



The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College

**Tang Museum Presents *A More Perfect Union*
featuring Mel Ziegler's Multi-Year Project *Flag Exchange*
beginning July 2, 2016**

**Series of Programs Exploring the Nature of
Politics and National Identity Presented in Conjunction
with Installation of 50 American Flags from Across the Country**

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. (April 20, 2016) — The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College will present *A More Perfect Union*, on view from July 2, 2016 through January 1, 2017, and featuring Mel Ziegler's multi-year project *Flag Exchange*. *Flag Exchange* comprises weathered American flags from all 50 states gathered by the artist as he traveled across the country, offering new replacement flags for tattered ones flying at homes, post offices, businesses, and other public locations. The Tang exhibition marks the culmination of the project and the first time the complete *Flag Exchange* will be exhibited, with a full complement of 50 flags.

The installation will feature one flag from each state, ranging in size from five-by-eight feet to 18-by-36 feet, and hanging from the walls and ceiling of the Tang's first-floor gallery space. Each flag will have the name of the state where it was collected embroidered on its edge. Ziegler's installation will complement a large stage and built-in tiered seating, creating a space evocative of a political convention in the gallery.

Drawing upon resources within Skidmore College and beyond, the Tang will organize a series of programs wherein the public and Skidmore faculty and students can gather to consider and discuss national identity, the power of iconography, and the nature of politics in this presidential election year. Debates, lectures, performances, community meetings, and an election-night party will be featured.

"Mel Ziegler's piece provokes our curiosity about the many stories behind these flags, the ways in which people define and display nationalism and patriotism, and what the flag means in an increasingly diverse country," said Ian Berry, Dayton Director of the Tang Teaching Museum and exhibition curator. "Steeped in both potent symbolism and humble physicality, Mel's use of the American flag as the mode of expression in this work encourages individual introspection and collective conversation about our country's complex identity. His extensive multi-year travel project brought him to communities all across this country—touring like a political candidate. His

performative project is a monumental achievement, and we are thrilled to see it come together at the Tang.”

Mel Ziegler began *Flag Exchange* more than five years ago, when he was inspired to trade his first flag at a barn in Tennessee. Since then, Ziegler’s visits to city halls, factories, and homes have evolved into a wide-ranging documentary project in which he gathers flags while also compiling doorstep conversations with flag owners from across the country. Ziegler’s trade of new flags for old creates a medium for rich storytelling and geographical mapping. Although the original owners of each flag will remain anonymous, the Tang will share on its website elements of the stories Ziegler has gathered.

Ziegler has been exploring themes of national identity and civic engagement throughout his career—redefining public art through the integration of site-specific works in public areas and subtly blending the conceptual with a deeply socially engaged practice. In 2005, the Tang presented the first retrospective examining the work of Ziegler and his longtime collaborator, the late Kate Ericson, in the exhibition *America Starts Here: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler*, a collaboration with the MIT List Visual Art Center that was accompanied by a catalog of the same title.

About Mel Ziegler

Throughout his career, Mel Ziegler has created art through engagement with individuals and communities. With Kate Ericson, he traveled across the United States organizing social-interventionist art projects. These joint works include *Camouflaged History*, where the duo painted a house in Charleston, South Carolina, in a U.S. Army camouflage pattern consisting of 72 municipally approved colors; and *Peas, Carrots, Potatoes*, in which they constructed an American flag out of baby food jars inscribed with the infants’ pre-lingual sounds.

Ziegler’s solo works include *Smell The Flowers*, for which he worked with the U.S. military in a project for the Cheekwood Museum of Art and Botanical Gardens; and *Breathe In, Breathe Out*, for which Ziegler collected 4,000 samples of breath from people in the same community and combined them in an air tank used to fill car tires, sports balls, and other needs of the same citizens. Ziegler’s work is in the collections of the Tang Museum; Whitney Museum of American Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; SFMOMA; the San Diego Museum of Art; and the Albright-Knox Museum in Buffalo. Ziegler is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit Sandhills Institute in Rushville, Nebraska, which is a catalyst for developing new models of artistic citizenship in America’s heartland. Ziegler is a the Chair of the Department of Art and the Paul E. Shwab Chair of Fine Arts at Vanderbilt University. He lives and works in Nashville, Tennessee.

About the Tang Teaching Museum

The Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College is a pioneer of interdisciplinary exploration and learning. A cultural anchor of New York's Capital Region, the institution's approach has become a model for university art museums across the country—with exhibition programs and series that bring together the visual and performing arts with fields of study as disparate as history, astronomy, and physics. The Tang has one of the most rigorous faculty-engagement initiatives in the nation, the Mellon Seminar, and robust publication and touring exhibition initiatives that extend the institution's reach far beyond its walls. The Tang Teaching Museum's building, designed by architect Antoine Predock, serves as a visual metaphor for the convergence of ideas and exchange the institution catalyzes. The Museum celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2015. More information at <http://tang.skidmore.edu>.

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