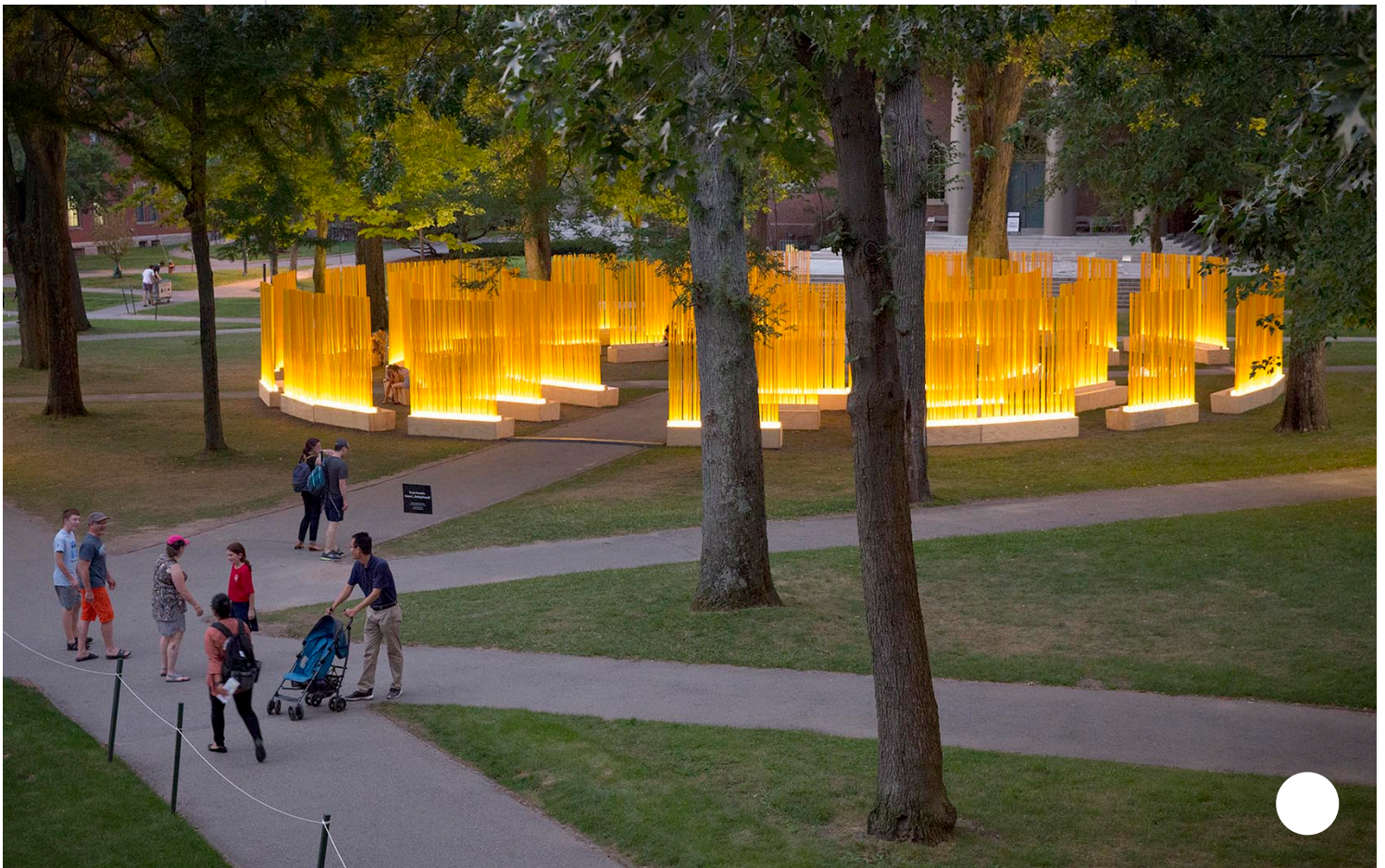


The ARtery

With Her Installation At Harvard Yard, Artist Teresita Fernández Taps Into Our Need For Connection

August 31, 2018

By [Jacquinn Sinclair](#)



“Autumn (...Nothing Personal),” a new installation by Teresita Fernández is art, activated.

