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Archives of American Art

Celebrating 175: Lucy Lippard, Correspondence, Ukeles, Mierle Laderman, 1977-1988

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MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

1. ACCOUNT OF CAREER, PREVIOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS &
LIST OF GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS AND AWARDS

"The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"

From my "Manifesto for Maintenance Art! 1969"

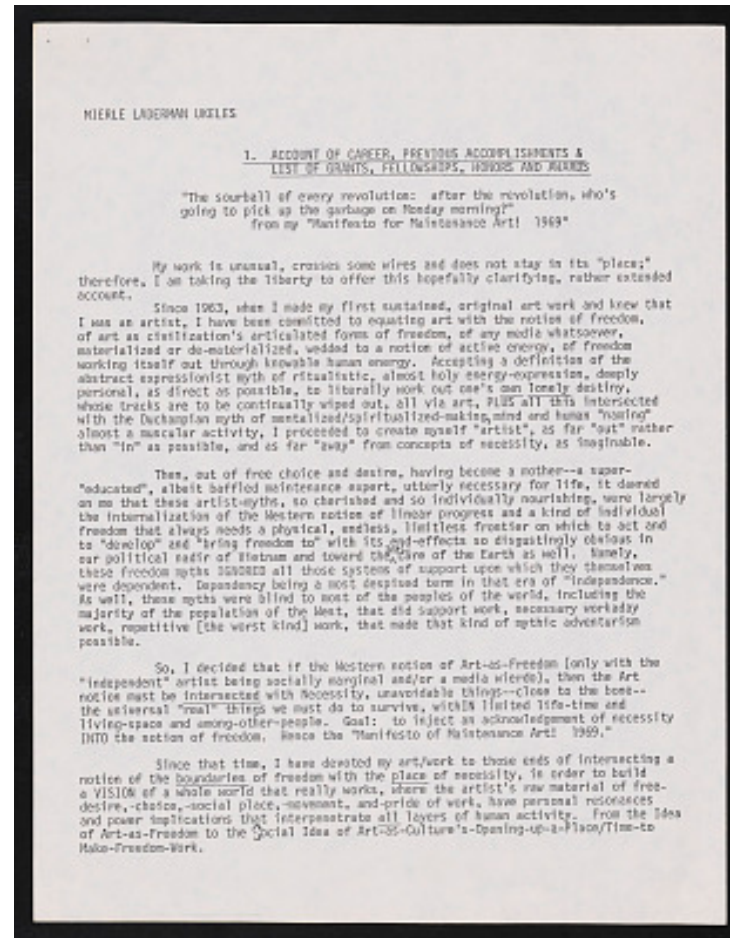
My work is unusual, crosses some wires and does not stay in its "place;" therefore, I am taking the liberty to offer this hopefully clarifying, rather extended account.

Since 1963, when I made my first sustained, original art work and knew that I was an artist, I have been committed to equating art with the notion of freedom, of any media whatsoever, materialized or dematerialized, wedded to a notion of active energy, of freedom working itself out through knowable human energy. Accepting a definition of the abstract expressionist myth of ritualistic, almost holy energy-expression, deeply personal, as direct as possible, to literally work out one's own lonely destiny, whose tracks are to be continually wiped out, all via art, PLUS all this intersected with the Duchampian myth of mentalized/spiritualized-making, mind and human "naming" almost a muscular activity, I proceeded to create myself "artist", as far "out" rather than "in" as possible, and as far "away" from concepts of necessity, as possible.

Then, out of free choice and desire, having become a mother--a super-"educated", albeit baffled maintenance expert, utterly necessary for life, it dawned on me that these artist-myths, so cherished and so individually nourishing, were largely the internalization of the Western notion of linear progress and a kind of individual freedom that always needs a physical, endless, limitless frontier on which to act and to "develop" and "bring freedom to" with its end-effects so disgustingly obvious in our political nadir of Vietnam and toward the anti-care of the Earth as well. Namely, these freedom myths IGNORED all those systems of support upon which they themselves were dependent. Dependency being a most despised term in that era of "Independence." As well, these myths were blind to most of the peoples of the world, including the majority of the population of the West, that did support work, necessary workaday work, repetitive [the worst kind] work, that made that kind of mythic adventurism possible.

So, I decided that if the Western notion of Art-as-Freedom (only with the "independent" artist being socially marginal and/or a media wierdo), then the Art notion must be intersected with Necessity, unavoidable things--close to the bone-- the universal "real" things we must do to survive, WITHIN limited life-time and living-space and among-other-people. Goal: to inject an acknowledgement of necessity INTO the notion of freedom. Hence the "Manifesto of Maintenance Art! 1969."

Since that time, I have devoted my art/work to those ends of intersecting a notion of the boundaries of freedom with the place of necessity, in order to build a VISION of a whole world that really works, where the artist's raw material of free-desire, -choice, -social place, -movement, and -pride of work, have personal resonances and power implications



that interpenetrate all layers of human activity. From the Idea of Art-as-Freedom to the Social Idea of Art-as-Culture's-Opening-up-a-Place/Time-to-Make-Freedom-Work.

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