

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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CU observes 'A Day Without Art'

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In observance of the AIDS awareness day 'A Day Without Art,' students and faculty from the School of the Arts yesterday morning erected a black box that blocked the statue Alma Mater from view.

'A Day Without Art' is designed to draw attention to the losses that the arts community has suffered because of the AIDS epidemic, according to Peter Smith, outgoing dean of the School of the Arts.

Smith added that the disappearance of familiar works of art will demonstrate the grave threat the AIDS epidemic poses to the art community.

"It has the purpose of making people pause for a moment to consider the horror of AIDS and to respond to it in any way they're inclined," Smith said.

Other activities commemorating 'A Day Without Art' included draping Butler Library's mural painting of Athene with a black cloth, closing the Wallach Art gallery and draping the statue of Venus with a black cloth, located on the Barnard campus.

Although 'A Day Without Art' has been observed at Columbia in the past, Smith said this year's decision to cover the Alma Mater will have a greater impact on the Columbia community.

"Alma Mater is, as it were, a person who cares for all the people who are in this institution," Smith said, "Losing her for a day takes

away from us the symbol of our unity.”

According to Julie Porter, CC '96, coordinator of the AIDS support volunteer group, it is the symbolic nature of the box that accounts for its strong statement.

“It’s really dramatic. It says something without actually having to say anything,” Porter said.

Jonathan McKeever, CC '97, who assisted in building and erecting the black box, said he doubted whether students would associate the disappearance of Alma Mater with a need to be active in the fight against AIDS.

“It will have just as much effect [of raising AIDS awareness] as a used car ad has for the used-car dealership— which is not much.” McKeever said

Patrick Kelsey, School of Arts '97, said the impact would be greater if the Alma Mater were left hidden for a longer period of time.

The black box stands at 14 feet, and 8.5 inches at its tallest side and 12 feet at its back, according to Josh Rothenberg, the technical supervisor of the Oscar Hammerstein Center for Theatre Studies and chief architect of the box. Rothenberg estimated the cost of the project at \$750.

The original plan to hide Alma mater included the placement of a large Aids Ribbon on the black construction but was rejected in favor of avoiding an obvious cliché, according to Rothenberg.