Celebrating 25 Years

18th Street Arts Center
A 21st Century Odyssey

by Anuradha Vikram

Even before the launch of 18th Street Arts Center’s International Visiting Artist Residency in 1993, some of our Los Angeles–based founding artists were already thinking about the possibilities of global interconnectedness between artists around the world afforded by then-recent advances in communications technology. From 1990-1992, performance artist Barbara T. Smith collaborated with 18th Street artists in residence Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz (otherwise known as Electronic Café International) to realize a two-year durational performance in which she tested the limits of electronic technologies in facilitating global communication.

During the first year of her performance, Smith traveled throughout South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, visiting India, Nepal, Thailand, Australia, and Hawaii. In each place, she enacted live performances that were transmitted in real time to her partner, Dr. Roy Walford, who spent the corresponding two years of Smith’s travels secured inside the experimental community of Biosphere II in Arizona. In the second year, she traveled to London and Norway, where she attempted to reconcile her explorations of spiritual traditions in the developing world with her personal background as a European-American and a Christian. That the project proved inconclusive, even failed, in its objectives, is a testament to Smith’s unwillingness to recreate a colonial power dynamic that subverts the cultural specificities of Eastern cultures to the Romantic objectives of the West.

Today, we take global communication for granted. In an instant, many of us can pull out a supercomputer (in 1990 terms) kept in a pocket, send a text halfway around the globe, and get a near-instantaneous reply. The capacity for a transmission to cross a distance of more than 8,500 miles without noticeable delay or decay enables a sense of relational intimacy with loved ones from afar—a genuine, but also deceptive, feeling. As early as 1990, Barbara Smith and Electronic Café International recognized the potential for media technologies to enable such feelings of closeness over distance. Nonetheless Smith’s experience was characterized by disappointment, as the intimacy she hoped to preserve with Walford instead degraded along with the quality of the remote connection, and her partner’s health. Encountering a host of technological challenges along the way, she discovered that the external validation she sought from her relationship with Walford could only be found by looking inward and understanding herself. We might consider her example the next time we find ourselves in rapture to social media.

Smith in some ways represents another Homerian figure as much as Odysseus: that of Cassandra, doomed to always prophecy the future and to never be believed. The mythological Cassandra tries and fails to warn the leaders of Troy about the Trojan Horse that enabled Greek soldiers to sneak past the secure city gates. A 21st Century Odyssey contains a warning about the capacity for communication technologies to create a false sense of connection between people when in fact we understand very little of one another.

If the mission of the Electronic Café International to create a social space for interpersonal interaction centered on technologies of mass communication seems redundant today, it is only because such environments have become as ubiquitous as personal computing. Their work at 18th Street over the past quarter century was consistently at the vanguard of not only technological capacity, but human capacity for understanding and imagining that technology’s potential. Sometimes that includes the potential to fail—an necessary part of experimentation, as any artist or scientist knows. Smith’s willingness to make the shortcomings of her project apparent is a testament to her unflinching artistic stance.
Alma López, a long-term resident at 18th Street Arts Center from 2001–2003, is a queer Chicana artist whose work has sparked discussion and controversy worldwide. Much of Mexican-born López’ art is thematically centered on prominent female figures in her culture of origin, whom she approaches with a spirit of empowerment. López was an early pioneer of digital collage, applying new technologies to articulate an indigenous worldview that is informed by ancient traditions and contemporary aesthetics. The majority of her work is multi-media, produced using a mixture of computer software and photographic tools.

López’ application of queer and feminist politics to images of religious and cultural significance has drawn more than its share of controversy. While at 18th Street in 2001, she submitted a digital collage print to the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for the exhibit Cyber Arte: Where Technology Meets Tradition. The piece, Our Lady (1999), was a reimagining of the Virgin of Guadalupe, an apparition of the Virgin who is said to have appeared to an indigenous man in 1531 at the site now marked by Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica in México City. López selected the Guadalupe Virgin as her subject because of her status as a Catholic icon with indigenous significance throughout Mexico and Latin America. The work was misinterpreted as a sexualization of this religious icon and was met by outrages in the Catholic community of Santa Fe, with demonstrators demanding that it be removed from the museum.

These experiences were ultimately chronicled in a book, Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’ “Irreverent” Apparition, edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Alma López and published by University of Texas Press in 2001. For this volume, López and Gaspar de Alba brought together leading scholars of Chicana feminism, indigenous rights, social justice, and art to address the theoretical and historical underpinnings of her work and the political factors that influenced its reception. As a focus of scholarship, López’s work once again pushes boundaries, as the concerns and inspirations of women of color are still only rarely prioritized by academics. Furthermore her work demonstrates that rather than adapt “western” technologies to “pre-Columbian” aesthetics, artists of color have been among the pioneers of media art at the forefront of determining the aesthetics of the digital age.
Crazyspace, co-conceived, co-founded, and coined by Asher (then known as Lauren) Hartman, was a rare and essential experimental retreat and Hartman a foster mother for stray artists on LA's increasingly affluent, culturally conservative, and creatively "safe" West Side. The gallery in 18th Street Arts Center's 1629 building became an infamous haven for artists still hugging the margins of their disciplines. Crazyspace had an incredible run from 2000-2005 and provided asylum for artists and audiences hungry for raw art who were witness to numerous amazing performance artists' comebacks, flops, follies, and grand finales.

I was part of the Crazyspace curatorial collective from 2001-2002 along with Hartman, Michael Sakamoto, Marcus Kuitland-Nazario, Curt LeMieux, Kristina Farragher, and Carol McDowell. Most pieces lasted only one night, one weekend, or perhaps were week-long endurance events. The only rule I knew of was that you could do whatever you wanted, as long as you returned the space to its original condition when your creative work was finished.

