

## Scenarios : Scripts to Perform

**Richard Kostelantz, Marina Abramovic, Ulay, Blair H. Allen, Charles Amirkhanian, Michael Andre, Bruce Andrews, Mel Andringa, Anna Banana, Amari Baraka, Peter H. Barnett, Wolfgang Bauer, Lee Baxandall, Allan Bealy, Kenneth Bernard, George Brecht, Carolyn Brown, Ed Bullins, Donald Burgy, John Cage, Carl D. Clark, Guy de Cointet, David Cole, Paul Epstein, Loris Essary, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Filliou, A.M. Fine, Richard Foreman, Peter Frank, Ken Friedman, Malcolm Goldstein, Paul Goodman, Dan Graham, Spalding Gray, Charles Gruber, Guerrilla Art Action Group, Anna Halprin, Ihab Hassan, Scott Helmes, Bob Heman, Hi Red Center, Dick Higgins, William M. Hoffman, Jerry Hunt, Patrick Ireland, Tom Johnson, Ben Johnston, Sheila Keenan, George Ketterl, Michael Kirby, Alison Knowles, Christopher Knowles, Kenneth J. Leon, The Living Theatre, Philip Lopate, Alvin Lucier, Mary Lucier, Otto Luening, Toby Lurie, Jackson Mac Low, George Maciunas, Sarah Maclay, Toby MacLennan, Aaron Marcus, Kenneth Maue, Michael McClure, Jonas Mekas, Dave Morice, Charlie Morrow, Linda Mussman, Opal Louis Nations, Claes Oldenburg, Rochelle Owens, Nam June Paik, Pedro Pietri, Le Plan K, Bern Porter, Rachel Rosenthal, Jerome Rothenberg, R. Murray Schafer, Francis Schwartz, Stephen Scobie, Douglas Barbour, Stuart Sherman, Mieko Shiomi, Paul Sills, Stuart Smith, Gertrude Stein, Conciere Taylor, Jim Theobald, Lorenzo Thomas, Fred Truck, Tristan Tzara, Wolf Vostell, Keith Waldrop, Robert Watts, Carole Weber, Emmett Williams, Robert Wilson, Nina Yankowitz, Paul Zelevansky**

Anthology of theatrical/performative scripts and documents conceived as of as a companion to Breakthrough Ficioneers and Essaying Essays. Compiled and edited by Richard Kostelantz. Features contributions by Marina Abramovic, Ulay, Blair H. Allen, Charles Amirkhanian, Michael Andre, Bruce Andrews, Mel Andringa, Anna Banana, Amari Baraka, Peter H. Barnett, Wolfgang Bauer, Lee Baxandall, Allan Bealy, Kenneth Bernard, George Brecht, Carolyn Brown, Ed Bullins, Donald Burgy, John Cage, Carl D. Clark, Guy de Cointet, David Cole, Paul Epstein, Loris Essary, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Filliou, A.M. Fine, Richard Foreman, Peter Frank, Ken Friedman, Malcolm Goldstein, Paul Goodman, Dan Graham, Spalding Gray, Charles Gruber, Guerrilla Art Action Group, Anna Halprin, Ihab Hassan, Scott Helmes, Bob Heman, Hi Red Center, Dick Higgins, William M. Hoffman, Jerry Hunt, Patrick Ireland, Tom Johnson, Ben Johnston, Sheila Keenan, George Ketterl, Michael Kirby, Alison Knowles, Christopher Knowles, Kenneth J. Leon, The Living Theatre, Philip Lopate, Alvin Lucier, Mary Lucier, Otto Luening, Toby Lurie, Jackson Mac Low, George Maciunas, Sarah Maclay, Toby MacLennan, Aaron Marcus, Kenneth Maue, Michael McClure, Jonas Mekas, Dave Morice, Charlie Morrow, Linda Mussman, Opal Louis Nations, Claes Oldenburg, Rochelle Owens, Nam June Paik, Pedro Pietri, Le Plan K, Bern Porter, Rachel Rosenthal, Jerome Rothenberg, R. Murray Schafer, Francis Schwartz, Stephen Scobie, Douglas Barbour, Stuart Sherman, Mieko Shiomi, Paul Sills, Stuart Smith, Gertrude Stein, Conciere Taylor, Jim Theobald, Lorenzo Thomas, Fred Truck, Tristan Tzara, Wolf Vostell, Keith Waldrop, Robert Watts, Carole Weber, Emmett Williams, Robert Wilson, Nina Yankowitz, and Paul Zelevansky.

