Alexandra Bell (b. 1983)  
“A Teenager with Promise,” Counternarratives, 2017-2018

Alexandra Bell is an American multi-disciplinary artist, best known for Counternarratives, a public art project of supersized New York Times articles edited to reveal biases and assumptions about race and gender. Bell’s work is featured in the 2019 Whitney Biennial.

In 2018 the Pomona College Museum of Art welcomed the artist activist to the Claremont campuses, where, with the assistance of student volunteers, she mounted Counternarratives. “A Teenager with Promise” is part of that public art project. Bell explores how racist narratives are perpetuated by highlighting hidden language codes, picture choice, and headlines to expose editorial bias in main stream media. Using articles from the New York Times, the paper of record presumed to be a liberal voice, Bell “radically reedits” the articles. She redacts loaded text, leaving racially neutral language; and changes the position and size of images to be more consistent with the content of the story. Her work underscores the necessity of evaluating the tone and veracity of media.

Bell states, “I’m creating a narrative that goes against the dominant narrative put forth by the news.” She describes her work as investigating the “complexities of narrative, information, consumption and perception.” Her approach asks us to consider what is missing, what a journalist or editor left out in favor of other elements of a story, specifically with respect to race.

Alexandra Bell holds a masters in print journalism from Columbia University’s prestigious J School. In 2018 the International Center for Photography, New York, awarded Bell the prestigious Infinity Award for her work exploring the ways media frameworks construct memory and inform discursive practices around race, politics, and culture. Her work appears in public spaces and is shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art, MoMA PS1, Bennington College, as well as multiple galleries. This was the first showing of her work on the west coast.

“Alexandra Bell Highlights Bias in the News and Rewrites Racist Headlines,” by Victoria L. Valentine, Culture Type, March 5, 2019

Image: Alexandra Bell, A Teenager with Promise; Annotated, 2017. Image courtesy of the artist