From short-term experimental installations and exhibitions to durational, immersive, performance-based installations, to audience-activated, interspecies, and memorial events—Crazyspace was like the waiting room in a hospice. In this ultimate endgame, time was extended, emotions and senses heightened, events unreal, and you knew you would be changed somehow, if not a better person, once you had emerged as the audience participant. Crazyspace had guts, balls, and above all, it had true heart.

So many shows left their art mark on me, like Mariel Carranza's *Corners*, where she spent nine days fasting and knitting herself into the space; Jamie McMurray wrecking the joint with “man tools” in *Fence*: Gul Kagin burning phrases on raw, cow steaks strapped to her body; Johanna Went’s performative installation adapting the Maysles brothers film *Grey Gardens*; and Mario Gardner’s *The Nigger of Sesame Street* directed by The Hittite Empire’s Keith Antar Mason. *Odorific* attacked the olfactory senses and *Mother’s Day Wafflemix* made us into every mommy fantasy imaginable. One show invited canines in for culture, others brought celebrated performance artists like Johanna Went out of retirement and gave seminal performance artists like Barbara T. Smith a chance to play live again (with Hartman naked atop a ladder).

Some of my own artistic experimentation in Crazyspace included; *Mother/Mothra*, a durational duet exploring the complex bonds between women in an installation environment, incorporating marshmallows and mothballs with Mother live on speaker phone; *Purgatory Lounge*, a durational event where my dog Shade was the deity in the center of the room, and the rest of us tried anything to get strangers to take us out of there including bribing, tap dancing, and intimacy with strangers; and *Let Me Call You Daddy*, that flipped the Japanese hostess club concept on its ear and had me seeking patriarchal love.

Crazyspace also became a site for artist memorials such as the one for the late Mario Gardner in his final act, *Imitation of Imitation of Life* (titled after the Douglas Sirk film). Thanks to the existence of Crazyspace and its artist staff, Gardner was able to turn his death into a performance art installation and a three-day festival featuring a memorial, a funeral, and a wake that lasted six hours.

My first visit to Crazyspace was in 2000 when I was invited to Hartman’s *Gesthe*: a durational, performative installation involving a revolving corps of characters, monologues, and interactions including Hansel (Danny Scheie) in tuxedo tails and no underpants; Gretel (Suzan Averitt) in elevated dress and lederhosen; a mugging, silent movie actress (Hartman) emoting on black and white film; and a performer in gorilla suit. I had never been so captivated, so mystified, so smitten. I sank against the wall and watched the rotational performance for many hours. Crazyspace was a high-dive platform to risk failure, make a bold creative statement, or have a place to live out a latent art fantasy for one night.
Ruth-Marion Baruch and Pirkle Jones

Black Panthers

by Gulnar Tuli

Black Panthers: Photos by Ruth-Marion Baruch and Pirkle Jones was a photography exhibit of the couple’s iconic images from the Civil Rights era that premiered in 2004 at 18th Street Arts Center. Politically-charged and of great historical significance, this set of 45 black and white photographs by husband and wife Ruth-Marion Baruch and Pirkle Jones immortalizes moments of candor within the Black Panther Party, the notorious socialist organization that rose to prominence in the late 1960s.

Both Ruth-Marion Baruch, who died in 1997, and Pirkle Jones, who died in 2009, leave behind illustrious legacies in photography. Though both photographers shot work individually as well, it was two of their collaborative series that really catapulted them to prominence: Walnut Grove (1961), a documentary series focused on a withering Sacramento River town in a post-agricultural period, and Black Panthers (1968).

During a period of intense social turmoil, Baruch and Jones became involved with the Black Panthers through their connection to the Peace and Freedom Party. They cultivated a loose and controversial relationship with the Black Panther Party, photographing them over a four-month period in the summer and fall of 1968. Much to the dismay of many of their white peers, the couple’s images were often sympathetic to the Panthers, serving to humanize members of the activist group in a way that no other media had dared to do. Ansel Adams, a mentor to Pirkle Jones, even advised the couple to keep their distance from the Party—advice that Jones wisely ignored.

The pair toiled on, brushing shoulders with some of the most prominent Panthers leaders such as Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver in their quest to add a new dimension to these individuals who were so demonized in the media of the time. Working side-by-side, the couple combined their unique skills to produce a varied collection of Panthers images, with Baruch capturing intimate portraits and Jones shooting chaotic street scenes. The result was a plethora of iconic images of the men, women, and children of the Black Panthers Movement that remains a crucial historical record of this period.

Much of Baruch and Jones’ work was handed over to the Black Panthers themselves to use to promote their activist goals. Jones went to the printer to order 1000 large prints of one of his photos to use as Black Panthers posters. This adaptive quality of the photographs to be applied as propaganda is indicative of the overall tone of the series of photos: the quiet strength evident in all of the images, but also an overwhelming sense that the Panthers were relatable, ordinary people and not the radical miscreants that they were often painted as being.

Baruch and Jones were far ahead of their time, for their photographs of the Black Panther Movement may well have altered the historical trajectory they sought to document by offering this humanized view of the Panthers to the world. Though much of the couple’s other work has been shown around the country, this particular series, arguably one of their most famous, had never been exhibited in Los Angeles prior to the show at 18th Street, 36 years after its creation. This exhibit serves to remind us of that tumultuous space in time that was the late 1960s, and also to call attention to the capacity of the arts to affect the course of history.
Dan Kwong

Secrets of the Samurai Centerfielder

by Gulnar Tuli

CENTERFIELD IS THE DEEPEST PART OF THE FIELD!

The place farthest away from home plate. “Home” is waaaaaay over there, and the centerfielder is waaaay out here! This develops one’s sense of connection with that which is “other.” A sense of connection with events happening far from oneself—whether it be three hundred ninety feet away or seven thousand miles away... Playing so far from home requires great faith. One’s concept of “home” must be expanded and redefined.

