

Neuberger

Museum of Art

2001

Biennial

Exhibition of

Public Art

Nominators: Bill Aguado, Director, Bronx Cultural Council on the Arts, Bronx, New York; Suzanne Delehanty, Director, Miami Art Museum, Miami, Florida; Jane Farver, Director, List Visual Art Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Jose R. Gelats, Assistant Curator, Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida; Edgar Heap-of-Birds, Artist, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Robert Lee, Director, Asian-American Arts Center, New York, New York; Dewey F. Mosby, Director, The Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York; Sidra Stitch, Curator, San Francisco, California.

Jurors: Tom Finkelpearl, Programs Director, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; Dr. Beej Nierengarten-Smith, Director, Laumeier Sculpture Park and Museum, St. Louis, Missouri; Grace Stanislaus, Consultant, New York, New York; Ken Strickland, Dean, Purchase College School of Art and Design, Purchase, New York; and Dr. Noel Frackman, Purchase College faculty member and member of the Board of the Friends of the Neuberger Museum of Art, Dr. Judy Collischan, former Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs, and Jacqueline Shilkoff, Assistant Curator, represented the Neuberger Museum of Art. Dr. Lucinda H. Gedeon, Director of the Neuberger Museum of Art served as an ex officio jury member.

Organization: Jacqueline Shilkoff

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Purchase College, State University of New York

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Neuberger Museum of Art 2001 Biennial Exhibition of Public Art

On the Campus of Purchase College
State University of New York

May 20-October 7, 2001

Laura Anderson Barbata

Robert Chambers

Keith Christensen

Tom Doyle

Mags Harries & Lajos Heder

Lisa Hein & Bob Seng

Mei-ling Hom

Niki Ketchman

Marisol *Biennial Honoree*

Barbara Neijna

Gregory Lee Pickard

Noah Purifoy

Steven Siegel

Todd Slaughter

Suzy Sureck

Steed Taylor

Acknowledgments

We are most pleased to present our third Biennial of Public Art on the Purchase College campus. The scale of this exhibition continues to be a challenge, but well worth the effort. Each Biennial stands as a renewal of the Neuberger Museum's commitment to the presentation of contemporary art in a public arena.

This year's Biennial presents the work of fifteen artists, plus Marisol, who was invited as our honoree in recognition of her contribution to the field of public sculpture. As in prior years the group was selected by a process that included nominations from art professionals around the country, and then a jury procedure, through which the fifteen artists were selected from a pool of more than one hundred and twenty-five submissions. With few exceptions, each artist visited the campus, selected his or her site and created a work for that site.

We are most grateful to the artists who participated this year and thank them for their creative energy. I would also like to thank our nominators and members of the jury for their contribution to the selection process. The members of the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Neuberger Museum of Art were, once again, totally supportive of the exhibition, as was the campus administration, to whom we owe our sincere gratitude. Staff members in the facilities division and in the office of public safety were particularly helpful and we offer them our special thanks. Judy Collischan, the Museum's former Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs, was the organizer of the Biennial in 1997 and 1999, and played a major role in the early stages of this exhibition's organization. Assistant Curator, Jacqueline Shilkoff, stepped in when Dr. Collischan left the Museum's employ, and must be given special recognition for her extraordinary work in seeing the exhibition through to fruition—from the time of artist selection, to site visits, project proposals, scheduling, and installation. Registrar Patricia Magnani and Associate Preparator José Smith were also involved to the fullest and to them all I offer heartfelt thanks for a job well done.

I would also like to extend our grateful appreciation to art critic and historian Eleanor Heartney for her essay for the catalogue, Ellen R. Feldman for her editing skills, Marc and Cindy Zaref of Marc Zaref Design, Inc., for their extraordinary graphic design work on the invitation, map and catalogue, and Michael Kleinberg for his photography of the works in the exhibition. As in all such projects, it has been a team effort of many individuals that has made this exhibition possible. I am also most grateful to our funders, without whose support the Biennial would not be possible. To the Friends of the Neuberger Museum of Art, the Ruth and Seymour Klein Foundation, Inc., The Corrine H. Buck Charitable Trust, David Durst, the Westchester Arts Council with funds from the Westchester County Government, Neuberger Berman and other private donors I extend our sincere and utmost gratitude.