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## 51st Street/Lexington Avenue-53rd Street

NINA YANKOWITZ

### *Tunnel Vision, 1988*

Ceramic tile in lower pass

*Tunnel Vision* consists of handmade tiles that line the 51st Street and Lexington Avenue subway underpass. The 1,000 square-foot ceramic tile installation contains a series of wide cracks that appear as deep indentations in the form of lightning bolts ripping through the site and exposing bright blue marbled water tiles. Revealed within are seascapes that offer a view to another realm. A ceramic relief architectural frieze of the New York City skyline in red, black, and white wraps around the top portion of the walls, and column-like forms appear as pillars supporting



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SUN

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1993

THE SUN

## 'Ciphers': Artistic questions of identity

By John Dorsey  
Art Critic

### ART REVIEW

**What:** "Ciphers of Identity"  
**Where:** Fine Arts Gallery at  
University of Maryland  
Baltimore County, 5401  
Wilkins Ave.  
**When:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Tuesdays through Saturdays;  
through Jan. 15  
**Call:** (410) 455-3188

Identity, cultural identity and national identity, and sometimes they're conflicting. How does one identify oneself as black, say, or homosexual, and at the same time as American, when the country as a whole has traditionally rejected or oppressed one's culture? It's not surprising that the artists here, like Kruger, deal not so much with defining cultural identity as with how difficult that is to do.

Fred Wilson's "Friendly Natives" consists of four plastic skeletons in four old-style showcases in which one might have seen artifacts from "other cultures" in an ethnographic museum. The impersonality of these skeletons suggests the inadequacy of such exhibits to encompass the real nature of whatever it was they purported to show. But by labeling the skeletons "somebody's mother," "somebody's brother," Wilson gives this work another meaning as well: that we all ultimately lack identity, that identity is a myth. And by using fake skeletons he suggests that even the myth is a myth.

Elaine Reichek's "Red Delicious" consists of a romantic depiction of what appears to be a young American Indian woman, inset with stills

do, who sees us do it, and how they interpret it. Our identity, therefore, doesn't belong to us.

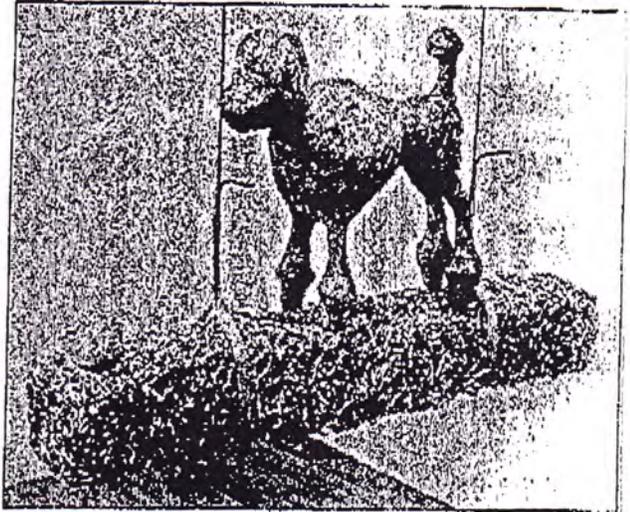
The premise of "Ciphers of Identity," curated by cultural historian and art critic Maurice Berger, is challenging. A UMBC statement defines the exhibit as an investigation of "how artists from diverse racial, ethnic, sexual, and economic communities have defined cultural identity in the politically charged climate of America in the 1990s."

Identity is a difficult question, especially in America, because there are so many complexities to it. There is individual identity, socio-economic

Barbara Kruger's "Untitled" in UMBC's show "Ciphers of Identity" plays with identity in several ways. She used an existing photograph of a woman's hands pulling a photograph out of a file drawer filled with folders bearing numbers — 2400, 3150, etc.

The photo the hand holds is blurred; you can't tell what it shows, so the subject doesn't have an identity. The numbers indicate that whatever or whoever the photo shows has been reduced to something nameless or the purposes of this file. On the whole Kruger has superimposed the written legend "Who do you think you are?" By throwing this question at the viewer, Kruger indicates we all have as little identity as the subject of the photo.

