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Woolf's 'Lighthouse' inspires collaboration

The Wexner Center for the Arts will present the theater is a blank page on Thursday through Sunday in Mershon Auditorium, 1871 N. High St. The performances are sold out.

By **Michael Grossberg**

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Mershon Auditorium on the Ohio State University campus, long a setting for shows and stars, is itself the focus in *the theater is a blank page*.

Columbus artist Ann Hamilton and SITI Company of New York collaborated on the site-specific piece about space and time.

The Wexner Center for the Arts, which includes Mershon, will end its 25th season with the new work. The performances, beginning Thursday at the 58-year-old auditorium, are sold out, but there is a waiting list.

"What we wanted to do was look at the mechanism of a big theater and renew our interest in what a theater can do. That's why it's called . . . *the blank page*," said Anne Bogart, co-artistic director of SITI, a movement-oriented ensemble.

Hamilton, an OSU professor, often roots her installation art in architecture.

"The history of my work has been one of responding to the places that I find myself . . . and the social and historical context around that space," Hamilton said.

"What's exciting is we're asking, even in the title, 'What is this space of theater and what happens in that space?'"

Chuck Helm, director of performing arts at the center, views the first collaboration between Hamilton and the theater company as historic.

"They have developed a common language . . . altering our expectations of time and space and how things unfold," he said.

Starting in the balcony, groups of 120 people will be ushered through Mershon to explore space, time and reflection.

"It's not a typical black-box show. It uses the entire space," Bogart said. "The audience starts by looking at it from a great distance. . . . Then they enter the stage and watch it transform."



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Professor Ann Hamilton, left, and Anne Bogart of SITI Company

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A primary source of inspiration was *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf's modernist novel offering stream-of-consciousness reflections on loss and subjectivity.

"I suggested to Ann that we approach Woolf's *Lighthouse*, a piece of literature about a family that goes to an island in Scotland," Bogart said.

"It's their time away from time . . . on vacation — which you only get if you don't take your laptop or smartphone."

Six SITI performers, working with nine OSU students, perform the three-hour piece, which includes an intermission.

Performers will read text from Woolf's novel on continuous strips of cloth.

"The text is pulled through readers' hands and you see that accumulate," Hamilton said. "We're trying to create a space where people feel comfortable about letting go of their expectations of what will happen in the space."

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