Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Intentional Conversation: 100 Artists Walk Into a Room…

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, October 6th, 2011

Funny thing happens when you get a bunch of artists together. They talk about what they do.

Which is odder than it sounds, because most of the time, artists don't. They're usually kind of quiet, even introverted, and prefer to say things like "I'd really rather let my work speak instead of me."

But we were at the Intentional Conversation, an event that brings together creative leaders of all sorts to do something that's increasingly rare… converse.

For the past two years I have been privileged to attend the Intentional Conversation, an event hosted by Marymount College and its president Michael Brophy, and under the guidance of writer and engaged citizen Hoyt Hilsman.

Hoyt's genius is that he's able to set an easy yet serious tone in the room. The ground rules are disarmingly simple: The purpose isn't to come to decisions or agreement, just to talk. No one is more expert than anyone else; everyone is an artist of some kind, and success is measured by how openly we discuss and how many questions we still have when we leave.

As I participated this week, I realized it's had a big influence on *Cultural Weekly*, because the Conversation shows that just by creating space for discussion, discussion happens.

This past Tuesday, at Los Angeles's downtown cathedral, we have questions set before us. Is your work primarily concerned with the imagination or the real world? The visible or the invisible? What impact does your exploration of the imagination and the invisible have on your work, and the larger world?

What we discussed doesn't translate well here, because you'd need a transcript of the discussion to have a feel for the experience, which is process, not product. All of us have inner monologues that run through our heads; at the Conversation we can share them.

Marymount is expanding its commitment to the Intentional Conversation, now providing office space, and an ambition to expand beyond twice-yearly gatherings to ongoing and service-oriented activities. It's a good model for all of us; one wishes this kind of conversation could happen more often, and more places.

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