By using an old photograph for her purposes, she has altered its original identity. The woman's disembodied hands suggest that she, whoever she was, has no identity for us beyond what her hands are doing. Kruger says, our identity changes depending on what we



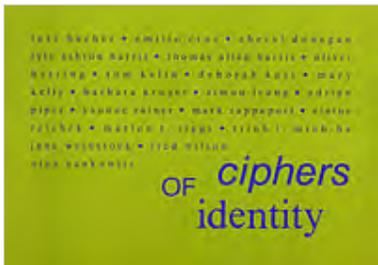
"Dog on Beam," by Nina Yankowitz, part of "Ciphers" exhibit.

from old movies showing white men crudely dressed as Indians torturing white women. The work suggests that both the romantic and the Hollywood western versions are stereotypes, and the title further indicates the indignities to which American Indians have been subjected.

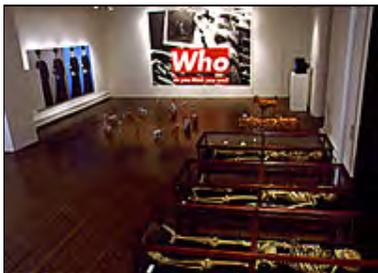
Lyle Ashton Harris' "Face" shows the artist as himself, a black man, and in blond wig and white makeup, suggesting that the difficulties of identity of blacks and homosexuals are compounded when one is both. These are but a few examples from an thought-provoking show.

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## Ciphers of Identity June 4 - July 8, 1994



Installation view south gallery  
Deborah Kass, Barbara Kruger, Nina Yankowitz, Fred Wilson



Installation view south gallery  
Nina Yankowitz, Fred Wilson, Lyle Ashton Harris



Installation view north and south galleries  
Deborah Kass, Emilio Cruz, Simon Leung, Oliver Herring



Installation view north gallery  
Adrian Piper, Elaine Reichek, Oliver Herring

### Artists included in **Ciphers of Identity**:

- Lutz Bacher
- Emilio Cruz
- Cheryl Donegan
- Lyle Ashton Harris
- Thomas Allen Harris
- Oliver Herring
- Tom Kalin
- Deborah Kass
- Mary Kelly
- Barbara Kruger
- Simon Leung
- Adrian Piper
- Yvonne Rainer
- Mark Rappaport
- Elaine Reichek
- Marlon T. Riggs
- Trinh T. Minh-ha
- Jane Weinstock
- Fred Wilson
- Nina Yankowitz

Click here for a PDF version of the following [Press Release](#).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 3, 1994

## Ciphers of Identity

June 4 –July 8, 1994

Curated by Maurice Berger

Nina Yankowitz • Fred Wilson • Jane Weinstock • Trinh T. Minh-ha  
Marlon T. Riggs • Elaine Reichek • Mark Rappaport • Yvonne Rainer  
Adrian Piper • Simon Leung • Barbara Kruger • Mary Kelly • Deborah Kass  
Tom Kalin • Oliver Herring • Thomas Allen Harris • Lyle Ashton Harris  
Cheryl Donegan • Emilio Cruz • Lutz Bacher

Throughout history, artists have often played a significant role in shaping national and personal identity. Organized by Maurice Berger, Senior Fellow at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School for Social Research, New York, the exhibition explores the ways in which artists of varying racial, ethnic, sexual, and economic communities have defined cultural identity in the politically charged climate of America in the 1990's. At a time when racism, sexism and homophobia have become the linchpins in censorious and oppressive attacks against marginal or oppositional culture, artists are now faced with fundamental political and aesthetic questions: In the age of mass communication, can artists produce effective and moving work within high cultural contexts? Should cultural figures and social communities under attack define themselves in relation to individual racial, sexual and ethnic groups and risk divisiveness, or should a cultural politics of coalition and consensus be encouraged? Is it possible for artists to represent themselves through multiple identities? What role should social, cultural, and art history play in redefining the role of self in modern society?

*Ciphers of Identity* examines the work of contemporary painters, photographers, filmmakers, and video, performance, and installation artists who are committed to examining the complex relationship between identity politics, forms of aesthetics address, and the struggle for social and cultural freedom. The show has a central aesthetic and theoretical theme: each participant employs the formal and theoretical device of displacement – allowing identity to exist outside of autobiography through displaced representations of the self – to question the notion of a unified, coherent identity. By splitting the self into ciphers – in which the self is represented through other people, articles of clothing, animals, objects, fictional characters, skeletons, and other cultural icons – these artists problematize the idea of identity as something immediately apparent and recognizable and hence a willing partner to destructive and undermining stereotypes.