— Dan Kwong, Secrets of the Samurai Centerfielder

Secrets of the Samurai Centerfielder, Dan Kwong’s one-man show, explores what it means to be a Japanese-Chinese-American. Caught between three different cultures, Kwong finds himself in “centerfield,” a site not wholly grounded in any one cultural identity. Kwong’s narrative, which he first performed in 1989, is framed by his lifelong love of baseball and includes elements of his grandfather’s journey from Japan to the United States, and eventually to a World War II internment camp. Also incorporated into the piece are the 1989 Beijing student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square.

A resident of 18th Street Arts Center since 1989, Kwong has been a strong presence on the campus and has played a vital role in the sphere of local performing arts. It was through Secrets of the Samurai Centerfielder, Kwong’s debut performance, that his identity as a voice of the Asian American community in Los Angeles first took shape.

Secrets of the Samurai Centerfielder was the first piece to ever officially be rehearsed on the stage of Highways Performance Space, 18th Street Arts Center’s anchor tenant organization. Born out of Kwong’s unique position on the cusp of multiple cultural identities, the performance addresses how he never felt singularly American growing up as the child of second-generation Americans. By contrast, he never identified completely with either Japanese or Chinese culture either; rather, as a child of both ethnicities, Kwong was subject to the pungent racism that sets one Asian culture against another.

The piece begins in darkness, Kwong seated center stage. He is dressed in an elaborate costume melding samurai tradition with a typical baseball uniform. As the light starts to fade in, Kwong speaks to the audience directly, breaking the “fourth wall.” He begins confiding in the audience his “secrets”: vague, seemingly philosophical observations accumulated through his experience as a Samurai Centerfielder. As the performance continues, Kwong’s performance is interspersed with a recorded voice-over, narrating his own childhood and the experience of his Japanese grandfather, whom he calls “Papa.”

Through the duration of the performance, Kwong struggles with his identity, using the theme of baseball, his love of which is curdled by ethnic exclusion, to draw out his outsider’s perspective on American culture. There are no baseball heroes who look like him, and though he identifies with the sentiment of the sport, he does not find true acceptance within its community. As the piece progresses, Kwong begins to intertwine his story with others, continuing along his journey to self-acceptance.

The dramatic monologue format of his show, coupled with the voice-over narratives that pepper its duration, allows for Kwong to emphasize the “center field” nature of his position. By contextualizing his feeling of marginalization within larger themes of discrimination, for example the discontent manifested in the Tiananmen Square protests and the forcing of Japanese-American citizens into internment camps, Kwong depicts himself as neither here nor there, a lone individual in the midst of both a historical conflict that is bigger than himself and someone who faces these challenges directly. By presenting the piece in this way, Kwong makes Secrets of the Samurai Centerfielder relevant in a multitude of ways, cementing its name amongst some of the most provocative and engaging pieces to come out of 18th Street Arts Center.
Francisco Letelier & Steve Durland

Hierarchy of Needs

by Nicole Rademacher

Francisco Letelier and Steve Durland created a politically timeless and poetic installation in what was then called the New Gallery, now 18th Street’s main gallery. *Hierarchy of Needs* was hailed as a ‘new kind of sociopolitical art’ by Los Angeles art critic Peter Frank. The installation highlighted the strengths of both artists yet held true to the meaning of collaboration in the fact that it was not clear, nor important, who was responsible for what. With its fire references, it called to mind the recent Rodney King Riots, but transformed the timeliness of the exhibition into broader subject matter: *Hierarchy of Needs* subsumes the abilities and visions of its contributors into a scape-size message, one that conflates the physical and social requirements of humans, civilization’s effect on these requirements and the presence of nature both as a source of fulfillment and as a needful organism itself. Letelier and Durland established a sense of theater with their sod house installation containing a waterfall in the center. The viewer was guided through a narrow entrance hall by charred timbers where on the walls hung framed photographs of fire with goblets placed in front of them. *Hierarchy of Needs* contained paintings and objects with text in both English and Spanish conveying our hierarchy of needs from sleep to sex to security. The structure was a type of paradise containing live plants and a waterfall. Without violence, Durland and Letelier managed to create a work that brought to the forefront what the six days of rioting had meant for the rest of the city.

Steve Durland served as Managing Editor of *High Performance* magazine from 1983 through 1985, became Editor-in-Chief in 1986, and remained in that position until the magazine folded in 1997. Additionally, Durland was the Executive Director of Astro Artz, the nonprofit organization that published *High Performance* and various art books from 1983 to 1986, resuming that position again from 1989 to 1993 when the organization changed its name to 18th Street Arts Complex and expanded its mission to include artist and arts organization housing, a presenting space, and an art gallery. As a visual artist, Durland began as a ceramic sculptor and eventually settled into working in assemblage sculpture, installations, and most recently digital imagery.

Born in Santiago, Chile, Francisco Letelier left Chile with his family in the wake of the military overthrow of the democratically elected Salvador Allende government. His father, Orlando, was assassinated by a car bomb in Washington, DC, in 1976. Francisco and his brother José, along with Chilean painter René Castro, formed “Brigada Orlando Letelier,” painting murals in 12 American cities and traveling to Nicaragua in 1980 to paint five more as part of a national literacy campaign. Letelier moved into 18th Street Arts Complex around 1989. Now based in Venice, CA, Letelier has worked on public art works, performances, installations, publications, and exhibitions in the United States and internationally. He writes, teaches, and lectures, and has worked with people of all ages creating collective and individual works, such as portable murals, banners, flags, books, medicine wheels, and earth mounds.


by Nicole Rademacher
In the midst of realizing what would become a canonical artwork of the late 20th century, performance artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco took up residence at 18th Street Arts Center in July 1993. During the period when they lived and worked at 18th Street from 1993–1995 the pair were engaged in an ongoing exposé of the colonial impulses and desires that remain just beneath the surface of contemporary “post-racial” society in the US and Europe. In performances such as The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit the West (1992–1994) and Mexarcane International (1994–1995), documented in the video art work The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey (1993), they presented themselves as “undiscovered Amerindians” costumed in an amalgam of “noble savage” tropes and the repurposed industrial materials that are everywhere in the streets of the formerly colonized world. In the tradition of the jester, the artists used humor to reveal the darker side of human nature for an audience that often didn’t realize they were part of the act.