Lucinda H. Gedeon, Ph.D.
Director

Public Art and Public Questions

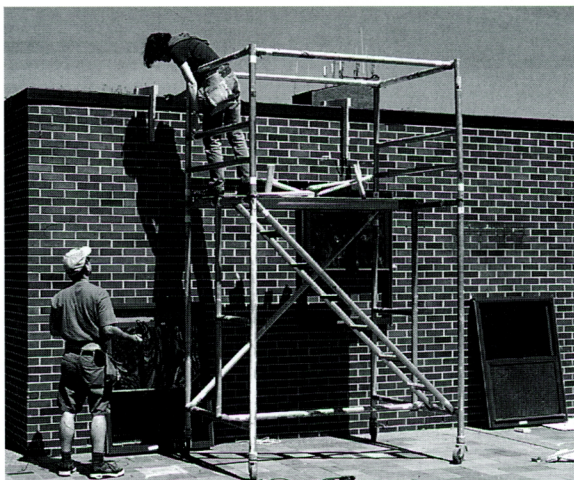
by Eleanor Heartney

"Public" is one of those words whose popularity in our political rhetoric is inversely proportional to its actual presence in our lives. Truly public plazas are swallowed up by the pseudo-public space of the corporate plaza or the suburban mall; once public services, from schools to prisons, are increasingly run by private entities; even the wild frontier of the Internet is gradually curtailing its pose as the open forum for democracy in favor of business models that stress profit and productivity.

In this climate, artists devoted to public art find themselves in a situation that is at once daunting and exciting. It is daunting, because they often have to redefine the idea of public to an audience that has almost forgotten what it might mean, and exciting because difficulties are a potent source of artistic inspiration. As a result, public art has emerged as one of the most innovative fields of contemporary art.

Public artists were once confined to a narrow range of functions—they were commissioned to memorialize great men, for instance, or to provide visually pleasing decoration for public buildings. Today, by contrast, public artists ask important and often disturbing questions. What histories and political interests have been suppressed to create the illusion of public consensus? What does our built environment tell us about our society's actual values and priorities? What would it take to make our cities and towns work for more of our citizenry? What is lost when private interests supplant public ones?

Given the complexity of such issues, it is not surprising that the artists represented in the Neuberger



Artists Lisa Hein and Bob Seng install *Double Hung*

Museum of Art's third Biennial Exhibition of Public Art, take so many different approaches to the idea of public space and public discourse. Nevertheless, interesting themes recur. One of these is the psychological and social effect of our increasing distance from nature. Another is the potential for art to alter the dynamics of public spaces that have been designed with little regard for human comfort or sociability.

These issues come to the fore, in part, because of the specific nature of the Purchase campus. Built in the early 1970s under the master plan by Edward Larrabee Barnes, the architecture of the school represents the emphasis on geometry, functionalism, and visual rationality that characterized much city planning in the postwar era. From a contemporary perspective, the extended concrete plazas, windowless brick walls, and severely rectangular building forms can feel oppressive and dehumanizing. There is a particular irony to this, as Purchase is located in a lovely natural setting full of thickets of trees, open meadows and gently rolling hills.

The 2001 Biennial artists take full advantage of this contradiction. They use art to critique the underlying presumptions embedded in the Purchase plan, to soften the edge of the architecture by reintroducing a human scale to the campus's public areas, to meditate on the complex relationship between natural and human-built environments, and to investigate how audiences can be made participants in the process of public art.

Several of the artists play off the traditional functions of public art. Marisol, who is the Biennial Honoree and subject of a retrospective this summer at the Neuberger Museum of Art, has contributed a work that appears, at first glance, to exemplify the traditional memorial public statue. Entitled *The General* (page 27) it represents a military figure on a horse and brings to mind any number of statues of war heroes in public squares around the world. This being Marisol, how-

ever, the work is full of satiric content. The figure is too Stalinesque not to be Stalin, the discredited Soviet leader whose effigies were removed from the Russian landscape long before the demise of the Soviet Union. He sits astride something akin to the Trojan horse, which contains his mausoleum, self-contained for his march into oblivion.