An innovative, forty-four page catalog accompanies the exhibition; the book contains a critical essay by Maurice Berger, black and white reproductions and film, video and performance stills of artists' work, a checklist of the exhibition, and a selected bibliography. To expand the discourse, the catalog includes a selection of quotes and statements on the subject of identity from a broad range of intellectual, cultural, and political figures. Additional information including biographies of the artists and curator are available upon request.

The exhibition originated at the Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County and will travel to the University of California/Irvine, the University of South Florida/Tampa, the New Orleans Center for Contemporary Art, and the Kemper Center at the Kansas City Art Institute. The exhibition is made possible with support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, and the Maryland State Arts Council.

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Since a number of the works in the traveling exhibition have been shown extensively in New York, several have been temporarily replaced by new pieces never before seen in New York.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Mondays by appointment. There will be a reception on Saturday, June 4 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. For more information or photographs, please contact Susan Yung at (212) 226-3232.

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TZ'ART  
&  
CO.

f o r i m m e d i a t e r e l e a s e

## **BARE BONES**

CURATED BY NINA YANKOWITZ

June 25 - September 5, 1996

(August by appointment only)

**opening reception:** Tuesday, June 25, 6-8 pm

*Armature: A skeletal framework built as a support to construct something, as in the basic underlying framework or features of infrastructures*

**TZ'ART & Co.** is pleased to announce its exhibition "Bare Bones", showing the work of painters, sculptors, and architects who from the 1960s to the present have dealt with the idea of armature at the aesthetic core of their work. "Bare Bones" will open on June 25th and will run through the summer.

"Bare Bones", conceived and organized by sculptor Nina Yankowitz, includes the work of **Alice Aycock, Jo Baer, Sam Brody and Rolf Ohlhausen, Stuart Diamond, Kathy Goodell, Ron Gorchov, Zaha Hadid, Andrew Kennedy, Kennedy & Violich, Susan Leopold, Sol LeWitt, Fabian Marcaccio, Donald Moffett, Roxy Paine, Kyong Park, Renzo Piano, Marjetica Potrc, Hani Rashid and Lise Anne Couture, Dorothea Rockburne, Sean Scully, Robert Stackhouse, Frank Stella, Michael Webb, Stephen Westfall, and Andy Yoder.**

The exhibition juxtaposes work from the sixties and seventies with more recent art. Some of the participants focus on exposing the armature, relying on the structure of the materials to give visual meaning, while others create the illusion that the framework does not exist. It is the intent of this exhibition to pose a dialogue between the idea of how the armature has been handled in the minimalist/post minimalist era and the present.

An illustrated brochure accompanying the exhibition is available upon request.

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Art

# Ignore the exhibit but look at the art

**'Monumental Propaganda'** artists triumph despite sparseness of display.

By ALICE THORSON

Art Critic

Presented in glass-topped cases in the manner of a library historical display, "Monumental Propaganda," a recently opened exhibit at the Kemper Museum of Con-

temporary Art and Design, 4420 Warwick Blvd., is not the most inviting art show you're likely to encounter this season.

But its contents are absorbing and entertaining despite the exhibit's austerity.

Russian emigre artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid,

## ART SHOWS & OPENINGS

well-known for their collaborative artworks lampooning Soviet art and ideology, initiated the project, which offers alternatives by 113 artists to the wide-scale destruction of Soviet monuments.

The project began with a call for artists in the May 1992 issue of *Artforum* magazine. "We propose neither worship nor annihilation of these monuments," Komar and Melamid wrote, "but a creative collaboration with them—to leave them at their sites and transform them, through art, into history lessons."

And artistic transformations they got—in the form of 160 proposals from artists residing in the United States, Russia, Canada and Europe. Independent Curators Incorporated in New York took on the task of organizing the respondents' drawings, collages, photographs and texts into the travelling exhibit which is now at the Kemper, replete with skewed banners of Lenin on the walls and inverted plaster busts of Stalin supporting the display cases.