Enclosed in a cage, the two performed exaggerated versions of stereotypical indigenous people that some found funny, others provocative, and certain audience members experienced as an affront to their expectations of “native” authenticity and subordination. The performances were intended both to critique such expectations and to implicate the museum as a tool of colonial ideology. Fusco and Gómez-Peña played on received expectations of gender as well as race by assuming the forms of the cannibal and the noble savage, two archetypes of indigeneity that serve to reduce non-western people to symbols rather than human beings. Fusco played the noble savage: pliant, innocent, un-self-aware, and perpetually situated in a tropical Eden.

The Romantic philosophers of the nineteenth century idealized this figure that they understood as a negation of Europe’s faith in technological progress over social justice. Though leftist, even democratic, in their domestic politics, these thinkers nonetheless maintained the assumption that non-western subjects were unsuited to citizenship or self-determination. Gómez-Peña played the cannibal: the philosophical foil of western Enlightenment thinkers who argued in favor of Christianizing “uncivilized” peoples in the New World. The philosopher and historian Catălin Avramescu has described the cannibal as an image of the catastrophic failure of European political frameworks to contain the inherent savagery of human beings. The fear of being consumed is articulated through his narrative as a fear of giving in to the violence inherent in the colonial project. Subject to deprivations and threats and hidden from social judgement, the conquistador is at pains to maintain his Christian values. This anxiety bespeaks a subconscious awareness that the act of colonization is no righteous task, whatever the rhetoric that may inform it.

The artists were inspired to begin their project by the Quincentenary celebrations of Christopher Columbus’ arrival in San Salvador, an island in the Bahamas archipelago, in 1492, which would lead to the conquest of the Americas by Spanish, Portuguese, French, and British forces. Rather than approach the subject of ongoing subjugation of non-white and non-western peoples around the globe—which continues to this day in the disproportionate incarceration of African-Americans, the strategic ghettoization of Muslims in Europe, and the overwhelming violence of the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank – with the anger which they surely felt, Gómez-Peña and Fusco elected instead to engage in parody so as to affect audiences obliquely and bypass their defenses. The resulting transgressions of social mores committed by audience members are often hilarious and sometimes appalling—as hypersexualized and opportunistic as our consumer culture.

In the tradition of performance artists such as Adrian Piper, Ana Mendieta, Yoko Ono, Marina Abramović, and Chris Burden, the situations created by Fusco and Gómez-Peña are intended to provoke anxiety in audiences who are socially conditioned to accept even the most egregious abuses as normal when contextualized as “culture.” Even after their split in 1995, with Gómez-Peña landing in San Francisco and Fusco in New York, the two have maintained that same focus in their independent practices. Performance art of this type holds a mirror up to society and forces us to confront our collective delusions. Such spaces of reflection are crucial to maintaining a healthy society.
Directed, written, and produced by Keith Antar Mason, *Prometheus on a Black Landscape: The Core* was first workshopped in 1990 at 18th Street Arts Center where Mason was an early resident artist, and then performed at Highways Performance Space later that year. *Prometheus* took inspiration from the “Central Park Five” case, blending what was then a very heated and relevant current event with Greek mythology and elements from the Efa religion of West Africa.

Keith Antar Mason has had a strong presence in the Los Angeles and national performing arts communities since the early 1990s. In addition to being a performing artist, Mason is a playwright and poet. His work is realized both solo and collaboratively, and he has in the past often performed with his ensemble, The Hittite Empire. These pieces deal broadly with themes of racial disparities in America and challenges to black masculinity.

The event that sparked the writing of *Prometheus* involved the assault and rape of Trisha Meili in April of 1989 as she was jogging through Central Park. The individuals convicted for the crime were five teenage males, four of black descent and one Hispanic. The basis for their conviction was murky and sparked a lot of controversy concerning racial discrimination. All five individuals served their sentences fully, but in 2002 their convictions were vacated when physical evidence was found proving their innocence.

Mason reacted viscerally to these charges as they were happening in 1989, producing *Prometheus* as an outcry against what seemed to him a very racially charged and inhumane legal proceeding. He believed that the case was a manifestation of an aspect of American culture that rendered black men a sort of “other”: a wild, inherently violent sect of the population.

The play opens with an interactive house party, the guests of which are the audience members themselves. Other segments of the play are carried out in a dream-sequence, in which one of the suspect rapists has a nightmare that merges with the coma of the jogger, and both confront their place as victim. *Prometheus* continues to be interactive after the opening: incorporating a mock gallery opening during the intermission and an attempt to facilitate active dialogue between the audience and cast members during the performance.

At its heart, *Prometheus* is a strongly formulated reaction to the morally troubling events of 1989. Mason strove at the time of this performance to provoke a relevant dialogue about real events and to narrate and relieve certain tensions within his community. Even now his ambition of stimulating thought through performance resonates with us at 18th Street Arts Center, guiding us to think about the more contemporary incidents of our time.
Spine Of The Earth 2012
by Nicole Rademacher

Spine of the Earth was originally created by Lita Albuquerque on the El Mirage dry lake bed in the Mojave Desert of California in the fall of 1980. It was an ephemeral, pigment-based land work, incorporating a performance in which participants laid red, yellow, and black pigment on the desert floor in a geometric pattern over 600 feet in diameter. Albuquerque used the earth as a two-dimensional, expanded drawing surface. The final piece could only be seen in its entirety from an aerial view.

