. If you will not hire people who look like us or share our experiences as people of color then at the very least administration, faculty, and staff must be trained to recognize unconscious bias.

[Terri Carbaugh, CSULB Spokesperson, statement released to Hyperallergic September 19, 2018:](#)

“It is important to understand that the departure of Kimberli Meyer is unrelated to the exhibit’s content.”

“Campus officials sought [exhibition] transcripts not to curtail free speech or artistic expression, but to gain a clearer understanding if the campus would need to invest in counseling staff who could assist any student who might experience an emotional trigger as a result of the intensity of the exhibit.”

Response:

Meyer was Lauren Woods' main collaborator in this project, this is a stated and known fact. Her removal from her position as director had a significant impact to the work and there is no conceivable way that that fact would have been unknown to UAM staff or anyone handling whatever personnel dynamics were in place. Removing a major collaborator from the project was a direct affront to the work and the content. This was an act of utter disrespect and institutional violence. It may be unrelated to the content of the monument as you understand the content to be but the fact is that the content was altered because of this action. The content suffered. If you still believe the content to be unrelated, you must at least admit that it became collateral damage. Take time to consider how the community and students of color feel about content that reflects them and their experiences casually become collateral damage.

To your second point regarding an interest in investing in counseling staff we ask this: if the university is truly concerned with the emotional well-being of students who may be triggered, why not invest in long-term solutions? Why has museum staff not received unconscious or implicit bias training? More importantly, why is Catherine Scott the only self-identifying person of color on staff at the UAM? (Incidentally, Scott has been the *only* UAM staff member to personally reach out to students, ask about our concerns, and attempt to organize events to facilitate our healing.) Despite the intensity of the events and discourse that followed Meyer's firing, we as students have not heard a single concern from UAM or COTA admin and staff specifically about our emotional well-being. We do not feel comfortable or safe going into the UAM. Somehow, this is apparently of no concern.

[Jennifer Moran, CSUEU Chapter 315 President, statement released to the LB Post October 1, 2018:](#)

"[Meyer's] conceptual legacy is honored with continued conversation about systemic oppression and exhibits that uphold social justice issues."

"I wanted to have a discussion [with University Police] about protecting the safety of UAM staff, and by extension, the students and public"

"This project is an opportunity to come together and have meaningful dialogue around systemic oppression. The fact that a personnel matter may overshadow the importance of understanding and exploring the bias in police violence is unfortunate."

Response:

Meyer's work is being co-opted by a staff that is inadequate for "continuing conversations about systemic oppression." How can the UAM claim to uphold social justice issues when the most actively committed person to radical change was fired? What does "upholding social justice issues" mean to you?

We want to sincerely ask you, Ms. Moran, do you think communities of color feel safe around police or law enforcement agencies? According to your statement you were most concerned with the safety of the staff. The mostly white and white-adjacent staff. American MONUMENT is about police brutality against black people. So, vehemently wanting to involve agents of an

institution historically linked to systemic violence and racism is not only a severely tone-deaf approach but it also represents complete disregard for the safety of the community and students of color.

Lastly, this project is about more than dialogue. It is about action. Violent actions from police, action taken by the community to claim ownership of public documents, and potential institutional actions to keep our brothers and sisters of color safe and alive. This personnel matter is not “overshadowing the importance of understanding and exploring the bias in police violence” because it is our lived truth every single day. Nothing will overshadow this reality for us. What is a shame, rather, is that this personnel matter, in which you are so invested, has impeded this public institution from implementing and achieving any kind of institutional change enabled by Kimberli Meyer’s leadership and Lauren Woods’ monument.

Kimberli’s firing and the consequent pause are a tremendous loss, not just for us but for the university whose ethnic/racial demographic is primarily made-up of students of color **[Undergraduates ethnic/race demographic according to CSULB’s Common Data Set 2016-17 (2017-18 data not provided on the CSULB website): Hispanic - 12,994; Black or African American - 1,274; Asian - 7,239; American Indian or Alaska Native - 57; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander - 74; White, non-Hispanic - 5,759]**. American MONUMENT was the first artistic project facilitated by the UAM that many of us at the School of Art felt truly reflected those practices in a way that was relevant to us. Learning about Kimberli’s anti-racist initiatives enhanced our excitement for it. We were starting to feel included.

With that said, we ask for a response from COTA Dean Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, CSULB Spokesperson Terri Carbaugh, and CSUEU Chapter 315 President Jennifer Moran. You were all quick to defend the institution, the UAM staff, and champion free and open dialogue. Consider this an open invitation to dialogue with us, School of Art students of color. We welcome any and all additional responses from CSULB administration, COTA admin, faculty and staff, and UAM staff.

Please understand that we would not engage in dialogue with you if we did not deeply care for this institution. We have invested so much of our time, money, and energy into CSULB. We love this university, we cherish our community, and we are supportive of the university’s interest in implementing inclusionary practices. However, we refuse to give up our seat at this table. All exhibitions, present or future, that do not involve anti-racist staff like Kimberli Meyer and the initiatives she spearheaded, are but superficial in nature regarding their claims of student engagement and racial justice. We demand a reworking of institutional practices linked not only to American MONUMENT but all future artistic presentations at the UAM.

We cannot sit back in silence and accept that our school will simply dismiss our concerns. By now you have all read Melissa Raybon’s open letter. CSULB failed her. The right thing to do is to

recognize how the institution has hurt her, apologize, and begin to implement measures to ensure that no other student like her has to endure that kind of treatment and disrespect again.

You can begin by responding to our concerns with an articulation of actions that will be taken to address the issues we have raised.

We stand in full support of Melissa Raybon (CSULB alumna 2018), Lauren Woods, and Kimberli Meyer.

Signed,

CSULB School of Art Concerned Students of Color and Allies
csulb.soa.soc@gmail.com

Attachment:

[Melissa Raybon's Open Letter](#)