

Statement of Withdrawal from the Critical Information Conference

I thank the conference organizers for the opportunity given to me to participate in this year's Critical Information Conference organized by the students of the Art Criticism & Writing graduate program at the School of Visual Arts in New York. I write however to withdraw my presentation from the conference. I feel deeply upset and disenchanted with the American justice system and wish to use my non-participation at the conference (as well as my refusal to visit the United States for the first time) as a protest to the systemic miscarriage of justice and the indiscriminate killing of people of color by the United State's police. My decision is personal and I do regret and apologize in advance for any inconvenience my decision may cause to the excellent efforts the organizers have put into setting up this conference. I consider my selection to speak at the conference a rare opportunity to interact with scholars whose insight will surely be helpful to my work. It is all my loss and my anger is against the US justice system.

That a country that parades itself as the epitome of democracy and justice in the world could so blatantly and continually permit and tolerate nonsensical police killings of peoples of color and refuse to do anything about it, that America has remained unwilling to reflect upon its primitive systems that are founded on a history of slavery and systemic racial abuse, for me, shows a nation that has arrogantly refused to live up to the principles it claims to possess. I had planned to attend the SVA Conference to discuss Steve McQueen's film, *12 Years a Slave*. I had planned to discuss the film as a reanimation of repressed traumas of black slavery in the United States. I thought that the film's ending with a family reunion is a message of survival, the audacious refusal of the family and community systems to succumb to the violence of slavery and racism. Those were the themes I had hoped to discuss at the conference.

But to speak of survival and resilience will belie the fact that in the twenty-first century United States policemen shot and killed a black boy of twelve playing in a park because he had a toy gun. To speak of survival will belie the fact that several black youths in the United States have been denied the opportunity to strive to survive. To speak of the resilience of community will belie the fact that the American system is antithetical to the ideals of communal strength. All because America still patronizes an unfair system of injustice and racism. So, I refuse to attend the conference to speak about survival and resilience, for that will belie the reality that the likes of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin did not survive. It will belie the fact that, like Eric Garner, many folks of color are deliberately being choked out of existence because they are classified as the wretched of the earth. I join numerous other voices to call for not just justice and reform, but also for a deep meditation on what it means for historically oppressed and marginalized groups to survive in America today.

Once again I apologize to the conference organizers and other attendees for my decision not to attend the conference. May we meet in better times!

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