November 14 - December 22, 2001
Vito Acconci
Antoni Abad
Otto Benfer
Roland Barthes
Mark Fosterk
Christian Jankowski
Andrew M. Kaufmann
Antoni Muntadas
Begona Muñoz
Gillian Wearing

Curated by:
Montse Badia

apexart curatorial program
291 church street
new york, ny 10013
212-431-6630
info@apexart.org
www.apexart.org

(2001)
Apexart, Inc.
\*Apexart is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization
\*and does not participate in trade or advertising.

Special thanks to all the artists in the exhibition who generously made their work available for this project: Vito Acconci, Mark Barthes, Jennifer Bolanos, John Cohen, Anahid Der Aghajanian, Heimo Fuchs, Howie Greenblatt, John Klemm, Kim Lay, Brenda Lopez, Michelle Marquis, Claudio Mariani, Jeremy Micozzi, Andreas Meier, Michael Morris, Catherine Moretti, and Yoav Wolf.


ISBN 0-9704071-8-1

The public sphere has been, and still is, a reflection—or a narration, according to Walter Grasskamp—of political will, social fabric, cultural dynamics and economic framework, as well as of the incorporation and the expansion of our cities. In this shared communal space, which is market place, site of all creation of power, of political and economical manifestations, of religious commemoration and fowel celebration, different forms of everyday use converge and overlap.

In a time defined by the end of ideologies, that comes together with the inability of political and religious power to define the notion of the “public,” public space has become a domain of consumption. Shopping malls, where the commercialization of goods and entertainment responds to a promise of experiences, are the substitutes of the traditional agora in spite of their apparent accessibility with their benches, walls and artificial gardens, they are private spaces that establish their own rules of access, surveillance and control.

This space disjointly, with the blue of the boundary between private and public life and the dispersion of the centers of production and of images (the public spheres of industrialized production? define our contemporary experience. This fluidity of the limit is absolutely evident in the ambivalent notion of space, defined by the technologies of information and communication media. In this context, “place” becomes a precarious concept and public space is transformed into a “communicative spot” made of images and representations, which are fixed in time and space by the screen and linked to “real” and everyday life. Privacy becomes, then, a guarantee of identity.

In addition, the exponential growth of technology has led, in many areas of public and private life, to a dual and simultaneous existence—digital and real. The net brings a new kind of ambiguity: the net activity of individual participants in a publicly accessible space, that is, a paradoxical longing for anonymity and communication.

The project Revolving Doors borrows its title from the renowned photograph that shows the door in Marcel Duchamp's apartment in Paris (1927), which opens a space and simultaneously closes another one and its reverse. This image evokes the notion of fluidity between the realms of the public and the private, that this exhibition sets out to explore. With their projects, the artists included in this show present a wide range of approaches related to the ambiguity and confusion between public space and private domain. With their critical, ironic, poetic or subversive proposals, they make statements or comments that alter the way we view or think about reality. Although the approaches can be very different, all the works have in common the fact that they become very individual gestures which define the relation of public/private in a human scale. Eventually, it is the individual who makes the door revolving.

Vito Acconci’s Following Piece documents a performance made by the artist in 1969. In the course of the action, the artist followed different people in the street. The action stopped suddenly each time the person entered a private space.

With this simple gesture, Acconci transcends the relativity of the learned rules and behaviors concerning the distinction between private and public.

Public Monument: Carlos (1998-99) by Andrew M. Kaufmann, is a video shot on a busy shopping street in Cologne in which we see a disinherited person
balancing a ball in the air using his crutches and his head. Carlos, the main character of this video, integrates himself in the public space by making an intelligent use of his natural limits and the possibilities provided by the site. Instead of using the impression of keeping, he defines his own space and carves out an autonomous and authentic formulation of his existence in the public.

In Gillian Wearing’s video Dancing in Pentonham (1994), the artist dances alone in the middle of a shopping mall, completely concentrated on herself and ignoring the surrounding. In a time where one can only be a user of public space by consuming, Wearing’s autistic dance becomes a real declaration of the definition of the individual presence in the public, completely detached from any consumer role.

Begonia Muto’s flyer and photographs document one of her “sensational and not announced” performances. An intimate act-the-basis is celebrated in a social space, a café, as an artistic statement. With the exclusive complicity of the closed friends of the artist, it evidences that private acts can still find a secret place, in a subversive but friendly way, in public space.

Christian Jankowski can’t get physical (1997) questions in a playful and unpredictable manner, the notions of time and space, illusion and reality, distance and intimacy and, of course, private and public. The starting point of the project was a personal situation: the artist was in Stockholm and his girlfriend in Milan. For seven days, the couple communicated only through the Internet and imagined their own meeting places in cyberspace. During this time, the artist was searching the net for objects to arrange in situations where, later, actors recreated his private dialogues. In a final test, these performances were recorded and the video was shown, again, on the Internet.

Otto Bechem’s projects also require the involvement and the collaboration of people in such a way that his proposals become on-going social activities in which the artist becomes a catalyst. The Dating Market (2000/01) focuses on inter-human relations in contemporary society. The visit to the local supermarket after work that Berchem defines as “the latest spin on a single bar” becomes the core of the project. Components of the project are presented in the exhibition space and in the supermarket, where the buyers purchase kwarts with a flower motif, derived from the shape of the set of the TV program “The Dating Game”, are offered to the customers who want to label him or herself as “available.”

Mark Formanek’s Archive of 100 Statements was started in 1997 and has since then continually expanded to increase in size. A time limit for the archive has not been set. It consists of a preserved collection of statements from individuals with 100 remarks (e.g., Mark Formanek, Schmule Strasse 26, D-48149 Münster) that are presented without any kind of censorship, translation or editing. The statements offer a variety of real and authentic “portraits”, absolutely anonymous, that communicate a mixture of deep thoughts and banal ideas that draw an image of the personality of the contributors.

When a visitor enters www.art-park.at/100/000, the computer screen shows pictures created by a million users that behave like an uncontrollable virus. With a playful but absolutely critical attitude, Antoni Abad submits the codes of some communication devices we are accustomed to: the password of your bank account or your credit card number. Instead of referring to an amount of money, as might be predictable, the title 100.000 (1999) quantifies the number of налоговых аппе (tax numbers). In this sense, Abad makes a playful but strong comment to the mercantilist and aggressive vision that involves pornography on the Internet: “Vergessen Sie nie! – ‘They say: forget it!’”

Mark Formanek Archive of 100 Statements, circa 1991-Installation

When a visitor enters www.art-park.at/100/000, the computer screen shows pictures created by a million users that behave like an uncontrollable virus. With a playful but absolutely critical attitude, Antoni Abad submits the codes of some communication devices we are accustomed to: the password of your bank account or your credit card number. Instead of referring to an amount of money, as might be predictable, the title 100.000 (1999) quantifies the number of налоговых аппе (tax numbers). In this sense, Abad makes a playful but strong comment to the mercantilist and aggressive vision that involves pornography on the Internet: “Vergessen Sie nie! – ‘They say: forget it!’”

Monte Rada  
© September 2001