The bold work by the world-renowned artist expertly makes use of the color and light of autumn. It was inspired, in part, by novelist James Baldwin's "Nothing Personal." The essay, which was originally published with photography by Richard Avedon in 1964, explores the complexities and contradictions of the American experience. In it, Baldwin writes of a desperate and divided country and highlights our inability to trust each other.

Prior to creating the piece, Fernández, a Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow, found herself reading Baldwin's text over and over again and was moved to "create a space where difficult and complex conversations could take place," she says.

Ultimately, Baldwin's essay ends with our inherent need for love, truth and light. In that spirit of connectedness, the project, comprised of concentric circles, constructed of thousands of custom-made polycarbonate tubes extending from the back of a series of wooden benches, does just that.



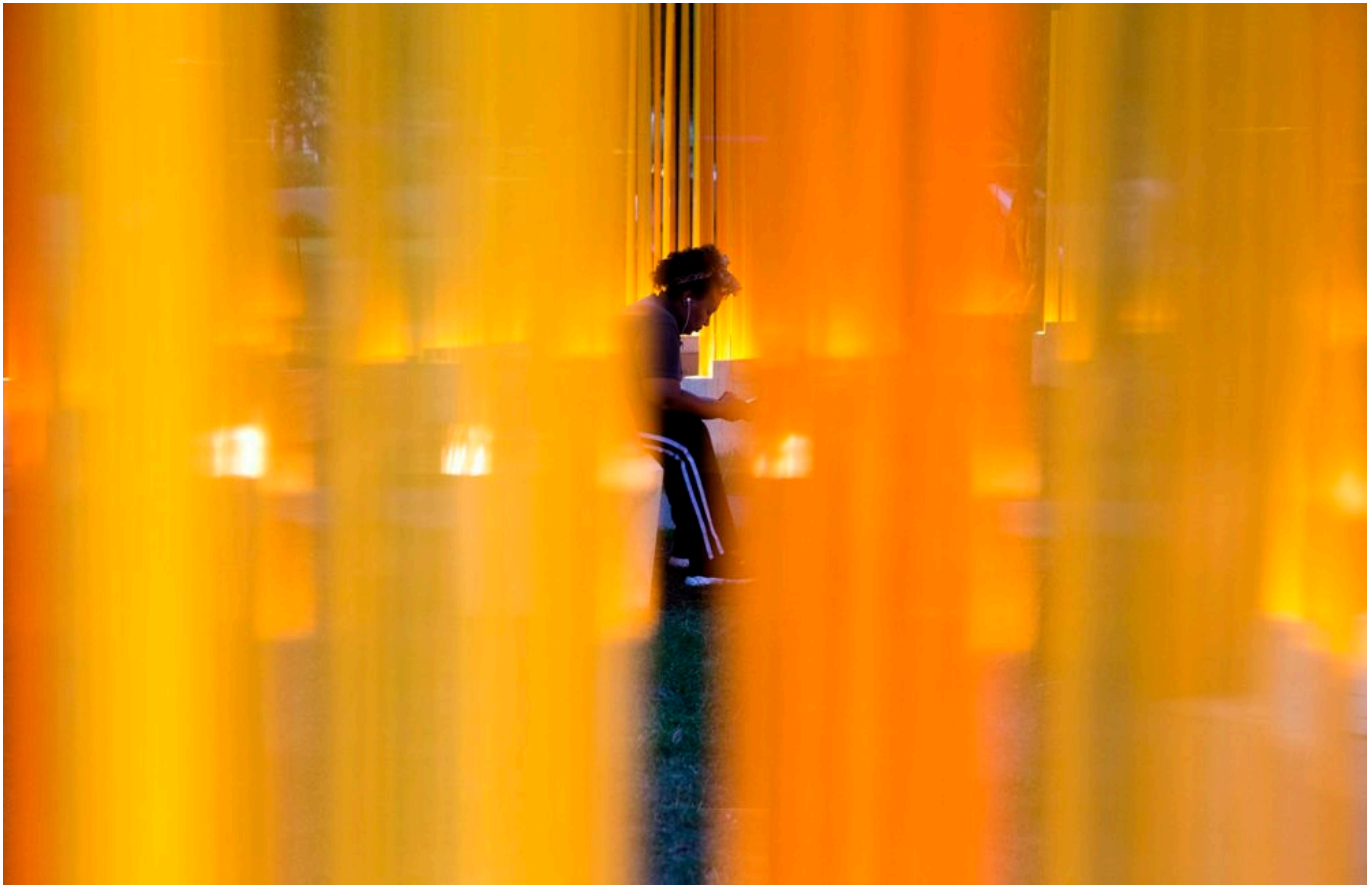
As night falls, visitors sit in the illuminated circles of Fernández's "Autumn (...Nothing Personal)." (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

