

PRESSBOOK

Sophie CALLE

*Artforum*

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## Artforum Summer 2017 Jackie Neudorf

### Sophie Calle

GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY

This past spring, French artist Sophie Calle inaugurated *Here Lie the Secrets of the Visitors of Green-Wood Cemetery, 2017–*, a simple installation nestled within a sprawling graveyard in Brooklyn. The project, which was commissioned by Creative Time, comprises a white marble obelisk erected on a plot bestowed to the artist for the next twenty-five years. Visitors may deposit written secrets through a slot in the monument's base; Calle will periodically return to the cemetery to burn the contents, making space for a fresh batch of secrets. For the opening, the artist, assuming the role of confidant and scribe, made herself available to write down participants' confessions if they opted to recite them directly to her.

Around noon the day I visited, Creative Time staff directed me and a few other early arrivals along a curving road that led to Bay Grove Hill (so named because the site, which is one of the highest natural points in Brooklyn, has a view of the ocean), where we were told Calle

would be waiting. When we arrived, she was sitting on a wicker chair at the hill's crest, wearing a dress whose black grid pattern was not dissimilar to the motifs of the picnic blankets on which Creative Time personnel were stationed around us. There were two more empty chairs, one placed directly opposite her, the other positioned at her back, facing outward. On a chalkboard by her side, we saw the following message: IF YOU PREFER TO STAY ANONYMOUS SIT BEHIND ME—. When it was my turn to speak with Calle, I became suddenly nervous, and sputtered out my secret in a rush. After asking a few clarifying questions, she dutifully jotted down my responses in cursive, using a blue pen, and I was surprised when, at the end of our exchange, she offered advice. I thanked her and walked off to deposit the piece of paper she'd just handed me in the obelisk, around which a gaggle of spectators had gathered, desperately documenting the environs on their phones.

As it turns out, *Here Lie the Secrets* is the most recent incarnation in a trinity of works that carry out the same concept. In June 2014, Calle performed the ritual for the first time with residents of Saint-Servais,



Sophie Calle, *Here Lie the Secrets of the Visitors of Green-Wood Cemetery, 2017–*, marble, 81 × 20 × 20". Photo: Leandro Justen.

France, in the graveyard of a sixteenth-century chapel. The written confessions were buried beneath a tombstone laid horizontally on the ground. This past September, Calle once again collected strangers' admissions. On the occasion of a group exhibition of contemporary sculpture titled "Open End," staged in Geneva's oldest cemetery, she installed the headstone in the same manner as the kindred work in Saint-Servais, only this time with a slot carved into its surface so that future visitors might continue to unburden themselves—an innovation applied in like manner to the Brooklyn installation. In interviews, Calle has also spoken of how she grew up beside the Cimetière du Montparnasse in Paris, and of how some of her first photos were of graves in Guatemala and California.

At Green-Wood, the project raised several questions: What does it mean to confide something to a stranger? And is the desired result of such an act really catharsis or absolution, when posting revealing confidences on platforms such as Instagram or Twitter has itself become a means of garnering social cachet? In what seemed like an unwitting illustration of that fact, images from the intimate event lit up social networks during the opening—proving yet again the enduring currency of the "art selfie." But, to Calle's credit, the artist has long been making the personal public through investigations of human subjects in the form of photo essays—*cum*—art books published throughout her four-decade-long career. Calle is always searching for covert narratives—yet somehow it's her audience who end up finding themselves.

—Jackie Neudorf