



David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in NY* (on vinyl, 1978-79, silver print, 8" x 10" of 3

Certeau tells us that walking is sometimes like dreaming. In *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79), David Wojnarowicz photographed his friend and lover, Brian Itterick, disguised as the French Symbolist poet. Wearing a mask, a facsimile of Rimbaud's face, this figure appears as a phantom, haunting the city's deviant spaces: underneath bridges, piers, red light districts, run-down apartments. Like the return of repressed, the emergence of this phantasmatic figure asserts a right to a public life for marginalized groups and their refusal to be removed from urban reality.



Alex Villar, *Upward Mobility*, 2002. DVD video, color, 7 min., silent

Simon Leung's *Squatting Project/Berlin* was conceived to comment on the expulsion of Germany's immigrant Vietnamese population in 1992. Developed as posters for bus stops throughout Berlin, Leung took his visual cues from the squatting position assumed by people in Asian and other non-western populations, as well as the notion of claiming residency in an unoccupied building. Echoing Export's (non-) conformist postures, Leung's squatting also recalls Wojnarowicz's masked Rimbaud, inhabiting improper places. Leung's project makes visible a population that had not been allowed to squat, and was instead quietly being exiled from both the cultural habits of the body and a chosen place of refuge.

In *Upward Mobility*, Alex Villar incorporates his body into urban architecture in unexpected ways. Challenging the means by which city planning forces our movement in a particular trajectory, Villar explores the terrains of New York and London architecture by attempting to traverse buildings vertically. At once a futile gesture and a grasping for freedom, Villar climbs bus stops, buildings, scaffolding, and railings. Throughout his work, Villar, like Export, insinuates his body into the small spaces that remain unused by most city inhabitants. *Upward Mobility* pushes this notion further as it reveals the restrictions that are placed on our freedom of movement by the built environment and the regulation of city planning.



Kim Sooja, *A Needle Woman*, 1999-2001. DVD video still, 6'33" loop, silent

In the video installation, *A Needle Woman*, Kim Sooja is seen from the back, standing motionless facing a bustling urban street. These scenes are set off against serene images of the artist lying on a rock. In the city, her stillness emphasizes the urban chaos and distances her from the constant stream of people. By the rock, however, Kim's quietude takes on a contemplative, even spiritual aspect, suggesting that the source of her reserve within the city is strength rather than catatonia. In both Kim's video and Kusama's slides, the figure stands out against an urban background. While Kusama foregrounds the uncertain place of foreignness within an indifferent city, Kim contrasts the verticality of her body with the constantly fluctuating shapes and colors of the anonymous crowd, suggesting a more internal articulation of space.

Valerie Tevere's interactive DVD project, *A Preliminary Guide to Public and Private Space in Amsterdam*, is an idiosyncratic mapping of Amsterdam based on citizens' perceptions of private and public space. Through interviews with residents, Tevere creates a map determined by (seemingly) arbitrarily chosen public and private spots, delimiting various alternative routes through the city based on the practices of individual walkers. Like Piper, Tevere explores the interpenetration of public and private spheres, emphasizing as well chance encounters and the creative appropriation of space by its users. For the work's audience, navigating the interactive format of Tevere's DVD project mirrors the actual walking in the city.



Valerie Tevere, *A Preliminary Guide to Public and Private Space in Amsterdam*, 2002. DVD color video still

Like her colleagues in this exhibition, Tevere's work makes visible clandestine paths through the city, illuminating diverse modes of mobility. Seen through the lens of earlier urban performance, this contemporary art makes manifest the imbrications of the subject and the urban environment, and the struggle to find agency within regulated spaces.

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WALKING IN THE CITY

curators:
Melissa Brookhart Beyer
and Jill Dawsey

Walking in the City: *Spatial Practices in Art, from the Mid-1960s to the Present*



Adrian Piper, *I Am the Larcin* #5, 1975, oil crayon drawing on photo, 8" x 10"

scale buildings. "Walking" is an ordinary but transformative way of using space, for which we may number of other spatial practices. The works gathered here are first and foremost acts of spatiality. For de Certeau, walking is a form of enunciation, akin to a speech act. Like figurative language strays from literal meaning, walking, squatting, or scaling stray from proper places, introducing new ambiguities, and voices into an existing spatial system.

The spatial practices represented here reference a long legacy of avant-garde wandering, from the politically modern figure, the 19th-century *flâneur*, to the aleatory drifting of the Surrealists and Situationist these earlier moments in the (art) history of walking evince an easy spatial and social mobility or a specific privilege, the more contemporary works point to the heterogeneity of lived experience, a global articulated locally through the stubborn insistence of the body.

For artists working in the charged social climate of the late 60s and 70s, urban space signified revolutionary possibilities. Such was the context for many of Yayoi Kusama's highly publicized and politicized happenings. In 1966, the artist performed *Walking Piece*, a work that enigmatically raises questions about the status of the immigrant or stranger, and the city as a space of difference. Theatrically deploying a stereotype of exotic femininity, Kusama wandered the industrial outskirts of Manhattan dressed in a kimono, sheltering herself beneath a flowery parasol. One image depicts the artist encountering a sleeping homeless man. "Walking" in the city here finds a troubling cognate in homelessness, a different kind of migratory practice that eludes attachment.

Adrian Piper's video, *Mythic Being* (1973), negotiates the permeable division between public and private realms, as it intersects with race and gender. Dressing herself as a socially threatening black male, wearing a moustache and afro wig, Piper moves slowly down the street, repeating a line from her personal diary like a mantra. A group of passers-by gathers behind her—kids make faces at the camera, adults stare perplexedly. Piper's work thus refuses

WALKING IN THE CITY

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Curators' talk: Wednesday, January 8, 6:30pm

curators: Melissa Brookhart Beyer & Jill Dawsey

apexart curatorial program

291 church street
new york, ny 10013
212 431-5270 ph
212 431-4447 fx
info@apexart.org
www.apexart.org
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cover: Yayoi Kusama, *Walking Piece*, 1966

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