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art, Dispatches, exhibition, installation, place, sculpture

### | Dispatches #11 | John Hendershot, “You’re Gonna Be Okay”, @ Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University

In art, Dispatches, works on 05/24/2010 at 9:43 am



(<http://cablegram.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/hendershot.jpg>) The annual MFA thesis exhibitions at VCU (<http://www.vcu.edu/arts/>) (Virginia Commonwealth University) are highly anticipated in Richmond. The University’s School of Arts is ranked in the nation’s top ten, the roster of alumni is impressive (e.g. Teresita Fernández (<http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/#/artists/teresita-fernandez/>) and Tara Donovan (<http://www.acegallery.net/artistmenu.php?Artist=8>)). Each year the students explore the boundaries of their media and display innovative approaches. Within today’s short post I’ll discuss just one work from Round I of the MFA exhibitions [see the next post for a highlight from Round II].

For his installation “You’re Gonna Be Ok” John Hendersho (<http://www.jhendershot.com/>) re-created a waiting room in a doctor’s office or medical clinic, with a set of generic chairs and tables, tissue boxes, bad artwork, two TV screens with continuous loops of old headlines, and an interactive computer component. With these few props, Hendershot formed an immediately recognizable space that is both unremarkable yet also emotionally unsettling.

On the one hand, it’s an obvious cheap shot. Anticipation of medical procedures = bad feelings, ergo, this art “moves” me. But Hendershot’s work did more than elicit a somewhat unpleasant visceral response; it made me question that response.

I thought about life (my daughter's) and death (my mother's). Why was it so easy for this artist to reach into my emotional lock-box with some carefully selected furniture and objects?

I thought about Marc Augé' ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Marc\\_Aug%C3%A9&oldid=351755171](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Marc_Aug%C3%A9&oldid=351755171))s “non-places,” those common, supposedly non-important interstitial spaces in contemporary society. Why are medical waiting rooms, which are essentially ubiquitous temporary holding pens for potentially fragile people, so consistently banal?

I thought about the universality of certain experiences. Is there anyone in this country who hasn't experienced the acute mixture of anxiety and boredom that arises when trapped in a room such as this in a doctor's office or ER, waiting to hear about a loved one's condition?

Surely other artists have explored the idea of the waiting room, but Hendershot's is the first installation I've encountered. I've been chewing over this work for a couple weeks now and was just rewarded by reading the artist's straightforward, personal, and articulate artist statement (<http://www.jhendershot.com/?cat=11>). He discusses how “You're Gonna Be Okay” arose from his own experience with tragedy, his interest in game theory, and the concept of “framing.”

Essentially, Hendershot changed the framework a medical waiting room by re-creating one in an art gallery. This is not exactly a radical approach and yet his artwork insinuated itself in my psyche in ways I'm still mulling over and trying to articulate.

-N. Elizabeth Schlatter is a curator and writer living in Richmond, VA.

Image: John Hendershot, *You're Gonna Be OK*, 2010, mixed media installation.

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