While Marisol alters the traditional form of the memorial statue,



Artist Tom Doyle and crew install *Tecumseh II*

Steed Taylor makes a real memorial out of very different materials. *Tom's Round* is conceived as a memorial to all people named Tom or Thomas (including the patriarch of the family who once owned the land that is now Purchase College, and whose gravesite is encircled by this work). This artwork takes the form of a stylized organic design painted on the road (page 41). Taylor likens it to a ritual tattoo, laid over the surface of the road in a manner analogous to the way a tattoo is burned into the skin.

Other artists draw on the functional aspect of traditional public design, reinventing the forms and ideas behind public benches, fountains, and park equipment. The most startling reworking of this theme is Gregory Lee Pickard's *Sanctuary* (page 31). From a distance, this work has a delicate beauty. One glimpses a pattern of wires coiled decoratively like tendrils or ribbons over a standard issue swing set. Close up, it becomes clear that the title is meant ironically, for this is anything but a sanctuary. The tendrils turn out to be sharp-edged security wire of the sort used to line the fences of penitentiaries; in fact the whole work is set behind protective chain-link fencing. Thus, Pickard contrasts the placid connotations of the playground and the threatening reality of the prison. This dissonance will grow over the course of the summer as vines grow over the wire, allowing nature to creep over this monument to the complex relationship between protection and confinement.

Niki Ketchman's *Pied à Terre* is a far friendlier edifice. She has chosen as her site an untrimmed wildflower field at the outer reaches of campus. Her work is a tower-like structure with four outward-facing seats, which was inspired by the Surrealist park benches designed by Antonio Gaudi for the city of Barcelona (page 25). Again, there is an interesting contradiction in her choice of materials. The tower is created from various industrial materials, among them fencing, aluminum mesh, electrical wire, and polyester fishing line, but these have been literally woven, braided, and stitched together in ways that bring to mind forms of craft traditionally associated with women. Thus, she feminizes a kind of structure and a set of materials more commonly associated with masculine energy.

Noah Purifoy, meanwhile, reinvents the notion of the sculpture garden. But instead of the fountains, classical statues, and topiaries, he creates assemblage environments from discarded



Artist Niki Ketchman, assisted by her husband, install *Pied à Terre*

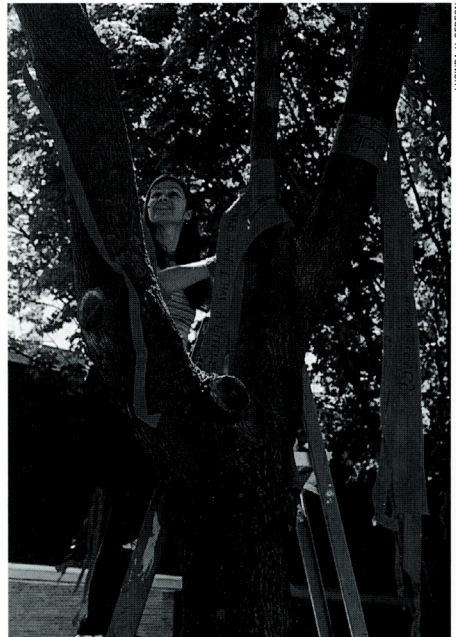
LUCINDA H. GEDDON

industrial and urban debris. *Kirby Express* is a railroad car pieced together from bicycle wheels, old rusting pipes and found bits of abandoned metal (page 33). It is one element from a larger group of works that are usually displayed in Joshua Tree, California. Rising out of the desert, much as Simon Rodia's *Watts Tower* rises out of the denuded urban landscape of East Los Angeles, this fantastical environment attests to the continuing life of society's discards.

Several of the projects here offer explicit critiques of the architectural philosophy embedded in the Purchase campus. In *Double Hung*, Lisa Hein and Bob Seng challenge the stark architecture, noting, "We open windows where none existed before." They have placed a set of colorful windows along an uninterrupted section of brick wall lining the campus's central walkway (page 21). The rectilinear forms and blank panes are meant to recapture the flavor of postwar Modernism. But, subversively, the initial order of their placement gives way to chaos, as the windowpanes slip above and below the normal sightline thereby expressing the artists' sense of the postwar era, when the appearance of rationality and order masked the real disorder of an irrational time.

