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Contact Person: Anna Schuleit, Artistic Director
Phone: (617) 626-9379
Extensive project website: www.bloomproject.org
Email: info@1856.org



MASS MENTAL IN BLOOM

Boston, MA, October 23, 2003 — After serving Boston's most disadvantaged patient population for 91 years, the internationally-renowned Massachusetts Mental Health Center (MMHC / 'Mass Mental') on Fenwood Road is destined to close its historic brick building in November. Project BLOOM, a vast site-specific art installation and accompanying community events, is planned as a timely tribute to its long history and in memory of those who have sought help here over the years.

Thousands of flowers will fill 18,000 square feet of empty, yellowed corridors. The different flowers in full bloom will create, as artist Anna Schuleit envisions, "a continuous composition of color and scent throughout the building." The basement corridors will be lined in grass to be experienced barefoot and the empty 1950's pool, in blue flowers. As the public is invited to walk through, a soundscape of the building's former life, of steps in the corridors and distant voices, will be played softly over the original PA system. BLOOM will exist for only four consecutive days, November 14-17, and will be free of admission and open to the public from 9 am to 5 pm.

Ken Duckworth, M.D., Medical Director of the National Alliance of the Mentally Ill (NAMI) and moderator of the BLOOM Open Forum on November 15, states, "If you know anyone who has a psychiatric illness, you know the game is rigged against them. Society is afraid of mental illness. No one talks about it. Few people really listen, and no one gets flowers." Inspired by this, Schuleit conceived BLOOM as a giving back in time, a gesture of offering and transition on a 1:1 scale with the site. At the conclusion of the events all flowers will be hand-delivered by volunteers to patients in psychiatric facilities throughout Massachusetts.

Treating people regardless of their financial circumstance, the Massachusetts Mental Health Center always provided unequalled access to specialized treatments and the latest medications through its unique partnership of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health with Harvard Medical School. Of those who trained in the building, many have gone on to be department chairs, state medical directors and commissioners, as well as mental health advisors to the White House and Congress.

In addition to the art installation, an academic symposium at a nearby venue is scheduled for Friday, November 14, bringing together the most eminent faculty and alumni of MMHC from around the country. On Saturday, Nov. 15, an Open Forum will be held at Mass Mental on its front steps at 74 Fenwood Road: a participatory forum for sharing and giving voice to memories, testimonies, and remembrances. In the spirit of a true community tribute, all events will be free and open to the public.

Previously, artist Anna Schuleit created *Habeas Corpus*, the November 2000 memorial for the former Northampton State Hospital, MA, a sound installation in which the Magnificat by J. S. Bach was played throughout the abandoned Kirkbride building while thousands stood by. She is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design and has twice been a fellow at the MacDowell Colony.

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum recently gave its endorsement to the BLOOM project for its creative mission. Over 10,000 visitors are expected to attend the events and walk through the Massachusetts Mental Health Center on BLOOM weekend. The artist's concept and project details can be found on the project website at www.bloomproject.org. As a non-profit volunteer effort, BLOOM has to be created entirely from donations. A limited-edition print is offered to all donors now, and a catalogue of the events will be available in December.

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