For Spine Of The Earth 2012, produced by 18th Street Arts Center and the Getty Museum’s Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival, Albuquerque re-imagined her groundbreaking project from 1980 in an entirely new context. This large-scale new work was embodied as a spectral line connecting the earth’s core to the sky above. In this re-enactment the red pigment of the spiral from the original piece was represented by 300 performers all wearing red suits. The movement of the performers was initiated by a skydiver, also in red, and transformed into a line as all 300 performers went down the 287 steps of the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook in Culver City, to create the image of a red “spine” in the fissure of the landscape.

On the morning of January 22, 2012, the volunteers were taken to the performance site by red and white buses. They signed releases and were given red painter’s coveralls and a red piece of paper with the following prose:

THE LANDSCAPE IS LISTENING
THIS IS SUNDAY, JANUARY 22 OF THE YEAR 2012
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
WESTERN HEMISPHERE
PAY ATTENTION TO THE FEET
YOU EXTEND FROM EARTH TO SKY
RED EARTH
BLUE
FROM INSIDE THE RED
BLUE PLANET
YOU ARE
SURROUNDED IN BLUE
ONE VERTEBRAE IN THE SPINE OF THE EARTH

Not only were the performers there to aid Albuquerque in her re-enactment, but their experience of the piece was integral to its success. As the volunteers began to dress themselves in the overalls, their individuality began to fade. The performers on the ground waited for the skydiver, dressed in the same red jumpsuit, to trigger the start of the performance. She jumped at noon. The ground performers started their slow procession down the steps, each with his or her hands on the shoulders of the performer ahead. When the front of the line reached the bottom step, the line stopped. In a slow, steady wave they all raised their arms for a few seconds and then lowered them. They stood in silence for a few minutes with only the sound of a helicopter circling overhead. Each performer was connected to another. Each could imagine the view from the helicopter, or the I-10 or the I-405. Each had lost his or her individuality. The performance continued until each red-jumpsuited performer reached the bottom and shed his or her uniform to regain an individual persona.

Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival was organized by Glenn Phillips of the Getty Research Institute and Lauri Firstenberg of LA><ART.
Celebrating 25 Years

Long Bin-Chen

China vs. America
by Ching Wing Lam Rosata & Xue Yihan Lisette

18th Street Arts Center founded its international visiting artist program in 1993, and since 1999 has been host to 30 artist residencies funded by the Ministry of Culture Taiwan. These residencies have supported many brilliant artists by not only offering them space and time to create new artworks, but also a community in which to connect with other artists, and a platform for their work to be seen internationally.

Among the first Taiwanese artists in residence, 18th Street Arts Center was honored to have Taipei-based sculptor Long Bin-Chen and to show his work in the exhibition China vs. America in 2000. Chen was born in 1964 in Taipei and studied in both the Fine Arts Department at Tung-Hai University in Taiwan (BFA 1987) and the School of Visual Arts in New York (MFA 1994). Prior to his arrival at 18th Street, he had already won numerous art prizes in Taiwan, the United States, and Japan, including the prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in 1996. Chen has exhibited widely in museum shows and biennials throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia and is represented by Frederieke Taylor Gallery in New York.

The sculptures in this exhibit both decried the death of literary culture and exalt recycled goods. Chen is known for using cultural debris, such as old books, newspapers, and magazines as the medium for his sculptures. Chen employed a unique chainsaw “sculpting” technique in making several of the pieces in this exhibition, many of which were made using discarded books he collected from New York City recycling systems. They looked exactly like carved wood, though they maintained a surprisingly soft texture. Some of the works in China vs. America alluded to political and historical issues, including the event of a mass book-burning during the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976. Also included in the exhibit was a large-scale Buddha head, representing the missing heads of many ancient Buddha figures that have been looted from Asia and sold to western museums and collectors.

According to Chen, using recycled materials to make art is a commentary on the waste of human consumption and its attendant ecological problems of garbage disposal, the mindless destruction of forests, and the uncontrolled eating up of nonrenewable resources. The artist always uses text in his work, the contents of which inform his sculptures. The finished sculptures often appear as though they are made of wood or marble though they consist mainly of paper. They are constructed in such a way that the various parts of the works fit together in a seamless manner. Chen explains that this kind of art form explores different cultural meanings, seeking to combine concepts from the East with those from the West.

In order to gather used materials to create his work when working in the United States, Chen scours the streets collecting discarded refuse, scouts offices for their rejected reams of paper, and visits stoops to gather cast-off telephone books when new ones are distributed. In Taipei, where there is less of a culture of waste, Chen obtains his material from university libraries and bookstores, publishing companies, archeological museums, and telephone companies. Books are important material to Chen; however, it is not the book itself that he values. Rather, its educational heritage, literary importance, historical knowledge, and the sacredness of the written word are what he treasures most.

Long Bin-Chen, Guan Ying (Art History), 2010, side view, Art History books, 19 x 10 x 13 inches, courtesy of Frederieke Taylor Gallery
Marcus Kuiland-Nazario & Cindy DeSantis

An Underground King & Queen

by Micah Barnes

Anybody who came into contact with 18th Street resident artists Marcus Kuiland-Nazario and Cindy Aida DeSantis, aka Cindy Pop (1956-2012), could feel wild creativity at work: a perspective far outside the restrictions of the traditional art world that never failed to impact the community that they anchored with their humor and warmth. Marcus was a founder of Clean Needles Now, Los Angeles’ first needle exchange program, and one of many artist-activists drawn to 18th Street Arts Center via Highways Performance Space during the AIDS crisis. He began living at 18th Street by crashing on the brown vinyl couch in the employee lounge of the former Westside Oldsmobile warehouse before 18th Street converted it into artist studios. His performance series, Pop Tarts, was launched at Highways, and for 14 years it provided a laboratory for artists like Luis Alfaro, Danielle Brazell, Dan Kwong, Elia Arce, Ruben Martinez, Denise Uyehara, Naom Bustamante, Michael Sakamoto, and Keith Mason to experiment. Cindy Pop was an imposing figure at first, thanks to the tattooed arms mapping her journey from the suburbs of Philly to Los Angeles’ underground as she followed her favorite band X around. She was an assemblage artist, cartoonist, singer, and performance artist. Her cartoon Poodlerland had a devoted fan base and was regularly published in Coagula Art Journal. Her all-girl art band Kitten Freaky performed in small venues throughout Los Angeles.