Laura Anderson Barbata is also critical of architectural Modernism. Her project, entitled *Our History Is Not Found in a Book*, consists of a series of red, handwoven hammocks, swinging between the trees in a wooded area in front of the Humanities Building (page 11). These contrast sharply with the usual rigid benches of conventional landscaping, thus exemplifying her notion of the contrast between European models of city planning, which stress a rigid separation of nature and culture and pre-colonial native ones, which stress a continuity between these realms. She invites the public to lounge in her hammocks and to express their desires and personal sense of history by writing thoughts on red ribbons, which will be hung periodically on the trees that support the hammocks.

This desire to narrow the gap between nature and culture also motivates other Biennial works. Steven Siegel's *Carbon String* is a plywood armature covered with bits of shredded tire. It winds over the north side of the wide plaza like a snake, bringing to mind those carbon pellets



Artist Laura Anderson Barbata positions ribbons in her installation *Nuestra historia no se encuentra en un libro (Our History Is Not Found in a Book)*

that when ignited, create a snakelike trail of ashes (page 35). With this anomalous element, Siegel introduces a memory of untamed nature to this controlled architectural environment.

Mei-ling Hom's *Dwarfed Landscape* also brings a memory of earlier states of nature to the Purchase campus. Her softly rounded limestone and cement seats have the quality of time-worn and weather-beaten archeological finds or landscape forms like mountains, boulders, and valleys shaped by the elements (page 23).

Nature is an even more integral aspect of Suzy Sureck's *QuamaneQ*. The title of this work comes from the Inuit word meaning illumination, and it depends for its existence on the movement of the sun and the action of the wind. Sureck has installed six reflective elements that cast shifting abstract light patterns on an otherwise featureless brick wall (page 39). The reflectors have been calibrated with the angle of sun, so that they will continue to reflect as the sun's path changes over the five-month period of the exhibition.

In *Liquid Heart* Barbara Neijna invokes nature in one of the most natural sites on campus. Her work is set away from the campus buildings in a wooded area over an old cistern. She has erected a large pipe whose two ends are covered with glass that transmit a strange blue neon glow (page 29). Meanwhile, the approaching visitor becomes aware of the sounds of water running, draining, and spilling on the ground. In fact a recording on a continuous loop, this simulated water symphony has a musical quality, poetically evoking the water hidden below.

Tom Doyle, meanwhile, has chosen an open site near the pedestrian entrance to the campus for his lyrical wooden sculpture *Tecumseh II* (page 17). An artist who has been active since the 1950s, Doyle softens the hard industrial edge of abstract outdoor sculpture of the sort pioneered by Mark DiSuvero by using three kinds of roughly hewn oak. One can also see a relationship to the dynamic gestures of Abstract Expressionism in this work. Pieces of wood thrust upward and outward from the three points where they touch the ground. The artist likened the form to a shooting star, hence it has been named for a Shawnee Indian chief whose name means Shooting Star, and its organic muscularity provides a tonic to the pervasive geometry of the campus buildings.



Artist Suzy Sureck and Assistant Curator, Jacqueline Shilkoff prepare a reflective panel for *QuamaneQ*

While all public art has some element of interactivity, in that viewers are asked to move around the work and grasp its formal and conceptual relationship to its surroundings, some artists are interested in even more explicit forms of participation. Robert Chambers's *Zen-Volt* has the appearance of a giant space ship that has just landed on campus. It consists of a huge white bulbous globe surrounded by chairs whose forms are borrowed from the designs of sculptor Wendell Castle (page 13). But while the chairs are fully functional, they also serve as hidden microphones, which pick up both the voices of viewers and the ambient sounds. These are mixed, distorted and projected out of a large dish at the top of the structure.

Keith Christensen's *Freedom Game* comes at interactivity from another direction (page 15). He has installed what appears to be a two-sided board game in the shape of the letter F next to the Social Science Building. Texts inscribed on each side of the structure contain reflections on the value of freedom. Some were culled from historical figures associated with freedom or its lack, while others were lifted from a questionnaire on freedom distributed to social science students. A companion web site documents the conceptual basis for the work and mentions textual references as well as responses to the questionnaire. Using the format of a board game, Christensen wants to remind us that freedom is a participatory process.