Humor, of the wry, irreverent variety, is this exhibit's stock-in-trade. Robert Beckmann's proposal presents a "Lenin Slot Machine," slyly titled "The Gamble that Didn't Pay Off"; Judith Fleishman envisioned statues of



Photo courtesy of the Kemper Museum

"Recycled Lenins," by Irina Nakhova, and featuring Gorbachev (left) and Yeltsin.

Marx and Lenin clad in bras and garter belts.

A number of artists invented ingenious, if absurd, new practical uses for Russia's dated effigies. Andrei Roiter conceived a memorial statue as a support for a playground slide; Thomas Lawson responded with a proposal for a "Lenin Drinking Fountain."

Another favorite strategy of the artist respondents was to devise unlikely coverings for the statues, as in the Mother Russia topiary proposed by Nina Yankowitz, or the mulched and spray foam-coated versions of monuments conceived by the team of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler.

And what better comedown for a communist leader than to be memorialized in a compromising relationship with capitalism, as in Constantin Boym's collage, "Endorsed by

Lenin," showing the former Soviet leader hawking Nike shoes.

The proposals are not all poking fun and games. Susan Hoeltzel responded to Komar and Melamid's serious concern over the monuments' destruction with a work that addresses the ever-shifting political and ideological currents that swirl around them. Her "Fall-Proof Monument" would leave an existing statue intact, save the leader's face, which would be replaced by a video monitor presenting the leader of the day.

A series of essays in the show's accompanying catalogue also explore the serious issues underlying "Monumental Propaganda."

"Shaped images stand for historical memory which finds new definition with each generation," notes Dore Ashton.

See OPENINGS, Page 23, Col. 1

## OPENINGS

Continued from Page 22

"The sacredness of the monument's space derives from our willing complicity in the monument's essential illusion," writes James E. Young.

One of the cleverest and most thought-provoking ideas for monumental retooling came from Joseph Kosuth. Viewing the statues' bases as a subversion of the social realist ethos of the effigies they supported, the guru of Conceptual Art proposed an exhibit of monument bases as abstract artworks.

Some viewers will find the two-dimensional proposal format of the works in this exhibit to be tedious, and long for objects. But the show's conceptual drift is not inappropriate given the cultural realities it recalls.

Even as it was breaking up, the Soviet Union was a place where art materials were hard to come by, and people in general defined themselves through ideas rather than the possessions that served

*THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1997*

**"MATERIAL GIRLS,"** Gender, Process and Abstract Art Since 1970, 128 Gallery, 128 Rivington Street, Lower East Side, (212) 674-0244 (through tomorrow). The artist Harmony Hammond has put together a wide-ranging show of small works by 31 women in a tiny space. The earliest pieces, a pleated painting by Nina Yankowitz and a near-transparent Mary Miss sculpture, date from 1967. The 70's are represented by Sarah Draney, Maxine Fine, Kazuko (with a tense wall piece of twisted string and nails), Patsy Norvell, Howardena Pindell and Carla Tardi, among others. The body-oriented work of the 1990's got its start with such pioneer artists, and they are joined here by a handful of their heirs, including Lisa Beck, Linda Matalon, Sarah Rapson, Kiki Smith and Carrie Yamaoka. (Cotter)

### Dialectical Spiritualism: A Language of Critique and Belief

*Olivia Gude, University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago Public Art Group*

Most young artists stop making art within a few years of being out of school. If teaching art at the college level is more than a pyramid scheme, we must ask ourselves, why this is. Is there just too much art around? Are these simply artists without the drive and talent to keep on keeping on? Are we teaching young artists to make art that isn't wanted, needed or understood?

After graduating from the University of Chicago, I was fortunate to receive a second graduation education in the Chicago community mural movement, a tradition which extends back to the historic 1967 *Wall of Respect*. Through this apprenticeship with artists who invented a new public art practice, I was introduced to ideas such as creating art which utilizes artists' knowledge and insights while respecting community aspirations, rethinking the social description and interior experience of being an artist in order to be open to collaborative strategies, and the need to become a multi-cultural person, rooted in the imagery and understanding of various cultures of representation and belief.

Many of my mural projects are the result of complex collaborations with community members and other artists. The projects are woven out of fragments of images and ideas. The aim is not to create a seamless whole, but rather to develop a heteroglossic aesthetic medium in which multiple points of view represent a postmodern reweaving of collective, social consciousness.