Cindy and her dog Sweetheart landed at 18th Street in 1993 where she and Marcus met and became best friends and collaborators. Their mutual Puerto Rican roots, love of toys, glitter, scary things, folk art, and music bonded them. The studio they shared on-and-off for 14 years was the de facto green room for Highways Performance Space. Visitors to 18th Street who wandered into their studio were immediately struck by their aesthetic—a heady combination of Rock ‘n’ Roll, Junk Americana, Catholic iconography, and gorgeous Santeria-based avant-garde altars. The tiny cottage they shared was a 24-hour interactive durational performance—they were the dressing room, the congregation house, and the Senate floor for every party at 18th Street, Highways, and Crazyspace. A big pot of black beans and white rice was always at the ready to feed all who entered. On Thanksgiving or Christmas, their studio was “home” for all the wayward artists of Los Angeles.

In addition to hosting Highways’ artists, there was a long, long line of 18th Street’s international artists from all corners of the globe that came through their doors. Many artist collaborations were born under their roof. Rapper Deadlee, RuPaul, Bennett Schneider, Kelly Mantle, Tammy Faye, visual artists Alex Donis, Alma López, Fiona Fell, Chris Fox, Bill Rangel, Nadia Reed, and performance artists Rochelle Fabb, Michael Sakamoto, Denise Uyehara, Josie Roth, and Reza Safai are just a few of the artists that rehearsed, recorded, designed costumes, built altars, and much more in the tiny cottage studio of Marcus and Cindy.

Marcus continues to create performance works, and with Pilar Pérez he is launching Oficina de Proyectos Culturales, a contemporary art center in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. In 2012 Cindy Pop passed away. To our Underground Queen: thank you for the love you shared. We will always have you in our hearts.
How to Make a Refugee
by Anuradha Vikram

Phil Collins

Of the 300 artists from 50 countries who have come through 18th Street’s international visiting artist residency, few command attention on the level of UK-based Phil Collins. Fresh out of graduate school at the University of Ulster, Belfast, at the time of his residency in July 2000, Collins was already producing works of video art that appropriate the conventions of conflict journalism to report, not on the specifics of individual wars, but on violence and reconciliation as undercurrents of civil society worldwide. Since that time, he has exhibited at museums throughout Europe and the United States, and his work has been acquired by leading contemporary art museums including the Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. He has been nominated for the Artes Mundi Prize and the Turner Prize. Collins’ socially engaged practice is emblematic of 18th Street’s values of stoking dialogue and promoting a healthy society.

Collins was invited to the residency at 18th Street on the strength of early works such as how to make a refugee (1999), shot in a Kosovar Albanian refugee camp in Macedonia. The subjects of this work are not the families who have been displaced by sectarian warfare and a UN bombing campaign in the former Yugoslavia, but the journalists who fervently collect their stories of suffering and loss. The spectacle of global media is always front and center in Collins’ works in current and former conflict zones. While his interests have taken him around the world, Collins has returned to the former Yugoslavia throughout his career in works such as Young Serbs (2001) and zasto ne govorim srpski (na srpskom) / Why I don’t Speak Serbian (in Serbian) (2008) that speak to the task of rebuilding after civil war.

Collins is drawn to regions where the shortcomings of global leadership have been rendered most visible by current events, areas such as Iraq and Palestine. In Baghdad Screen Tests (2002), he arrives in advance of the US invasion to document everyday Iraqis in “screen tests” for a nonexistent Hollywood film. Applying this Warholian device to a population primed for the imminent arrival of America’s militaristic vision machine, Collins prompts us to consider the links between sight and control established by Michel Foucault, Paul Virilio, and other Marxist critics of contemporary media culture. In they shoot horses (2004), Collins sets up a dance marathon in Ramallah, Palestine, and invites teenagers to dance for an entire day. Their representation here deviates from the picture typically painted by mainstream media, which situates Palestinians as victims or terrorists with little capacity for leisure or an interior life. Even so, the tension and exhaustion his subjects manifest becomes a metaphoric representation of the daily trials of life under siege that they experience. Meanwhile, his premise comments on the pence of pain that the international community consistently demands from Palestinians, fueled by media portrayals that deny them status as human beings deserving of rights and dignity. In Collins’ work, the fact of each subject’s humanity is undeniable, and its preservation in representation is the artist’s primary concern.

Since relocating from the UK to Germany near the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Collins has turned his lens on his neighbors’ efforts to make peace with their country’s divided past. Works such as marxism today and use! value! exchange! (both 2010) and This Unfortunate Thing Between Us (2011) place contemporary Germans raised on opposite sides of the wall in situations where the suppressed ideologies of the Communist GDR are revealed to be a shadow presence in unified, capitalist Germany. Working between Berlin and Cologne—from the formerly divided city to the region of Joseph Beuys—he carries forward Beuys’ maxim to heal social rifts through art. Steeped in Marxist labor analysis and consistently critical of capitalist ideological hegemony, Collins is more than a “political artist” because he keeps the focus on the individual experiences of everyday people and resists the urge to draw doctrinaire conclusions from their stories. Instead, his art functions as an ethnographic record of our contemporary, mediatrrenched global culture.
There may be no performer who more fully embodies American ideals than Santa Monica–born Phranc Gottlieb, known to the music world as Phranc. Her artistic persona blends elements of Bruce Springsteen’s working-class toughness with a heart of gold, Claes Oldenburg’s fascination with American consumerism, and James Dean’s rebellious sex appeal. Phranc has done much to advance positive representations of lesbian Americans because she is so endearing and approachable while being unabashed about her Jewishness, her queerness, and her androgyny.

