

ARTFORUM

XAVIERA SIMMONS ACCUSES QUEENS MUSEUM OF REPURPOSING HER WORK WITHOUT PERMISSION

By News Desk

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View of "Tracey Rose: Shooting Down Babylon," 2023, Queens Museum, New York. Photo: Xaviera Simmons.

Artist Xaviera Simmons has taken the Queens Museum to task over its reuse of a site-specific structure that she conceived for her solo exhibition there this past winter. Originally bringing the matter to light on her Instagram account, Simmons says the

museum failed to return to her a freestanding structure that formed part of her site-specific installation *Align*, presented as part of her 2022–23 exhibition “Crisis Makes a Book Club.” Instead, the institution painted it pink, moved its entrance, and used it to display works by South African artist Tracey Rose, whose solo show “Shooting Down Babylon” followed Simmons’s exhibition. That show traveled from Cape Town’s Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, where it originated.

The work in question comprised a large walled enclosure whose interior housed seven videos by Simmons, and whose exterior bore black panels on which were painted in white Simmons’s own musings on race as well as text taken from James Baldwin’s 1984 essay “On Being White . . . and Other Lies.” Following the exhibition’s closure in March, Simmons expected the materials comprising the structure to be returned, having received an email from the institution informing her that the panels were on their way back to her. These turned out to only be the black panels containing the text, not those making up the underlying enclosure.

Shocked to see the structure repurposed for another artist’s exhibition without her express permission, Simmons contacted the museum and was told by an assistant curator that the enclosure had been reused in order to conserve materials, thus “add[ing] less to the landfills.” Simmons objected strongly and demanded that the structure be torn down and removed. The museum complied, shuttering Rose’s exhibition for thirteen days while they dismantled the enclosure and built a new one to display Rose’s work. *Artnews* reports that Queens Museum executive director Sally Tallant emailed Simmons photos of the destroyed structure.

“Those were not temporary walls,” Simmons told *Artnet News*. “That was a sculpture site specifically made for the show, built and fundraised for by the artist. The Queens Museum is gaslighting.”

“While it is common practice for museums to repurpose portions of an exhibit for future use, we temporarily closed the Museum to the public to remove the structure and built an entirely new one for the next show,” a Queens Museum spokesperson told *Hyperallergic*. “We are committed to our mission and grateful to Xaviera for her bold and brilliant exhibition.”

Simmons told *Artnews* that she wondered whether the museum would have repurposed such a structure without permission had it been by an artist like Joseph Beuys or Donald Judd, both renowned for their minimal, site-specific works.

“No artist should be put in the position of an institution repurposing their art for another artist’s exhibition without their consent,” Simmons told *Hyperallergic*. “A museum should not be in the business of discrediting an artist’s work then taking a long time when it comes to an artist asking for a work to come down.”