

12th January 2011

Who Are You?

From mid-November through the end of January, the [Boston Center for the Arts](http://www.bcaonline.org/calendar/today-at-the-calendar/details/227-who-are-you.html) [http://www.bcaonline.org/calendar/today-at-the-calendar/details/227-who-are-you.html] is home to a most unexpected art commission that has dressed-up the Cyclorama's bathrooms and silently posed key questions about the signs and symbols most of us take for granted everyday.

Douglas Kornfeld's "Who Are You?" [http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm] was installed in both the men's and women's restrooms - appearing behind the urinals and on stall walls, respectively. Creatively co-opting the iconic imagery normally found on WC doors (you know, those basic female/male figures that help us know where to go), the intent behind "Who Are You?" [http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm] is to highlight and play off of the fact that those symbols are but coded abstractions of the ways individuals are asked to identify themselves on a daily basis.



[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_Wv1yKeKLlc8/TS4cKBVOSQI/AAAAAAAABCE/ujxibNXKmNU/s1600/men%2Bwomen%2Bsymbol.png]

(Image found via [Clker](http://www.clker.com/clipart-men-women-bathroom1.html) [http://www.clker.com/clipart-men-women-bathroom1.html])

These universal symbols offer extremely one-dimensional categories for gender identity (and - from a fashion standpoint - leave little room for women who wear pants, men who wear dresses, and/or any permutations thereof!). Having represented such icons in different ways throughout his career, Kornfeld understands the subtleties at work here and has chosen to explore one of them – body type – head on.

[Before I go on to share some images of the work, I want to issue a little disclaimer: I learned of this installation through photographs on the [BCA's](http://www.bcaonline.org/calendar/today-at-the-calendar/details/227-who-are-you.html) [http://www.bcaonline.org/calendar/today-at-the-calendar/details/227-who-are-you.html] Facebook page and though I have not yet seen "Who Are You?" [http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm] in person, I plan to before the end of its run (and wanted D4S readers to have the opportunity to do the same). I think its subject is particularly apropos (especially at a time of year when so many folks are concerned with keeping weight-related resolutions) and I hope my choice to feature this installation now can be a fun reminder of the importance of physical fitness and healthy living while encouraging acceptance of the fact that we come in all sorts of wonderful shapes and sizes - and we should celebrate that reality].

Kornfeld's installation offers patrons a few larger-than-life, retooled icons whose outlines are meant to prompt users to recognize that they need not be defined by the original symbols from which the new icons were derived. To quote [the artist](http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm) [http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm] ,

"While these figures have become more and more ubiquitous they have, at the same time, become less and less descriptive of how men and women see and describe themselves. While these industrial icons serve a useful purpose as easily understood signage and signifiers they, at the same time, narrow our perception of the richness and diversity of those they depict."



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_Wv1yKeKLlc8/TS4WmikVeXI/AAAAAAAAABBk/Te49-FuQ0IQ/s1600/Public_Art_BCA_2010_Men_2%2BKomfeld.jpg]



[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_Wv1yKeKLlc8/TS4WnHaNpGI/AAAAAAAAABBs/eLNaDvrQodE/s1600/Public_Art_BCA_2010_Women_1%2BKomfeld.jpg]



[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_Wv1yKeKLlc8/TS4WndOdojI/AAAAAAAAABB8/nfg_bc_nAVg/s1600/Public_Art_BCA_2010_Women_3%2BKomfeld.jpg]




[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_Wv1yKeKLlc8/TS4WnSC-FcI/AAAAAAAAABB0/WrxmaU6p0IQ/s1600/Public_Art_BCA_2010_Women_2%2BKomfeld.jpg]

(Images found via the [artist's website \[http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm\]](http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm))

The truth is, in life there is room for a variety of descriptors as we each continually try to define ourselves and our place within society. “Who Are You?” [\[http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm\]](http://www.awaka-inc.com/BCA_2010/BCA.htm) drives home the importance of that realization (and the fact that public artworks really are all around us!).

Here's to experiencing some art in the [BCA \[http://www.bcaonline.org/calendar/today-at-the-calendar/details/227-who-are-you.html\]](http://www.bcaonline.org/calendar/today-at-the-calendar/details/227-who-are-you.html) ladies room very soon...

Posted 12th January 2011 by [Mary M. Tinti](#)

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