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**“(Brett) Cook’s visually enchanting work begs the question:  
Does one find beauty in a thing, or in the spirit in which it’s made?”**  
(Sarah Valdez, *Art In America* December 2003)

Brett Cook creates objects, experiences, and feelings that defy classification in any singular discipline. His work has been exhibited at museums and galleries since 1991 concurrent with a practice manifested in public projects since 1984 and teaching since 1988.

The public works have been executed across the United States from California to Maine, and internationally in Brazil, Barbados, and Mexico. Museums, public agencies and schools have commissioned some projects, while others have been self-initiated interventions on abandoned spaces. Brett has completed scores of these projects, often through an interactive and collaborative process. His use of participatory ethnographic strategies, progressive educational pedagogy, and community organizing connect his work to exceptionally wide audiences.

Brett’s work in museums and galleries can take a variety of skillfully crafted forms, with a frequent emphasis on painting, drawing, and photography. Brett’s museum work frequently includes elaborate installations that make intimately personal experiences universally accessible. Brett’s gallery installation work has also documented participatory public projects, using a wide variety of media to retell the stories of transformation that occur through the social collaboration process.

Brett’s teaching practice in all scholastic levels in a variety of academic disciplines is an extension of his public collaborations and has similarly involved diverse communities in dialogue to generate experiences of reflection and insight.

**Meditations** (2005) Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery at Wesleyan University’s Center for the Arts, an exhibition, that in process and product, involved aspects of meditation to catalyze contemplation. Reflective, large-scale, shrine-like installations incorporating biographical materials as well as drawings, objects, words and photographs shared the gallery with a selection of works on mirrored Plexiglass, transparent polyester and other unusual paper media. A third collaborative work, incorporating Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, was developed with the assistance of Zilkha curator Nina Felshin’s undergraduate class, Issues in Contemporary Art. Attendees of the opening reception contributed to this new work that modeled Freire’s idea of Praxis – reflection and action.

**Re-Invented** (2004) at the Alvarez Bravo Photographic Center Oaxaca, Mexico, a workshop on collaboration with Galeria de la Luz in Oaxaca and Wendy Ewald, who directs the Learning Through Photography program at Duke’s Center for Documentary. Participants from both Mexico and the United States investigated and modeled methods from a variety of disciplines for working in collaboration, inspiring internal reflection and creating outward social change. Artists, educators, and community workers of various ages learned collaborative approaches to creative writing and art making in the classroom and for use in larger community and social settings. Assignments based on self-portraits, identity and community explored art as a teaching tool. Participants frequently worked in small groups to review images, make objects, complete writing exercises, and develop

their own inclusive curricula. The workshop culminated in an exhibition of installations made by the participants at Galeria Arte Alterno in Oaxaca, Mexico.

***Revolution: Celebrate Harlem 127<sup>th</sup> Street – A Collaboration*** (2003) Harlem, New York City, a festival for everyone who attended to build divine relationships in positive multidisciplinary ways. Collaborative visual art making stations, continuous short film screenings, computer/digital video kiosks, free health and community information packets, and D.J./Music performances were some of the event activities to explore radical social, environmental, cultural, and spiritual themes. At the center of these exercises for positive shared experience was a commentary as well as a representation of Revolution - with the focus being the people of Harlem, most specifically folks from 127<sup>th</sup> Street. With none of the activities of the event driven by commerce, competition, or anger, *Celebrate 127<sup>th</sup> Street* is revolutionary in its generous, inclusive, joyful nature. With a celebration of multi geographic, multi generational, multi cultural, and multi class participants in dialogue, *Revolution: Celebrate Harlem 127<sup>th</sup> Street – A Collaboration* was a gathering of social change for the better.

