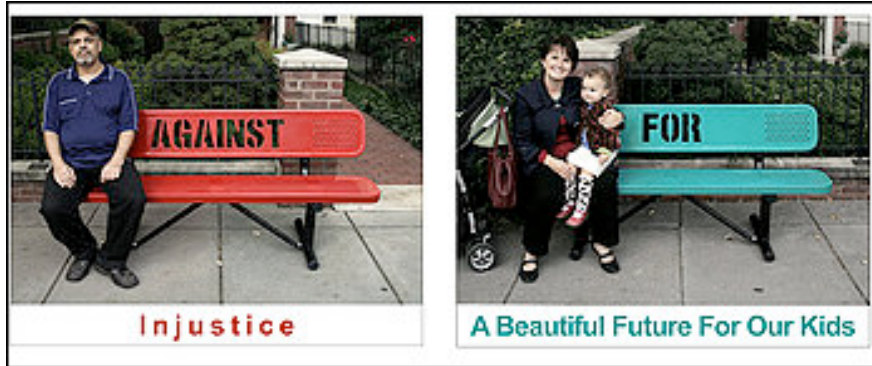


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Linda Hesh's 'For and Against Bench Project' encourages participation

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One work in "Bilateral Engagement" stands out for its immateriality. That's the "For and Against Bench Project," by Alexandria conceptual artist Linda Hesh.

There is a sculptural component, of sorts. Out back of the museum sit two metal park benches the artist purchased from a commercial manufacturer. One, in turquoise, has the word "For" on it; the other, in red, reads "Against." Inside, there's a rotating slide show of photographs the artist shot featuring people sitting on one bench or the other during a series of public appearances by the benches in the Washington area, beginning in fall 2008. Captions come courtesy of her subjects; Hesh invited them to write what they were for or against on a clipboard. "Against Conformity" is an example.

The real work isn't the benches, though. It isn't even the photographs. Rather, it's the performance that takes place whenever someone stumbles upon them. It's all part of what exhibition curator Laura Roulet calls "relational aesthetics," meaning that the work changes because of your interaction with it. Go ahead and pull out your own digital camera. Make your own art. "I welcome that," says Hesh, whose two more benches on current view -- featuring the words "Doubt" and "Trust" -- sit outside Baltimore's Lyric Opera House.

In fact, the artist encourages visitors to e-mail her (linda@lindahesh.com) with their own photographs and captions.

-- Michael O'Sullivan