

Donnell Media Center
presents

Nora Ligorano
and Marshall Reese

**FREE SPEECH
ZONE:
Dangerous Books?**



**A Multi-Media Installation on View From
September 5 - October 1, 2005**

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The New York Public Library

The expansive powers of the Patriot Act, the increasing monopolization of media, and the explosion of the Internet present new challenges to America's foundation of free speech. Artists **Nora Ligorano** and **Marshall Reese** have conceived their work "Free Speech Zone" especially for the entrance of the Donnell Library Center. The installation takes its title from the current practice of restricting the exercise of First Amendment rights into areas called "free speech zones." The exhibition will be presented throughout the month of September 2005, which includes the national celebration of Banned Book Week (the week of September 26).

Nearly half of the 100 most acclaimed novels of the 20th century have been targeted for censorship, according to the American Library Association. "We created this work as a provocative statement against the banning of books," says Reese. "Libraries are a vital public access point when it comes to protecting our rights to read and to have access to information. Creating this installation made us understand and respect even more the efforts of the library to maintain an open society." In "Free Speech Zone," Donnell's entrance is transformed into two sets of illuminated triptychs. Each triptych includes two backlit portraits of blindfolded individuals, representing the diversity of those impacted by censorship. "They are the bookends, so to speak, of the triptychs," says Ligorano. The two middle sections contain LED displays with a scrolling collage of passages from books that have been censored. Excerpts from recently challenged books, such as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *The Color Purple*, *Native Son* and *Heather Has Two Mommies*, alternate with those from landmark censorship cases that include *Ulysses*, *Naked Lunch*, *The Well of Loneliness*, *Lysistrata* and *The Tropic of Cancer*.

Donnell Media Center's presentation of "Free Speech Zone" continues a series of interdisciplinary works that Ligorano/Reese call "The Alexandria Project," a reference to the great library of ancient Egypt. The series focuses on the library and the collection as a site for cultural investigation. Previous works in the series include "Acid Migration of Culture" (1994), a site-specific photo-video mural presented by Donnell Media Center (1998), and *Turning Leaves of Mind* (Granary Books, 2003), a photo essay about the materiality of the book, with images drawn from archival collections throughout Spain.

The artists received assistance for "Free Speech Zone" from Materials for the Arts, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, NYC Department of Sanitation and NYC Department of Education, as well as ImageKing Visual Solutions. This project is supported in part by funding from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese have been collaborating for almost 20 years. Their installations, videotapes and artists books have been shown in the United States and Europe. They have exhibited at Cristineros Gallery in New York and eyewash in Brooklyn. Ligorano/Reese were artists-in-residence at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program and The MacDowell Colony. They are recipients of numerous awards and grants, including support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, Art Matters, Inc., the Puffin Foundation, and were 2004 artist fellowship recipients of the New York Foundation for the Arts.

On Thursday, September 29th, award-winning children's and young adult writers will read from banned and challenged books to sound the alarm about a recent surge in attacks on books in schools and public libraries, where librarians have had to fight to keep the likes of *Harry Potter*, *The Color Purple*, *Native Son* and *Heather Has Two Mommies* on the shelves and available to young readers. The program, organized by the National Coalition Against Censorship, PEN American Center, and the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, and hosted by the Donnell Media Center, will be held in conjunction with "FREE SPEECH ZONE," during Banned Books Week (September 26-30), the nation's annual celebration of the freedom to read.