***Columbus: Tobacco*** (2002) seven temporary pieces in various Columbus Georgia community locations, involving local addressing tobacco, history, other challenges determined by the social collaboration themselves. The Project involved forums in Randolph County, Sumpter County, and in Columbus at The Friendship Baptist Church and Columbus United Methodist Church. The project grew to include the Columbus State University Teen Achievers, the Columbus Georgia chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., and other miscellaneous institutions connected to the Western Central Health District (WCHD) tobacco use prevention program. Likewise contacts were made outside of institutions connected to the WCHD tobacco use prevention program, most notably the Columbus State University Art Department, and Columbus Museum. The seven works were displayed at 7 prominent community locations, and then donated to a selection of City of Columbus organizations.

***Harlem Development/Gentrification*** (2001) ten residents of Harlem were the sources to speak for one of the most talked about communities in the history of New York. Through interviews and questions the participants developed themselves, the residents describe the story of their neighborhood concurrent to its dramatic residential, economic and cultural transition. Real-estate development in Harlem surged in 2000, causing many to title the renovation of formerly abandoned spaces, and new commercial properties as a “renaissance”. What were the new institutional resources, and new residents moving into Harlem doing to the social, economic, visual, and cultural landscape of Uptown Manhattan? What exactly was meant by this term “renaissance”? Was it a suggestion of a 15<sup>th</sup> century European model of rebirth, a nostalgic reference to the early twentieth century when Harlem was in vogue, or a synonym for gentrification? How could residents speak directly to changes in their neighborhood experience? Woven into ten public works the *Harlem Development/Gentrification* collaborative community project is the voice of ten people addressing transformation in their neighborhood.

***(De)Segregation*** (2001) Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), a project involving three members of the Harvard educational community, interviews with them, and large public art works to explore issues of educational segregation and improve education/society as a whole. The participants were incorporated into the process – generating questions for their interviews, sketching projections of themselves from acetate drawings, and painting their quotations using stencils. The final triptych of three 8’X8’ images were installed temporarily next to the HGSE library on a busy street. The pieces were then purchased and are on permanent display at HGSE. With statistics

showing educational segregation growing simultaneous to less perceptible, potentially segregating practices of educational privatization and voucher schooling, the Boston area served as a particularly interesting location for this inquiry with its history of segregation/desegregation and Harvard itself as a private institution.

Brett's solo exhibitions include, *Revolution* and *Multifaceted* at **P.P.O.W. Gallery** in New York *Reflections of Revolution* at **Provisions Gallery GAEA Foundation** Washington D.C. and *Blackness*, **Stony Brook University Gallery**, Long Island NY. Group exhibitions include *Walls of Heritage Walls of Pride* at the **Smithsonian Anacosta Museum**, Washington D.C.; *Contemporary Portraiture*, **Snug Harbor Museum**, Staten Island NY; *Black President Exhibition* **New Museum of Contemporary Art**, NY; *Social Studies/Brown V. Board of Ed. 40th Anniversary*, **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Gallery**; *Community Interactions* **Wayne State University Gallery**, Detroit MI; *Hip-Hop Nation*, **Yerba Buena Center for the Arts**, San Francisco, CA; and *Generation Z*, **P.S. 1/Moma**, Long Island City, NY.

Brett was the recipient of the 2005 **Richard C. Diebenkorn Fellowship** at the San Francisco Art Institute. In 2004 he was a **Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Artists in Communities Grant** recipient with MAP of Philadelphia and awarded **Headlands Center for the Arts Bridge Residency**, Sausalito California. He has received awards from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (2004), the Puffin Foundation (2003), the *New York Post* (2002), the Jacob Lawrence Institute for the Visual Arts (2002), The Rheedlen University for Community Education (TRUCE)(2002), Art Omi International (2001), *Vibe Magazine* (2000), the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, New Jersey State Council on the Arts (1998), the Studio Museum of Harlem (1997), Skowhegan Residency/Camille Hanks Cosby Fellowship (1997) ArtMatters Grant (1996) and Best New Muralist Award, Precita Eyes Arts Center (1994) among others.