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*Archives of American Art*

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

Extracted on Mar-29-2024 11:28:44

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Add to that, an equal commitment to deal with urban scale; that's why I came to NYC, actually transferred my adoration of the scale of the Rocky Mountains that nurtured and enthralled my child-eyes, onto the most obvious representation of democratic society: the City. Where the reality of complex organization, fitting so many people into limited space and taking care of them while permitting them maximum freedom, is so readily apparent. Add, also, a lingering fidelity to gesture, tracks of activity that I wish to believe can reveal the truth about inner intention [Pollack's gift].

Besides the great learning and discipline about maintenance work, necessity, inter-dependence within a workingclass context that being--and desiring to be--a mother has afforded me, I have had two other overwhelming opportunities to create holistic visionary models with the sense of scale and dense organization that I think are so central to our post-imperialistic-last-chance-for-democracy-age: The 2nd was an invitation to be in a show at the Whitney Museum Downtown which led to long-dreamt-of access to the skyscraper of 3 1/2 million sq/ft in which it was located in 1976, at 55 Water St. I invited the 300 maintenance workers--who make the physical material place a-place-in-which-to-continue-to-work, who take away yesterday--to deal with my idea of choosing a segment of time during their "restricted prime energy time of 'work'" and to consider it "art" over a period of six weeks (the duration of the show). Not a conceptual art idea, but rather a performance, realized through unknown-before-hand actions in the real world, i.e. with duration, actually the most important element, because I shared that equally with them by "playing it out in time, hanging in there, and putting in the hours," day and night, 8 hours at a time. That caused a genuine co-terminosity of relationship with them that crossed many bridges. The Museum, a space on the 2nd floor never heretofore entered by this entire work-force voluntarily, not thought of as "their" kind of "place", became a different kind of PLACE, a place to open up a possibility for movement, to change one's attitude, both for the worker-participants and for the audience. To see them, to cause their work to be considered, seen, noticed, to re-orient oneself anew in relationship to that which sustains, and equally to question, always to question whether a human being should spend prime life-time doing those sorts of things that sustain something larger than the self, a building an entity of dead materials, a building which doesn't dream and long for and want to run away like you can, just gets dirty, used: "I MAKE MAINTENANCE ART 1 HOUR EVERY DAY."

By happenstance, this opportunity opened up the 3rd major opportunity for accomplishment. David Bourdon wrote a very favorable review of the above piece in the Village Voice (10/4/76), concluding with the thought that if maintenance can be thought of as art, then, being that this was the height of the NYC fiscal crisis, and the whole city was threatening to go down the drain, with choices being made moment by moment as to what's Essential and what's Necessary with everything else to be cut, laid-off, eliminated, then, he continued, perhaps the Sanitation Department could consider its work performance art and thus qualify for much needed funds from the National Endowment for the Arts?? I grabbed that one, flinging it, via xerox copy of said article, to the winds. Commissioner's office called and asked if I would like to make art with 10,000 people. I'll be right over, I said. That was the end of 1976.

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Now, how does an artist relate to 10,000 people (well, 8,500 as 1,500 get laid off about then) --without resorting to decorating garbage trucks? Why, 65% of them were broken at any one time, ferchrissakes! It was a war zone. After I spent

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