Finally, several artists have chosen to use art to excavate hidden or forgotten histories. Todd Slaughter has a two-part piece in the Biennial. *Red Riding Hood Stand* is a giant cast fiber-glass red cape that encloses a stand of the sort used by hunters to sit quietly above the land-

scape to locate their prey. The hunting stand recurs in *Cloud Cover*, where it sits beneath a camouflage-painted cloud sculpture mounted high on the corner of the library building on the mall. Both works remind us of the wilderness upon which this campus was built, and of the age-old struggle between hunter and hunted which is the dynamic of both human and animal societies (page 37).

Mags Harries and Lajos Héder bring back a more recent history. In *Play Back*, they conjure the memory of an abandoned tennis court that dates to the Chisholm estate upon which the campus was built. Rather than rebuilding the court, however, they have redrawn its outlines



Artist Todd Slaughter, assisted by Museum crew member Johnie Way, assemble *Cloud Cover*

with white nylon strapping tape (page 19). A ghostlike recording of the sounds of the game, complete with popping balls, shuffling feet, and muffled voices recreates past festivities, giving the overgrown abandoned site a double life, as if it exists simultaneously in the past and present.

This is the third *Neuberger Biennial Exhibition of Public Art*, and it is beginning to acquire a history of its own. Scattered over the cam-

pus are works that have been purchased or gifted from earlier versions of this exhibition. These join a selection of public art works that were acquired independently by the Museum. Meanwhile, each year, some of the new works occupy spaces used by artists in previous years. Thus, the works here relate, not just to each other, but also to other works on the grounds past and present. Together they weave an ever-evolving dialogue about what public art is and what it can be.



Artist Mags Harries and assistant preparing the site for *Play Back*

Laura Anderson Barbata

Mexican b. 1958 Mexico City, Mexico

Nuestra historia no se encuentra en un libro (Our History Is Not Found in a Book), 2001

hand-woven hammocks, ribbon, red cedar mulch

18 x 54 x 194¹/₃ feet

Selected Biography

Public Commissions

Gone from the Path Direct, Dante Park, New York,
New York

Growing Cities / Basic Needs, International Women's
University, Hannover, Germany

One-Person Exhibitions

- 1999 *Traces of Infinity*, Wave Hill, Bronx, New York
Cuentos del Orinoco y Otros Relatos, Sala
Mendoza, Caracas, Venezuela
- 1998 *In the Order of Chaos*, Austin Museum of Art,
Texas
- 1997 *No-tengo-quien-me-ayude-en-casa*, MARCO,
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de
Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico
- 1995 *La Piel de la Tierra*, Museo de Arte Moderno,
Mexico City, Mexico
- 1992 *El Sacrificio*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo
Alvar y Carmen T. de Carrillo Gil, Mexico
City, Mexico
- 1990 *Lo sagrado y lo profano*, Galería Ramis
Barquet, Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico;
Galería del Sur, Universidad Autónoma
Metropolitana, Xochimilco, Mexico

Group Exhibitions

- 2000 *Age of Influence: Reflections in the Mirror of
American Culture*, Museum of
Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
Blemish, Memphis College of Art, Tennessee
Gardens of Pleasure, John Michael Kohler
Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Growing Cities / Basic Needs, International
Women's University, Hannover, Germany
- 1998 *Archive X*, Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz, Austria
Cinco Continentes y una Ciudad, Antiguo
Arzobispado, Mexico
*El cuerpo aludido: Representaciones del cuer-
po humano del siglo XVI al siglo XX*,
Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico

- 1997 *VI Bienal de La Habana*, Havana, Cuba
Arte Mexicana, Museo de Arte
Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Nuevo León,
Mexico
- 1991 *Recent Acquisitions: Works on Paper*, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
New York

Grants and Awards

- 1999 *Miembro del Sistema Nacional para
Creadores*, Fondo Nacional para la Cultura
y las Artes, CONACULTA, Mexico
- 2001 Rutgers Center for Innovative Printmaking and
Papermaking Residency, Rutgers University,
The State University of New Jersey, New
Brunswick

Permanent Collections

Fundação Bozano-Simonsen, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico
Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico
Museo de Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