We often talk about the way this society doesn't support and often actively suppresses artists statements. Is it possible that these dysfunctions in the political and economic spheres result from a major dysfunction in the aesthetic sphere? Does our art have survival value at a time when the survival of many human communities is at stake in the slightly longer run?

Do artists have a role in cultivating the utopian imagination of the society? Which artists are willing to risk the appearance of naiveté by expressing belief in possibility?

Can we shift from secular to a sacred paradigm of art making? Can we create an art of dialectical spiritualism? Can we interrogate and critically investigate concepts like "justice" or "community" while we use them in praxis? Can we invent a language of critique and belief?

### The Lone Rangers: Beyond Early Feminist Orthodoxy

*Chairs: Nina Yankowitz, artist, New York; and Carey Lovelace, art writer, New York*

This panel will explore the work, decisions and political positioning of pioneer women artists of the 60s and early 70s, who were struggling to create careers at the crucial moment just before and at the emergence of the feminist movement, women who strongly identified themselves as feminist, but who turned away from the movement's rigid orthodoxies.

In particular, the panel will focus on women artists who dealt with "materiality": Many created sculpture using timber, rope, raw canvas, paper, industrial materials, work that on the surface seemed to have no female-related content. It could be argued that the efforts of these women, although they operated outside organized politicizing, helped advance the cause of women in important ways—perhaps even more than collective activity. How do we see the 70s debates about activism vs. "working within the system" in our own day? Did the artwork of these women, more than was acknowledged at the time, lay the groundwork for later feminist theories and organizational clout?

The session will open with a slide lecture on related work of the 1960s and early 1970s, followed by a discussion with panelists.

Questions for Panelist Discussion: (1) In the 60s and early 70s, in what ways was it political merely to be making work as a female in a male-dominated art world? (2) What impact did collective action by others have on the careers of women not actively engaging in groups? (3) Is the time

devoted to political activism to the detriment of art making? (4) What impact did the successful careers of particular women have on the advancement of women in general? (5) In retrospect, which had the greater impact on the situation of women artists: women who worked within the established system to make their own careers, or those who worked politically, attempted to establish separate institutions, etc.? (6) Was there feminist content in apparently "neutral" (Minimal, Conceptual) work? (7) Was the "handling" of materials by women different from the male-determined norm? (8) Did earlier work (by panelists and others) set the stage for later "feminist" themes (decoration? domestic art? social protest?) (9) Before the women's movement, was work dealing with certain types of materials (glass, fabric) read critically (derogatorily) as "feminine"? (10) Was there a "dialogue of effects" between feminists working within the system and feminists seeking collective action? In what ways did their achievements feed each others?

**Panelists:** Emma Amos, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey; Mary Miss, artist, New York; Pat Steir, artist, New York; Michelle Stuart, artist, New York; Jackie Winsor, artist, New York; Barbara Zucker, artist, New York

25th February 2013

## Scholarly Posts 1 and 2 by Allison Wright

Nina Yankowitz's Crossings Promotes Religious Tolerance for Contemporary Audiences

From painting to sculpture to poetry to new media, Nina Yankowitz crosses boundaries with her art. She is a woman of varied skills and interests who is not afraid to try new things and tackle new goals. Her career began in the late 1960s/early 70s, a time ripe for an artist with a social conscience, and Yankowitz was up to that challenge. It was against the feminist, civil rights, anti-war backdrop that the young artist began to develop her cross-genre, ever-changing, collaborative method of producing work that has allowed her to look seriously at current issues and address them

appropriately, and in the years since, her style has matured. In her 2009 interactive installation piece, *Crossings*, originally shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki, Greece, she explores the motives behind religious intolerance using the tools she has developed over the years. With *Crossings* (Fig. 1), Yankowitz creates an immersive, multi-media environment that interacts with the audience on a contemporary level on a near spiritual level, inviting them to learn and question their preconceived notions of religion and ultimately promoting the tolerance that stems of a place of greater understanding.