Located at the Tercentenary Theatre at Harvard Yard, the installation offers students, faculty and the community at large, a place to gather and engage in dialogue and performance, while encircled in the orange- and yellow-pinstriped clear tubes.

Everything around the piece, including buildings and people seem to appear and disappear within the space between the tubes as you walk around it. The tubes, which rest beneath a grove of elm trees, look solid in color from afar, but shimmer and dance with light up close.

“The piece is about transparency, visibility and landscape. Landscape is as much about what you don't see as what you do see. I use the word 'landscape' here not in the traditional sense of a vista, or a picturesque scene, but rather, landscape as the history of people in places, which we know is also completely tied to colonialism, power, ownership and all kinds of other complex histories. So, a lot of the aspects of the piece are about that subtle seeing and not seeing, making visible and making opaque, and present,” Fernández explains.

The thoughtful execution of "[Autumn \(...Nothing Personal\)](#)" was borne out of research — aided by Amanda Figueroa, a doctoral candidate in American studies and intern for the Committee on Ethnicity, Migration, Rights at Harvard — time, and careful consideration.



A visitor sits in one of the inner circles of Teresita Fernández's "Autumn (...Nothing Personal)." (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

The Harvard University Committee on the Arts first approached Fernández about the commissioned project almost two years ago, but they did not have a theme in mind. Instead, they trusted the conceptual artist, who has lectured and taught at Harvard in the past, to determine the best way forward.

“It took me some time to understand what kind of project would have most impact here,” Fernández explains.

To help jumpstart the process, Figueroa, who was a part of the project in its early stages, spent time “uncovering the history of this space,” she says.

“I mean not only is it a beautifully designed piece, but conceptually, it’s so full,” says Figueroa.

And that’s intentional.

“When I make public art, and with this piece especially, I was very deliberately trying to create not just a physical structure, but also a kind of social structure that’s under the surface and less visible. That’s always the much harder part,” shares Fernández.

That groundwork, coupled with the insight from Baldwin’s text has culminated into more than just a resplendent work of art. Over the next several weeks, the installation will feature several public events and collaborations including ["Bliss. This Autumn. Lecturance"](#) (a collaboration between storyteller Josefina Báez and guitarists and composers Tony Almont and Carlos Snaider), an outdoor performance of selections from the American Repertory Theater’s "The Black Clown" and a public reading of Baldwin’s "Nothing Personal."

Báez, who is the founder and director of Latinarte/Ay Ombe Theatre, is performing next month. She too, has used Baldwin’s “Nothing Personal,” text in her work and believes that the importance of what she does “is in the possibility of dialogue.”

That desire for conversation and thereby connection, both seem to tie back to the social structure that Fernández aspires to achieve. And, though it might be hard to measure, or might feel elusive, it appears to be taking shape. As the installation was being assembled last week, passersby gathered in small groups to read the signage, take pictures and to just linger around the dynamic and fascinating structure.

But for those who engage with her art, there's one thing Fernández hopes they don't miss: that her work is more than just pretty, it's important.

She says, "Underneath the work's seductive, beautiful color and glowing materiality, there's also a lot of research and a much bigger cultural, historical and political component that I've created around the work. It may not be obvious, it's not a banner, but it's there."



Visitors to Harvard Yard pass through the middle of Teresita Fernández's "Autumn (...Nothing Personal)," as the installation lights up the leaves on the trees around it in the early evening. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

"Autumn (...Nothing Personal)" is open to the public from Aug. 27 through Oct. 1. ["Bliss. This Autumn. Lecturance"](#) is on Wednesday, Sept. 5, at 7 p.m. Selections from American Repertory Theater's "The Black Clown" will be performed on Thursday, Sept. 13, at 3 p.m. The public reading and discussion of James Baldwin "Nothing Personal" is on Friday, Sept. 14, at noon.