



MARY LUCIER

*All images are from Wisconsin Arc,
2009–2012, single channel projected video.*

MARY LUCIER

New Installation Works

Opens Thursday, March 7, 6–8 pm

Continues through April 20, 2013

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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ROBERT BERLIND: Your work has often focused on various cultures not your own: Navajo, Japanese, and now Sioux (in a new collaborative project through the Rauschenberg Foundation and the North Dakota Museum of Art). You have worked in the Amazon, Alaska, Newfoundland, France and numerous American locations. While your work conveys much information about these subjects, it is not essentially anthropological or sociological; it always focuses on particular practices or experiences. You identify with your subjects in ways that seem personal to you and consequently have a personal resonance to the viewer. How do you relate your art to documentary practices?

MARY LUCIER: I believe that the documentary impulse in video practice has remained strong—even in installation work—for the past fifty years. When video was just taking hold, its portability and instantaneity exerted a powerful attraction for artists and documentarians alike. The low quality of the image seemed better suited to “issues”—social, political, environmental—than to other genres already associated with film’s higher production values. Video was a quick and dirty way to capture the immediate. In the years since, its technical quality and availability in all kinds of devices has increased enormously to the point that, at its highest end, it rivals film.

I have often worked in places where both site and culture are endangered. Other times the site is where I happen to be. The focus on cultures sometimes is not so much intentional as circumstantial.

My interest in places and people has a documentary aspect during my research for a project. Initially I am more interested in the site itself, but as the site becomes activated by its inhabitants my attention shifts to them. In *The Plains of Sweet Regret*, shot in North Dakota, the counterpart to daily life was the rodeo. The work I did in Japan, *Two Monzeki Spaces*, focused on Buddhist ceremony but I came to feel close to the people I was working with. Here in *Wisconsin Arc*, the focus is on the “performance” of activities, planned and impromptu and somewhere in between, by various groups of people in public settings.

RB: *Wisconsin Arc* is also particular to its setting in Calatrava’s Milwaukee Art Museum and the lakefront that can be seen through the large windows. In this piece too people of different cultures and ethnicities are presented.

ML: I spent a good part of two years in Milwaukee while teaching, much of it in the museum space, where the change of light and weather and the behavior of the public were galvanizing to watch. It seemed to me that visitors to the museum suddenly became liberated when they entered the space of those grand windows, and I noticed that they would behave in ways people don’t ordinarily do in a museum space, acting out strange performative rites as though they were on a playground. After watching this scene for a long period of time, I decided I wanted to explore that behavior against the background of Calatrava’s architecture and the breathtaking views it offers to Lake Michigan. I first shot random

footage at various times of day in what is called Windhover Hall and finally staged performances by local artists in the space throughout the period of one entire day. With the help of Joe Ketter, Chief Curator at that time, and a dozen or so of my students on a 3-camera crew, I invited people to come to the museum to perform in whatever ways they wished. Because I was interested more in the silhouettes than the details, people came all dressed in black and did their thing against this luminous eye and the reverberant chamber that surrounds it. Dancers arrived in leotards, jugglers with balls and clubs, cyclists with unicycles and bikes, parents with children, and conceptual artists with exploratory movements and non-movements.

Meanwhile, outdoors there are other sorts of unprogrammed dramas taking place. Shooting nearby on Bradford Beach in the early springtime, I focused on two groups of people—a trio of beachwalkers, one with a camera dangling at his waist, and a quartet of lively Hmong kids with a video camera, performing at first for each other and then, subtly, for me, although we never communicated directly. I would say that there is a unifying “culture” here, and it is that of the camera. Looking and being looked at, following and being followed, each group shows its regard/disregard for my camera as I isolate them against the misty ground of chilly spring beach weather. The layering of indoor and outdoor imagery in the work is crucial to the experience of permeability of those boundaries within the architecture. The equivalence of the layers posits a porousness of both time and space as they exist within the frame.

RB: Another way in which you deal with specific places is by making sculptural or architectural installations. Talk about how you go about making the choices that result in your installations.

ML: I have been making installations since the early 1970s. Before that, I was engaged in sculpture, photography, and performance, and all those activities have influenced what I do today. The space of an installation can be thought of as a kind of replication—not of the represented landscape itself but of the experience of that landscape. It becomes a sensory equivalent to a beach, for example, in a broad projection with surround sound, or to a vast prairie with synchronized images on four walls around you. Often, in multi-channel pieces I implant a “subliminal narrative” that flows back and forth across monitors or projections and, as in the 3-channel, 7-monitor *Wilderness* (1986), creates a poetic A/B/A/B/C/B/C form on multiple sources. Sometimes I incorporate found objects, as in *Asylum* (1986), which I feel adds a kind of authenticity to the environment and works as an echo or accompaniment, helping to complete the video by extension into the space around it. Even the furniture in the viewing space becomes part of the installation. The important thing, in any room, is to remain aware of the small as well as major affects of the space and to have everything function in the service of the work. Nothing, even in the dark, is truly invisible.

















Mary Lucier has been making video art and installations since the early 1970s. Her work has been shown in major museums around the world where it now resides in numerous collections, such as the Reina Sofia, Madrid; Whitney Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Milwaukee Art Museum; and ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany. She has been the recipient of many awards and fellowships, including the Guggenheim Foundation, Anonymous Was a Woman, the Nancy Graves Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Creative Capital, USA Artist Fellowship, and the Japan-US Friendship Commission. Lucier recently spent six months in Kyoto working on a new cycle of works based in Buddhist convents and, while there, participated in a traveling exhibition featuring three of the oldest convents in Japan. A recent project with the Brooklyn Museum, *Genealogy: The Dutch Connection*, was on view at the museum in 2012. Her work is represented by Lennon, Weinberg Gallery, New York, with video distribution by Electronic Arts Intermix.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Beauty and the Beast (2009–2013)

Single-channel video. Color. Sound. 3:00

Wisconsin Arc (2009–2013)

Single-channel video installation. Color. Sound. 26:00

Silk Hangings (2013)

A collection of digital prints on silk fabric.

Prints by Katy Martin Studio, New York

The artist thanks her husband, Robert Berling, for his contribution to the text and Katy Martin for her printing acumen. Thanks also to Joe Ketner, The Milwaukee Art Museum, and students from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, headed by Ryan Sarnowski, for their help in producing *Wisconsin Arc*.



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