

Al Dahya
4.301
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Upon a Blank Slate

Inspired by Radiohead song: Fitter Happier

This piece is meant to open up the inner frustrations I, and other students, have with the expectations that exist for our future lives outside MIT. There are many fears and pressures that every person faces when thinking of what and where they will be in the future. In some instances, this fear is couched in concerns about career, in others it is worrying about starting a family, and in some cases it also includes our deep seeded fears of becoming “old” and out of touch. The natural reaction to these fears is to rebel against them: “I will be bachelor for life”, “I will always be fun”, “I will not get a regular 9-5 career” are all common oaths one might utter. My goal in this piece is to connect to some of the viewer’s frustrations regarding these requirements and expectations of society.

The piece is located in Killian Court at the site where the stage for graduation is erected. The goal is to frame this piece in the context of leaving MIT and entering into this world filled with expectations and doubts. The white cloth used for the installation stands in stark contrast to the surroundings and its purity highlights how the mind is still essentially a blank slate at graduation, ready to be written upon with our experiences, our fears, our triumphs, and our failures. The cloth has a few statements that allude to concerns about life after college and in the center of the piece lays the motivating phrase for the entire installation: “Fitter. Happier. More Productive.” This phrase is taken from the Radiohead interlude “Fitter Happier” which is itself a commentary on the absurdities of social norms and expectations. In addition to this phrase, the cloth contains smaller, more pointed phrases that address different aspects of life. The ultimate goal is for these phrases and this theme to cause a viewer to develop their own phrasings for their anxieties and commentary. A black marker pen is included as part of the installation with the express hope that viewers will write what they feel onto the installation.

The installation is made of 4 pieces of white linen sewn together to form a cross. All wording on the cloth was ironed on from printer transfer paper. The actual installation is securely pinned to the ground using wire. Though cloth, all elements of the installation should be resistant to the elements – particularly rain and wind. However, it would not be my intention to keep this out for more than 5 days. At that point, I would collect the piece which would then serve to memorialize the contributions written on the installation.