

apexart curatorial program

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In/SITE/Out: Inquiries into Social Space

Curated by
Karen E. Jones

March 16 - April 14, 2001

Jan Baracz
Brett Cook-Dizney
Rainer Ganahl
Ellen Harvey
Runa Islam
Johannes Kahrs
Philippe Meste
Dave McKenzie
Karin Sander
Günther Selichar
Oona Stern
Accra Shepp

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Cover: adapted from Guy Debord, *Naked City*, 1957

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In/SITE/Out: Inquiries into Social Space

Upon arrival in a new city, I invariably orient myself by walking through the urban environment without a map or a guide, allowing both the architectural and psychological pull of the city space to determine my path. I've done this for as long as I can remember, many years before discovering the Situationists' concept of the *dérive*, defined as "an experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: A technique of transient passage through space."¹ The Situationist International politicized freeplay by promoting "the experimental forms of a game of revolution."²

In/SITE/Out unifies interior and exterior spaces in order to investigate the diminishing distinction between various types of space. The artworks are situated in public space such that a passerby may encounter various pieces while traveling normally through the New York City streets. Inevitably works will be altered according to the environment in which they are situated; some will remain in pristine condition, others changed by weather, perhaps some will be embellished or vandalized, while others may be covered by advertisements according to the rhythm of the rapidly changing façade of the urban landscape. The artists selected the sites for their works based on their personal attraction to different locations within New York City's terrain, inspired by the Situationists' concept of the *dérive*. The participants in *In/SITE/Out* have all, at times, located their practice outside the traditional parameters of art spaces. These works interrogate the distinction between public space/private space, center/margin and interior/exterior space. Furthermore, these artists utilize the exhibition space, rather than engaging in a wholesale rejection of the gallery context. The artists either activate the space or introduce traces or documents from their projects into the gallery interior.

In approaching *In/SITE/Out* we may begin at the location of the Apex exhibition space, a storefront building in Tribeca. Historically, artists have incorporated the alteration of storefronts into their works: Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961), Daniel Buren's *Untitled (Green and White Stripes, Bleecker Street)* (1973), Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Questions)* (1991) at Mary Boone and Mike Bidlo's *Saint Duchamp* (1996) in the East Village.

Günther Selichar *Who's Afraid of Blue, Red and Green?* 2001 duraclear installed on window 18 x 72 in

Günther Selichar transforms the gallery exterior by placing a striped covering on the front window in *Who's Afraid of Blue, Red, and Green?* (2001). The translucent window treatment allows light to filter through the blue, red and green stripes that represent the primary colors of pixels. Thus, the screen (computer/TV monitor) is implicated as a site through which visual experience is mediated, in the terms outlined in Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, from the perspective of both the exterior and the interior of the gallery's architecture. Upon entering the exhibition space one encounters



Runa Islam *Exile* 1998 Light box
13 2/3 x 5 1/8 in

Runa Islam's *Exile* (1998), which marks the borders between inside and outside. Islam's adaptation of the ubiquitous exit sign highlights spatial boundaries, suggesting that art in "exile" occupies a positive position. The spatialization of the gallery interior is equally underscored by the projects that occur in the public sphere.

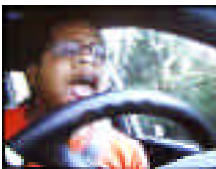
In another device of demarcating space Jan Baracz's *Walk-Through Frame 2.0* (2001) employs the architecture of the frame not as a window onto the world, but rather as a confining structure that designates the art object in terms of class and cultural status. Henri Lefebvre justly argues that the device of a frame is an insufficient model to describe space: "Vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere 'frame', after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form of a container of a virtual neutral kind, designed to receive whatever is poured into it."³ Baracz instead alludes to alternative realities indicating the site by which one enters a deeper dimension of experience.

Jan Baracz *Frame* 2001
mixed media installation



Interstitial/SITE

There are some works that resist the binary opposition posed by inside and outside but rather slip into discrete interstices. For example, when traveling in a car one occupies an in-between space. **Dave McKenzie** uses this site metaphorically in the video *Another Perfect Day* (2001) to reflect both emotional interiority and the "norms" of comportment within public space, specifically in relationship to the body.



Surveillance and control of public space is maintained by the State and corporate interests via security and police forces designed to maintain order and protect capital interests. **Philippe Meste** theorizes that the next revolutionary moment will be an aestheticized moment based on social, political and artistic freedom.⁴ The sculptural works *Bagpower* (1998/99) and *Robotgun* (2000/01) introduce the vocabulary

of military strategy into everyday life, positioned specifically at the level of individual subjects.