Phranc is just one of the iconic women who gravitated to 18th Street through its connections with the Woman’s Building, established in 1973. While young Phranc was taking art and music classes there, Woman’s Building founder Judy Chicago was in her studio at 1659 18th Street realizing her iconic installation The Dinner Party (1974–1979). Nearly two decades later, Phranc would take up residence and make those stomping grounds her own: creating visual art and enjoying renewed visibility for her music thanks to the Queercore/Riot Grrl movement which she helped to inspire. As a teenager, she came out (in every sense) in the LA punk scene with the bands Nervous Gender and Catholic Discipline. Like many other musicians with a message, she found that the powerful energy of punk could nevertheless be an impediment to having her words truly heard. In the 1980s, Phranc re-emerged as a solo artist playing irreverent folk songs with a queer spin. The years she spent living and working at 18th Street between 1992 and 2003 were some of her most productive as a musician and a visual artist. She released two records Goofyfoot (1995) and Milkman (2000), which maintained her folk vibe but included collaborations with younger punk rockers such as Donna Dresch (Team Dresch) and Patty Schemel (Hole).

In the interdisciplinary mix of 18th Street Arts Center, Phranc also began an ongoing body of sculpture under a new moniker, The Cardboard Cobbler. In this guise, she crafts everyday objects that are at once completely ordinary and profoundly queer. Her work is visibly informed by the sculpture of Claes Oldenburg, whose work of the 1960s canonized the quotidian imagery of commerce. Phranc sees in these objects a catalogue of lessons about fitting in, which resonate with a young person marked by difference whether based in ethnicity or sexuality. She is drawn to cardboard and craft paper because it’s the first art material of childhood, represented by the cardboard box that becomes a vessel for infinite flights of fantasy. Phranc is interested in how commodities such as shirts, beach balls, and sleds can invoke universal nostalgia and at the same time carry coded meanings specific to lesbian experience. She becomes a kind of archaeologist of the present, showing us our true selves through the objects that surround us.

On the cover of her debut album, Folksinger (1985), Phranc appears impossibly handsome and styled like a plaid Sinatra. Her pop art and pop music is intended to be universally accessible and to appeal to the heart as much as the head. Since the 1980s, Phranc has sought to reach a broad audience of art and music lovers to augment her large and loyal queer following. Her ongoing practice of visual art has been recognized with a mid-career retrospective exhibition at CUE Art Foundation in New York in 2007 curated by acclaimed performance artist Ann Magnuson and with representation by Santa Monica’s Craig Krull Gallery. The sheer joy of living is apparent in her work in any medium. Phranc’s remarkable ability to make the cultural mainstream bend toward her is emblematic of 18th Street Arts Center’s commitment to pushing the envelope of creative practices for a broad and inclusive audience.
As American citizens, we take much for granted, especially a number of democratic principles as they are codified and enshrined in our Constitution. The people of Pakistan, ruled for 66 years by military or military-backed governments, can’t make the same privileged assumptions. Controlling the media and public discourse is a priority for dictatorships, and critical voices are the first to be suppressed. Pakistani playwright, screenwriter, director, journalist, and human rights activist Shahid Nadeem knows this reality all too well. Imprisoned three times in the 1960s and 1970s and exiled for many years in the 1980s for his art, Shahid’s works on stage and screen examine and demonstrate the ways in which oppression and freedom affect the lives of real people in contemporary society. His voice is a plea for justice, compassion, and humanity.

It was a great honor for me, therefore, to help support Shahid’s residency from April to September 2001, when we hosted him at 18th Street as a Getty Scholar and Feuchtwanger Fellow through a program dedicated to current and former writers in crisis to aid them in developing their artistic practice and engagement with broader audiences.

When we were first approached about Shahid’s residency, we were excited to host such a prestigious figure, but we also didn’t know what to expect. Shahid had suffered greatly over decades of political battles, and we were concerned about whether the relatively casual and laid back atmosphere of Los Angeles, in general, and Santa Monica, in particular, were going to be a good fit for his working temperament.

We had nothing to worry about. Shahid and his family settled in, and he and his wife, a major Pakistani actress and fellow activist, Madeeha Gauhar, got started. Shahid worked on numerous writing and research projects at the Getty Research Institute and Villa Aurora and met numerous artistic and political figures throughout Southern California. At the end of his residency, he and members of Ajoka Theatre, the Pakistani feminist theater group he and his wife founded, staged their play, The Third Knock, at Highways Performance Space. Scheduled for September 16–18, 2001 it played to a sold-out house—only days after the tragic events of 9/11 played out on the world stage. The presence of Shahid and his colleagues that year were a positive influence on our thinking, giving us a greater internationalist perspective on the unfolding trauma and charging 18th Street with a greater energy and focus on our mission to support contemporary art making for social awareness and change.

Looking back, I wonder if our concerns stemmed from our ignorance of what it means to be someone who has dedicated their life to fighting dictatorship and promoting alternative, just solutions within a society where oppression is endemic and the mere thought of resistance can signal a life path of hardship and struggle. I write these words sitting in a beautiful café in Thailand, Southeast Asia’s second largest economy, where people desire relief and peace from their 12th military coup since becoming a constitutional monarchy 82 years ago. Like Pakistan, Thailand is a “developing” Asian nation. Staying quiet is not only safer here but expected by many of one’s peers. But corruption, dictatorship, censorship, torture, or worse wear the same face behind any mask. Activists everywhere know this, including Shahid and his artist compatriots in Pakistan who continue to sacrifice more, not simply because they want to, but because they don’t have a choice.

