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#NARCISSUS

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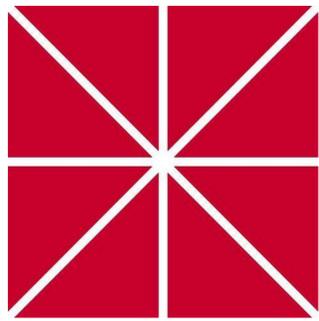
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“First, as noted above, it is clear that where there is alcohol, there is almost always a dedicated environment in which to drink it, and that every culture creates its own, highly distinctive, public drinking-places. Second, the drinking-place is usually a special environment: it represents a separate sphere of existence, a discrete social world with its own laws, customs and values. Third, drinking-places tend to be socially integrative, classless environments, or at least environments in which status distinctions are based on different criteria from those operating in the outside world. Finally, the primary function of drinking-places, in almost all cultures, appears to be the facilitation of social interaction and social bonding.” (Social Issue Research Centre, “Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking” 1998)

Concept:

The installation reflects the parallel between church ritual and drinking ritual, both being timeless traditional actions that give identity to many cultures and spaces. By creating a large altar out of red plastic cups, I am making a connection between the college culture of drinking, the ritual associated with it, and religious institutions. Studies on drinking have shown that the social consumption of alcohol is a ritualized act in most cultures, whether it be drinking out of an animal horn or out of a plastic cup. College culture today (especially in America) utilizes the red cup exclusively for drinking games such as beer pong and flip cup, again lending emphasis on the importance of the drinking vessel in ritual consumption of alcohol. These games create patterns with cups filled with beer, and my installation/altar contains many of the pyramid-like patterns found regularly in beer pong to emphasize that American culture has ritualized drinking to create a unique (yet sometimes overwhelming) social experience that parallels church experiences. My hope is that viewers examine their drinking and religious experiences and are able to have some sort of sublime experience in front of my altar as they see the connections between both rituals.

Relevance to Contemporary Art and Community:

My installation is extremely relevant to the college community due to its use of the red plastic cup as medium. However, any consumer of alcohol should be able to recognize the red cup as the popular drinking vessel it has become since its birth in the 1970s. I believe that it will connect to college students and other American spectators similarly to how Andy Warhol's soup cans connected to American consumers. We recognize a product and proceed to investigate its meaning in an alternate context. Many students and other participants of American party culture see the red plastic cup as the great equalizer that brings together people of all social standings, the drinking vessel which signifies we are having a shared experience. By making an altar out of plastic cups, I am making a statement connecting and comparing the ritual of drinking to the ritualistic aspects of religion. I expect that many people will be able to make these connections as the medium is contemporary and relevant to this time