The experience of space is altered by both collective and personal memory. The temporal aspects of performance or actions are located in discrete time/space fragments that are impossible to completely preserve.

Accra Shepp's *Flag Project* (2001) refers to a parade of elementary



Accra Shepp *Flag Project* 2001
mixed media installation

school students (organized by Shepp) in which they carried flags of their creations through the East Village on Martin Luther King Day. Shepp's photo-based sculpture preserves the historical memory of the Civil Rights Movement.

As cultural consumers, we attend lectures, panel discussions and performances often located in galleries, at universities and cultural institutions.

Rainer Ganahl inverts this location with a reading seminar that encourages active participation in a theoretical and cultural exchange within the framework of the gallery setting. *Reading Karl Marx* (2001) invites the public to participate in a structured discourse during the duration of the exhibition.



Rainer Ganahl *Reading Karl Marx* 2001
www.ganahlmarx.com

Out/SITE

Ellen Harvey's *New York Beautification Project* (1999-2001) postulates that certain forms of visual representation are acceptable only within strictly determined space. Furthermore, by painting discreet neo-classical landscapes directly onto exterior surfaces, Harvey insists that an artist's body and subject position are implicated within the experience of creating works in the public domain. The *Beautification Project's* Poussin-inspired oval paintings of idyllic scenes question Kantian notions of beauty; and more critically, they insist upon access to public space.



Ellen Harvey from *New York Beautification Project* 1999-2001
5 x 7 inch oval landscape in oil



Public space is clearly abused by commercial images as evidenced by building scaffoldings, walls and abandoned structures that are plastered with advertising images.

Johannes Kahrs' *Detail* (2001) critiques the rampant police

aggression based on racial profiling by representing the agents of power located in the repressive apparatus of the State. A photograph that illustrates Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* inspires Kahrs' drawing. Kahrs decidedly utilizes the traditional genre of charcoal drawing to oppose the highly produced quality of advertising photography that is specifically designed to be immediately legible. The politicized image in *Detail* requires both interpretation and contemplation by the viewer rather than rapid visual consumption.

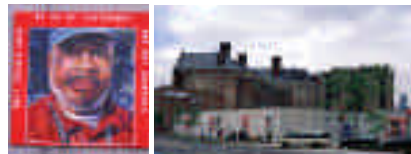


Oona Stern adapts two architectural sites, a parking hut and a seemingly abandoned building, in the project of altering aspects of architecture within public space. Stern's trademark intervention, the magnification of the surface qualities of building materials, are posted onto these architectural structures. Stern inserts the sign for wood and brick onto the buildings in the works *Wallpaper (brick, hubert st)* (2001) and *Wallpaper (wood, hubert st)* (2001), thereby reducing the geographical location and architectural language of these structures to the essential elements of their building materials.



Oona Stern *Wallpaper (brick, hubert st)* 2001 tiled paper
48 x 96 inches

Brett Cook-Dizney's large-scale portrait *Service and Protection* (1999) depicts residents from underrepresented communities by giving voice to their narratives and in turn



engaging others within that community in art practice. *Service and Protection* involves Cook-Dizney interviewing subjects and then painting large-scale portraits in a response to the Diallo police brutality case.

Spaces are often defined by their function and, equally, cultural meaning is inextricably imbedded within the architecture of these spaces. **Karin Sander** subtly alters strictly coded spaces and thereby neutralizes their inscription to reveal the overdetermined cultural status of a given site.

The works in *In/SITE/Out* permeate public space, allowing the viewer to experience aspects of the exhibition through their selected encounters with these artworks. The exhibition acknowledges that there are no neutral spaces and that all contexts implicate meaning into artworks. Furthermore, space cannot be defined by a static model as "Space is a social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and is just as bound up with function and structure."⁵ *In/SITE/Out* insists that art practice engage with the fluid formations that structure space. Therefore, art must occupy the multiplicity of locations that both produce and determine social space.



Karin Sander *Astrotruf Floorpiece* 1994 installation view
at MoMA 69 x 52 feet

Karen E. Jones
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1. Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, (Bureau of Public Secrets: Berkeley, 1989), p. 45.
2. Ibid.
3. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Blackwell Press: Malden, 1991), p. 94.
4. Based on a discussion with Philippe Meste, Paris, June 2000.
5. Lefebvre, p. 94.