Her previous work has focused on issues from feminism and racism to global warming. Grappling with heavy issues is not a new concept to her. Much of her work from the past decade is dedicated to demonstrating the effects of global climate change. Her *Cloud House* (Fig.2), from 2004, and *Global Warming Window* (Fig.3), from a 2012 exhibit celebrating the opening of a sustainably-focused non-profit, educate the public on this important environmental issue. [1] Both works use technology and shapes reminiscent of the home (a house and a window) to play out the horrible and unpredictable weather patterns associated with climate change. As art historian Joyce Beckenstein writes in a recent article on Yankowitz for *Woman's Art Journal*: "Cloud House omens the extinction of the generic home as a consequence of eco-carelessness." [2] *Cloud House* is one of many glass houses Yankowitz has produced, with her collaborators, and through this piece and how it addresses environmental (and subtly political) issues, it is easy to see how *Crossings* came to be imagined and became the all-immersive, spiritual and educational work that it is. Built in the shape of a traditional sanctuary, the building invites audience members to actually enter the space and interact with the piece, which has been characterized as a game. [3] *Cloud House* and *Global Warming Window* are pieces for the audience to watch, but in *Crossings*, they must participate. Writer and new media expert Frank Rose explores this wave of participatory, immersive media in his book *The Art of Immersion*. The internet has upped audience's expectations of stories, movies, and games, and Yankowitz has tapped into this trend in her use of participatory media. *Crossings* is her built world, designed to immerse and educate her audience, and Rose would say this is what a contemporary audience demands of its entertainment. [4] In a world so focused on technology and new media and "immersive video games," Yankowitz's idea of using immersion is an effective way of making her art piece engaging to a contemporary audience, one that about which it is often thought their brains are being rewired, the brain being "almost infinitely malleable" and completely affected by the technology available and potentially harder to interest, the more technology that is available. [5] For the lesson of *Crossings* to be effectively learned, it must engage all of the physical senses, with the possible exception of smell, and fully capture the curious, intellectual mind, getting audiences to put down their smart phones and fully enter the world of the piece.

It does. When viewers enter *Crossings*, they are confronted by Yankowitz's almost spiritual, encompassing world. The room is dark, lit by projections of religious mosaics and other designs on the floor, and the wall that they must control. The voices being played in the background are religious texts being read in their original languages. [6] These texts are taken from the five major religions: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, as are the floor designs. Having been presented with an infrared wand when entering, the "players" use it to tap the screen, which lights up with words "that suggest narrative gospel shining through stained glass windows," describes art history Beckenstein. She goes on to describe the process: "Using the wand, the player selects one word per [six horizontal lines] and slides that word from left to right, assigning it a relative weight . . . These word placements trigger a search

engine to locate scriptures that attribute similar emphasis to chosen words.”[7] The scriptures searched are the scriptures from the five religions, color-coded though not explained. The players find out only after they leave and receive a print-out of their self-created “Bible,” which religion each of the texts is from. Yankowitz told Beckenstein her goal, saying she was questioning the political and social issues that stem from religious intolerance and began wondering, “Are world religions really different? Or, are the same ideas and values pitched to each flock from a different set of agendas?”[8] The audience enters Crossings, interacts with it, and is then reborn into the outside world, with a new understanding of the sameness and fluidity of religions, and a printed handout to prove it.

The search engine technique and her use of associative words to find connections between short scriptures is another example of how Yankowitz has successfully lived up to new media demands of today’s audience and of how new media itself has changed the way people think. The internet has altered the ability to process long pieces of information, and has instead played to the associative-strengths of our brain. Wikipedia being a prime example of this, linking to new article after new article, finding connections between topics.[9] By developing her search engine, Yankowitz proves that she has a deep understanding of the value modern technology and of reaching audiences across it, especially if the goal of reaching them is to educate them. Also, by asking viewers to participate, even in 2009, she is catering to a trend of people wanting to do more than look at art. They want to Tweet or Facebook, text or IM. Basically, they want to talk about it and be a part of it.[10] Yankowitz predicted the development of this trend early on, in 2009, and allowed her audience to engage directly with her art piece and gave them an element of control.

