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I Know It When I See It

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Thesis Reflection Paper

During my sophomore, junior, and senior year in the College of Fine Arts, I have been making work about censorship. When it came time to start developing a body of work for my thesis, I knew I wanted it to be about censorship, but I didn't know what avenue to take. I had already played around with portraiture, architecture photography, and altering street signs, but none of those felt strong enough to defend for my thesis. I was making these pieces in my Photo Workshop class, a class specifically designed for photography students to develop thesis work. However, during that same semester, I was taking a class called Intermedia Workshop and was making a piece about censorship that I knew was stronger than the other work. So, fairly last minute, I decided to use that for my thesis show.

I Know It When I See It is a project about international censorship. I researched the movie rating systems for the 30 most populated countries and rated one photograph for each country for each age, ranging from 10 to 21 years old. The idea came to me after studying abroad during the summer before my senior year. It was my first time out of the country, and it was really insightful to learn that there is a whole new rating system for movies in other parts of the world. Once I got back to school, I still had that travel bug in me, so I made I Know It When I See It to satisfy that craving through researching 30 countries. Most of my findings were pretty close to my estimations. For example, Middle Eastern countries are much more conservative when it comes to nudity than western countries are. Also, movies in China all have to be appropriate for all ages, which is a rule that's regulated by the government. One struggle I had with my research was not finding enough credible sources. Some countries, like Japan, have websites with information about their movie guidelines, but it requires a login to get access to it. Other places, like the Democratic Republic of Congo, simply don't have an advanced film industry and therefore have no need for censorship regulations.

This information is interesting to me because I'm a strong believer in the fact that the content we consume shapes who we are. Because different countries have different rules of what you can and can't see at a young age, children in some countries grow up being exposed to different things than other kids their age are. By displaying all my findings on the wall in a grid, the viewer can walk up and learn about these things, giving them a chance to think about international censorship in the same way I do.