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Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University

For Immediate Release
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"Panama Canal" Opens at the Lewis Center *Interactive multimedia exhibition by senior Cara Michell*

What: Interactive multimedia exhibition that explores acts of exclusivity and privatization in urban public spaces.

Who: Created by senior in the Lewis Center's Program in Visual Arts Cara Michell

When: April 7 through 11, opening reception April 10 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Where: Lucas Gallery at 185 Nassau St.

Free and open to the public

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts' Program in Visual Arts at Princeton University will present "Panama Canal," an interactive, multimedia exhibition by senior Cara Michell of sculptures and assemblages that explore acts of exclusivity and privatization in urban spaces. The work will be on exhibit April 7 through 11 with a reception where visitors can meet the artist on April 10 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the Lucas Gallery at 185 Nassau Street. The exhibition and reception are free and open to the public.

Michell is majoring in visual arts at Princeton through a collaborative program of the Department of Art and Archaeology and the Lewis Center for the Arts' Program in Visual Arts, which offers students an opportunity to study art history along with courses in studio art. She is also pursuing a certificate in Urban Studies, which feeds heavily into the content of her work.

The impetus for Michell's show, which represents her senior thesis project, stemmed from a skateboarding accident involving her brother. "As the ambulance drove off," she notes, "Half a dozen kids ran after it, begging to stay by his side, and calls from worried friends followed. Still drowsy from painkillers, my brother explained, 'It's just a skateboard thing, we've got the tightest bond in the world.' After five years of watching these friends grow together, I was intent on finding the source of such an intense bond."



Senior Cara Michell working in her studio on projects that will comprise her exhibition of interactive, multimedia sculptures and assemblages. Photo by M. Teresa Simao

She questioned if this bond was built on the skateboarders' unique, non-verbal way of communicating, the common social stigma, or their shared tactile subversion of the architecture around them. She began to notice that although these boys came from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, their academic pursuits and potential for social mobility often transcended the statistics on social disparities. After spending days at a time observing in public plazas like the Palais de Tokyo/Musée d'Art Moderne courtyard in Paris, she noticed that street skaters' frequent reappropriation of the space's architecture also motivated a more diverse collection of people to use the space for purposes other than café seating. "I began to look at skate culture as a yet untapped source for methods to combat issues of segregation, prejudice, and the geographic isolation of disenfranchised groups," she explains.

For her project, Michell asked herself two questions: How can the politics of public space be leveraged to address social inequalities? And how can the rest of us reappropriate architecture and reap the benefits of an activity dominated by young men and boys?

Michell visited a number of urban areas to gather research and conduct interviews including Paris, London, New York, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Some of her travels were supported by the Lewis Center's Alex Adam '07 Award, a fund established in memory of Princeton student Alexander Jay Adam and made possible by a gift from his family. The award provides funding to Princeton undergraduates who will spend a summer pursuing a project that will result in the creation of new artistic work.

Her sculptures and assemblages in the gallery will fall into three types: structures whose functions are uncomfortably ambiguous, permeable barriers, and structures whose functions are contradicted, such as a bench with a hole where one might sit. Her goal is to challenge visitors to "misuse" the sculptures, primarily out of necessity, in much the same way skateboarders negotiate the spaces in which they skate. In addition to these works with which visitors will be encouraged to interact, she will host events during the run of her show that further explore her premise, such as a staged coffee house on April 8 at 4:30 p.m., an interactive media party featuring student musicians Alejandro Van Zandt-Escobar and Igor Zabukovec and dance improvisations by seniors Tess Bernhard and Samantha Gebb on April 10 at 9 p.m., and a workshop on quasi-public architecture on April 11 at 4:30 p.m.

The show will also feature photography and two-dimensional assemblages inspired by Michell's research undertaken through her Alex Adam Award.

The Lucas Gallery is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Admission is free.

To learn more about the Lucas Gallery, the Program in Visual Arts, and other events presented each year at the Lewis Center visit arts.princeton.edu.

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The Lewis Center for the Arts encompasses Princeton University's academic programs in creative writing, dance, theater, and visual arts, as well as the interdisciplinary Princeton Atelier. The Center represents a major initiative of the University to fully embrace the arts as an essential part of the educational experience for all who study and teach at Princeton. Over 100 diverse public performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings and lectures are offered each year, most of them free or at a nominal ticket price. The programs of the Peter B. Lewis Center for the Arts are made possible through the generous support of many alumni and other donors. For more information about the Lewis Center for the Arts, including a complete [list of supporters](http://arts.princeton.edu), please visit arts.princeton.edu.

Link to photo: <https://lca.sharefile.com/d/s06a59635b0c4a96b>

Photo caption: Senior Cara Michell working in her studio on projects that will comprise her exhibition of interactive, multimedia sculptures and assemblages.

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