Yankowitz has created previous pieces that include elements of design, such as her “Tunnel Vision” in the New York subway system from 1988 (Fig. 4), and she brings some of her understanding of design past into her activist work.[11] This combination of design and activism reflects another side of activism that Yankowitz has touched on simply called design activism, which, according to Design scholar Thomas Markussen, “is not a boycott, strike, protest, demonstration, or some other political act” but is “a designerly way of intervening in people’s lives.”[12] It disrupts people from their daily selves and gives them a new perspective on a familiar activity or place.[13] Crossings is, as stated before, shaped like a church, with the mosaic floor typical of traditional churches. The players enter this shape and make discoveries regarding religion, perhaps becoming a more enlightened being before exiting. By having this transformation take place in a church-shaped area, Yankowitz is asking her viewers to draw parallels between this experience of religion and the one typically found in churches. These conclusions are not forced on viewers, but the message of the “game,” combined with the voices reading the scriptures, the immersiveness of the content, and the physicality of the space, works to create a religious experience. Is this the sort of experience one should have within a church or another type of religious building? Is it significant that Yankowitz chose a typically Christian form or is that part of her designer’s eye (churches are the most common in America so perhaps the most likely to disrupt the viewer? Shake their preformed views on the idea?) If this religious experience can happen in a piece of art, with words from all of the different scriptures being read on repeat, almost like a mantra, then does religion need to be enclosed by the walls of a church; do people need to be boxed in to one religion and forced to misunderstand and not engage in other religions in order to to live moral lives? Is this art placing itself into religion or trying to understand religion?

The religious aspect of this work plays into a contemporary understanding of religion in art, which has developed and changed significantly since the early days of art, most specifically since the Renaissance, when art began to be revered for an artist’s skill and not simply its religious intent.[14] In even more modern times art has become detached from the church almost entirely, and indeed created a piece that is simply “religious” is often not enough, even for religious audiences.[15] Yankowitz’s work, while akin to a worshipful experience, “is not ‘religious’ in its intent,” says Beckenstein.[16] She is merely commenting on the religious experience and cultural understandings of religious values and trying “to reach across cultures” and get people to see past their “ethnocentric” ways, she told Woman’s Art Journal.[17] This contemporary use of religion, while a form of activist education, is also a reflection of today’s ever-more progressive society, as her understanding of new media is. Simple religious art is not welcome in the art world and often looked down upon, and educated audience members are demanding more and more complex and thought-provoking world.[18] A work like Crossings is effective because of immersive, participatory qualities and its complexity, its charge to the viewer to make them think, question, draw conclusions, act.

Crossings is an exemplary contemporary art piece of social activism, focusing on the new media demands of its

audience while addressing a long-standing social issue that is full of political and perhaps artistic implications. By created an immersive and participatory world, Yankowitz is educating her viewers while at the same time challenging them to stand up, pay attention. Participate, and in more than simply her work. While one downfall to new media is that, especially in today's world, it may never be "new" enough, and perhaps the ability to produce a timeless piece with technology without fear of it becoming outdated is gone, but Yankowitz seems an artist capable of watching trends and following them, of finding new collaborators and methods to spread her message. She, along with newer generations of artists, will work to keep art relevant in this fast-paced world and continue using it as not merely an escape from society, but a safe place to critique it and attempt to improve it. Time will tell.

#### Endnotes

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4. Frank Rose, *The Art of Immersion* (New York: Norton, 2011).
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6. Nina Yankowitz, "Crossings Interactive Installation Documentary," YouTube video, 3:01, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWYhQQcw2XM> (accessed February 3rd, 2013).
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13. Thomas Markussen, "The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics," 38-50.
14. James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.
15. Ibid.
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17. Ibid.
18. James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39-49.



Fig. 1, *Crossings*, 2009.



Fig. 2, *Cloud House*, 2004.



Fig. 3, *Global Warming Window*, 2012.



Fig. 4, *Tunnel Visions*, 1988.



**Andrew Hurst** March 1, 2013 at 9:07 AM

Your post about Nina Yankowitz was very delightful to read. I found what Nina Yankowitz was trying to do to be very interesting. I like that Yankowitz is trying to show and challenge her viewers to pay attention to what is around them. I'm also glad that Yankowitz is trying to keep art around in the world today. I like how her previous work was focus on problems like racism, feminism, and global warming. I surprise to learn that her past work was mostly dedicated to the effects of global climate change, I don't know many artists that center their work around that, but I found it to be very interesting.

Andrew Hurst



**Jasmine Banks** March 4, 2013 at 1 :36 PM

As someone who grew up in the church and surrounded by religion, I really like the idea and execution of Yankowitz's Crossings. I think we spend so much time consumed in our own beliefs (whether religious or not) that we tend to shut others out - not even realizing or considering the possibility that they may be similar in terms of thoughts and values. I appreciate her stance on promoting not only religious tolerance, but understanding and accepting other cultures as well.

Reply