



We interviewed Baltimore artist Amanda Burnham!

Burnham's work inaugurates the new Baldeck/Hollis Gallery with *In the Weeds*, an immersive drawing installation of fragmented landscapes inspired by the built environments of Collegeville, Phoenixville, and the Route 29 corridor between them. Here is a snippet of what she had to say about contemporary art, education and The Berman!

What is art's place in higher education?

I adamantly believe that the arts deserve not only a place in higher education, but a central role in education at all levels. There are a lot of reasons for this -- but the one I keep coming back to is the fundamental role that the act of seeing and making can play in our cognitive organization. Drawing helps me see and interpret the world with a level of detail and analytical sophistication that wouldn't be available to me otherwise. It makes me smarter, more observant, and more tolerant of ambiguity. Art is important for art's sake, and it is certainly cultural enriching -- but it shouldn't be viewed as mere enrichment -- I truly believe it can make people more thoughtful, engaged, and empathetic. It can make us better neighbors and citizens.

What is the biggest misconception about contemporary art?

The idea that all contemporary art is willfully opaque and designed for a rarified audience is unfortunate. I don't think it's entirely a misconception -- in fact, a lot of contemporary art *does* seem to court elites and disinvite engagement. Access (and the lack thereof) are very much coded by the spaces where contemporary art is displayed, and the work often encodes these values, too. That said, I don't conflate mysteriousness or abstraction with a lack of generosity -- rather, I think a lot of people lose confidence in their ability to meaningfully interact with contemporary works based on the ways that contemporary arts institutions (and sometimes works themselves) subtly signal that it isn't for them.

How was your experience at the Berman?

I loved my experience at the Berman! The Baldeck/Hollis Gallery is a wonderful space to create work for -- it's light filled, and open to the outside world via its long outward facing bank of windows. I really value spaces that aren't hermetically sealed and that have an inside/outside feel, so it was a pleasure to create a work with this space in mind. The staff of the Berman are a wonderful and supportive team -- I've never had a better experience being commissioned to do a site specific work, through all stages of the development process.

How do you feel about the current position of women in the art world?

Though progress has certainly been made, it is nonetheless troubling that, while the numbers of women far exceed men in secondary visual arts degree programs, women are nowhere near (to either these numbers or to their percentage of the population as a whole) appropriately and proportionally represented in gallery rosters or the collections of museums. Female artists are not collected at the same rates and do not command the same prices at auction, and the language of criticism and art history still often pigeonholes work by women in subtle and unobvious ways. There is plenty of work still to be done to challenge residually sexist structures within our global culture.