



DAILY BRUIN



Interactive show merges reading, theater experience using Virginia Woolf texts

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Lighting and set designer Brian H. Scott poses with some of the set materials from "the theater is a blank page." During the performance, actors will lead audience members through various sets. One installation features five Saratoga International Theater Institute Company cast members simultaneously reading one of Virginia Woolf's novels out loud. (Anna Moreno-Takegami/Daily Bruin)

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The literary hub of Powell Library and performance space of Royce Hall will come together for an immersive, staged reading experience.

The Saratoga International Theater Institute Company's "the theater is a blank page," which will run from April 29 to May 12, entwines literature and theater in three hours. The interactive project will feature art installations based on a novel by Virginia Woolf alongside performers who will lead audience members through Powell Library and Royce Hall to experience reading as a live group activity.

"the theater is a blank page"

Powell Library and Royce Hall

Saratoga International Theater Institute

April 28-May 12

The SITl Company's production integrates text from the novel. Visual artist and co-director Ann Hamilton said the experience is not about the plot of the books, but about the conditions in which the audience receives the story. Through the crossover between visual and performance art, co-directors Hamilton and Anne Bogart said they hope to recreate the experience of reading a book in a live community setting.

"It's such an extraordinary layout that you have the architecture of the theater (in Royce Hall), which is set up for voice and motion, face to face with Powell Library, which is set up for books and reading and the silence of that," Hamilton said.

Hamilton said she and Bogart were interested in the ways reading a book and viewing a play are similar – both require the viewer to immerse themselves in the story. By combining the two mediums, they are trying to regulate how audiences experience literature both on their own and in a group setting, Hamilton said.

The piece begins with the performers leading audience members to the second floor of Powell Library. The venue is decorated with a special collection of installations that give context to Woolf's life, including a first edition of one of her novels from Hogarth Press, the publishing house Woolf created with her husband.

Each audience member receives a collagelike version of Woolf's novel made out of newsprint. By providing audience members with the pamphlets, the performers ensure the spectators have a common text to carry with them throughout the performance, Hamilton said.

UCLA alumna Zuri Adele performs in each installation. In one exhibit, audience members read the text from Woolf's novel off a piece of cloth before passing it to the next person. The action allows the audience to become a part of the installation while the actors watch them, Adele said.

Another installation features five SITl Company cast members simultaneously reading pages of the same Woolf novel scattered throughout the room. The audience may only see one or two of the cast members depending on their position in the space, emphasizing the collective yet subjective experience of reading as part of a group, Adele said.

"The whole idea of the project is that we are cultivating this experience where people can come and be in a room reading together in a way that brings forth life," Adele said. "I'm just one of the bodies and voices of that experience."

Hamilton said multiple spatial dimensions are at play when someone is reading a book on their own. Individually, readers may be affected by external factors, such as the chair they sit on and the distracting text messages they receive, while they are simultaneously immersed in the world of the story. The group event allows the audience to explore how others respond to such experiences in tandem, Hamilton said.

"We're interested in the sense of being alone together," Hamilton said. "That spaciousness is really something that is incredibly rare and underappreciated in our culture."