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Inflatable ‘Truth Booth’ is art that lets you speak your mind

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BY DAVID FILIPOV



The Truth Booth in Cape Town, South Africa in 2014.

Boston has witnessed an uptick of giant inflatable objects in recent months. Five illuminated rabbits loomed over the Lawn on D last summer; a red “Breathing Flower” bloomed at the Museum of Fine Arts last month; and on Friday, a 23-foot-tall “Fruit Tree” grew at Faneuil Hall.

The next big inflated thing that will appear in Boston does something none of its pumped-up predecessors can: It invites you to enter it and speak your mind. The results can be thought-provoking, heartbreaking, and uplifting.

Called “In Search of the Truth (The Truth Booth),” it’s a white, inflatable video

booth that prompts those who step inside to complete the phrase, “The truth is. . .”

On Monday, the installation — “The Truth Booth” for short — will open for two days near Fenway Park at The Verb Hotel, before setting up from Wednesday to Friday on the Rose F. Kennedy Greenway across from Hanover Street in the North End.

The 14-foot-tall by 23-foot-wide Truth Booth looks like a big, white speech bubble with the word “Truth” inscribed over its entrance. It opened in Ireland in 2011 and has since traveled to Afghanistan, South Africa, and other US cities. Its creators, artists Hank Willis Thomas, Ryan Alexiev, Jim Ricks, and Will Sylvester, of a group they call [The Cause Collective](#), have sorted through some 6,000 video recordings to compile the responses into video art.

Thomas said the inspiration for The Truth Booth came from Alexiev’s projects that try to “put the public in public art.”

“The idea of a modern-day confession booth that allows people to express their values and unique perspectives is what we were most drawn to,” Thomas said Wednesday. “Especially in the political arena, ‘the truth’ is so loaded, we wanted to democratize that conversation and make it more individual and universal at the same time.”

A Cause Collective [video compilation](#) of Truth Booth responses from around the world, commissioned by New York-based [Public Art Fund](#), certainly reflects differing political realities.

“The truth in Afghanistan, I’m sorry, but there is none,” a man with a long white beard says into the camera in Afghan Dari, with English subtitles. “There is only deception and fraud, and helping yourself to power.”

“The truth is basically that humanity is born into slavery,” says a young man with an Irish accent, who produces what appears to be a piece of paper currency. “Humanity is slavery to this: money, scraps of paper with numbers printed on it.”

There videos also display a haunting, universal continuity.

“The truth is, being a girl and living in America, I get so many wonderful rights, and I don’t think it’s fair that girls who live in other countries don’t get those,” a young

girl says in American English.

“By the name of God, the truth is Afghan girls, especially in Herat province, have no liberty at all,” a young woman, her face covered except for the eyes by a niqab, says in Afghan Dari.



© Jim Ricks
The Truth Booth in Bamiyan, Afghanistan in 2013, in 2014.

And the truth is, many of the responses are raw, personal confessions that reflect wounded souls.

“The truth for me is it’s probably going to be hard for me to go two minutes without crying, because my life is not at all what I thought it would be,” says a middle-age American man, who then breaks into tears as he speaks about his divorce.

“The truth is, I fear every day, walking down the street,” says a young American man, who then brightens visibly. “The truth is, I love everyone. I find the greatest things in the most flawed people.”

Lucas Cowan, public art curator for the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, said The Truth Booth will serve as an artistic medium to represent the voices of residents and visitors.

“It’s going to create an interesting portrait of the community of Boston,” Cowan said. “They’re creating an ethnographic portrait of the city.”

The Truth Booth attracted long lines in Miami in December 2014 and in Brooklyn last August through October. In Boston, volunteers will help people use the booth, said Dina Deitsch director of curatorial projects for GT Public, which partnered with development firm Samuels & Associates and the Greenway Conservancy to bring The Truth Booth to Boston.

The booth is simple to operate, Sylvester said. Inside, a touch screen prompts you to start your statement with “The Truth is.” Under the phrase is a media waver, and a record button. Once you start, you have two minutes to record. When you’re done, you

press a stop button.

It's easy enough for children to operate. Which they sometimes do.

“The truth is, I think The Truth Booth is a wonderful idea,” says an American girl who can't be much older than a kindergartner. “I mean, it's fluffy, it's fun, and you can tell what's really inside your heart.”

The Truth Booth will be open at The Verb Hotel Monday from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. and Tuesday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. It will be open on the Greenway Wednesday through Friday from noon-7 p.m.

www.facebook.com/insearchofthetruth/

Watch a video about The Truth Booth on [Vimeo](#).

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