Thank you, Shahid, for helping 18th Street be a little more of what we needed to be.
Given that women’s histories have traditionally been excluded from official historical frameworks, assembling an archive on the topic of violence against women is a political act in its own right. This “radical archive” model enabled 18th Street Arts Center resident artists Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz (now Labowitz-Starus) to assemble and interpret their own historical narrative, which they presented here as *The Performing Archive* in 2007 and 2008. The archive documents the period between 1971–1984 when Lacy and Labowitz first realized a number of collaborative artworks on the subject of violence against women, then little discussed in art or politics. Under the auspices of the feminist art collective that emerged from The Woman’s Building, Lacy and Labowitz developed a body of socially-activated performance work that operated simultaneously as activism and as art.

This concept of an archive as something more than a catalogue of historical documents—as artwork, as activism—is gaining increased traction in the early 21st century. Archives, which serve as a means of collective memory, have proved consistently central to post-conceptual practices, most notably those that engage with issues of representation around a marginalized community or set of experiences. Informed by the writings of Derrida, contemporary artists who work with the archive as a form seek ways of subverting its implicit authority, which dictates that certain artifacts and memories included assume the status of “history” while others excluded are deemed “anecdotal” or otherwise inadequate. For Lacy and Labowitz, subverting that authority meant inviting young feminist artists to examine and respond to the archive from a different generational perspective.

A 2014 conference organized by artists Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani at NYU titled *Radical Archives*, proposed the following criteria for archiving as a radical practice: “archives of radical politics and practices; archives that are radical in form or function; moments or contexts in which archiving in itself becomes a radical act; and considerations of how archives can be active in the present, as well as documents of the past and scripts for the future.” *The Performing Archive* meets all these criteria. It is an archive of radical feminist politics and practices related to spreading awareness and reducing the impact of violence against women. It is a collection of performative objects, activated by the participation of a younger generation of guest artists whose 21st century reflections reinvigorate the historical documents. It is alive, augmented by interventions and interviews with the guest artists whose interpretations of the archive inform both its form and its historical record. It is a document of the past—a fixed period in the trajectories of both Lacy and Labowitz—and a script for the future, written by a generation of artists who were born during this same time period.

The archive is an ideal form for feminist art practice because it represents an opportunity to situate histories of the marginalized on more equal footing with the histories written by power. Collections are the battlefields on which the ongoing war over the historical record plays out. Access, care, and interpretation of archives remain closely held in most cases, and generally subject to patriarchal controls although the labor of such caretaking is consistently gendered female. Meanwhile, the violence of history is reinscribed on the bodies of women daily through street harassment and sexual assault, and committed afresh each time one of their stories is not heard or not believed. *The Performing Archive* is both a document of these realities and a corrective against them.
Celebrating 25 Years

Tomeka Reid

Off the Page: Women Composers Jazz Fest
by Nicole Rademacher

Just as the shaping of 18th Street Arts Center as an organization was an organic process, so is the organizing of many of the events in its history. The OFF THE PAGE: Women Composers Jazz Fest spontaneously grew out of jazz musician and composer Tomeka Reid’s time at 18th Street as the 2012 Make Jazz Fellow. While primarily known as a visual artist in residence program, in 2011 18th Street created a residency for jazz musicians and composers, which is made possible through funding by the Herb Alpert Foundation. Experimental jazz cellist Reid was the second Make Jazz Fellow.

Reid had always wanted to be an improviser. Since she began her formal studies of the cello rather late to be a professional, she was diligent when she did begin about learning her concertos, sonatas, and similar orchestra repertoire. She was adamant that in order to be taken seriously as a cellist she needed to master those staple pieces first. Even so, Reid felt very conflicted. As her practice matured, she began to heed her passion for improvisation. In 2011, she left her steady job teaching middle and high school at the University of Chicago Lab School, a big risk for her to take, to see where her work improvising and composing would lead her. Reid, who lives in Chicago, was the Make Jazz Fellow at 18th Street from August to October of 2012. The residency afforded her the time and space to delve deeply into exploration and improvisation, and simultaneously create new connections in a new environment.

It was at this same time that I moved to Los Angeles. Reid and I had been close friends when I lived in Chicago during my undergraduate studies. We both worked at the (now defunct) Center for International Performance & Exhibition, aka the HotHouse, in the South Loop. It was there that Reid originally met Nicole Mitchell, who played there with her Black Earth Ensemble often. Reid went on to play with Mitchell in the Black Earth Ensemble for many years, among other bands and solo gigs, exercising and honing her improvisation skills. Reid and I found it serendipitous that after so many years we would both find ourselves again in the same city, at the same time.

Mitchell, now a professor at UC Irvine, was Reid’s first link to the jazz artist community in Los Angeles. Driven by her passion to perform and experiment, during the fellowship Reid invited Mitchell and others to collaborate and play short-notice gigs in 18th Street’s main gallery. I attended many of the gigs, which brought me back to my own years in Chicago; Reid reawakened a feeling of excitement for music that I had not felt for some time. I was mesmerized by her music and impressed by her growth as a composer.

The crowds grew, as did Reid’s network, in particular her connections to other female jazz composers in the area. The genre of jazz is wide and diverse, and Reid met women with techniques that are sophisticated and varied. As her community became rich with talent, Reid wanted to seize the opportunity presented by her fellowship to address the need of women musicians to have community; so, she spearheaded the OFF THE PAGE: Women Composers Jazz Fest. The Festival was made up of two performances, one night at 18th Street and another at the World Stage in Leimert Park. Each night presented three composers and invited six different music ensembles to play music that the composers submitted for the Fest. It showcased an impressive mix of talent. Local musicians such as Dwight Trible and Najite Agindotan were also invited to perform these original works. Additionally, each composer performed in at least one other ensemble, extending each one’s own talent to the community of women. The featured composers were Dawn Norfleet, Maia, Nicole Mitchell, Leah Paul, Tomeka Reid, and Manisha Shahane.

The legacy of community and individuals working in collaboration that is stained in the walls at 18th Street permeates all that happens on its campus and with its artists and alumni. Reid’s work at 18th Street was a beautiful example of the cross-disciplinary collaboration, network-building, and support for minority artists of which many 18th Street artists before her have also taken advantage.