

Art in Prison Lecture 2

Contemporary Social Artists

This lecture addresses the general definition of Socially Engaged Art.

Contemporary Artists working in this form are discussed as examples.

Readings on the website expand the discussion.
A list of artists is provided for additional research.

ART AS SOCIAL PRACTICE: A Socially Engaged Art

Moves beyond dominant discipline-based art education and expressive and visual culture programs, by offering examples of art education that are engaged with:

1. **context** (teacher and students' surroundings),
2. **contemporary** art (current forms and perspectives)
3. **critical social issues** (the 'going' world and abiding justice-related concerns).

Art and Social Justice Education: Culture as Commons

Inasmuch as all art is created to communicate or be experienced by others, all art is social.

The term 'social practice' denotes the critical detachment of other forms of art-making (primarily centered and built on the personality of the artist), that is inherent to socially engaged art, which, by definition, is dependent on the involvement of others besides the instigator of the artwork.

All art invites social interaction;
yet in the case of Socially Engaged Art, it is the
process itself—the fabrication of the work—
that is social.

Socially Engaged Art practices are not Social
Work.

While they may subscribe to the same values,
artists may make work that ironizes,
problematizes, and even enhances tensions
around those subjects in order to provoke
reflection.

Education for Socially Engaged Art

SEA has a double function in that when we make socially engaged artwork, we are not just offering a service to a community, we are proposing our action as a symbolic statement in the context of our cultural history (and art history) and entering into a larger artistic debate.



Mel Chin

believes art can provoke greater social awareness and responsibility so he finds ways to integrate art into people's lives.

His work, *Knowmad*, was designed as a video game based on the carpets of disappearing tribal cultures. His hope was that something fun could also teach people about the beautiful artworks created by these cultures that most Americans were unaware of.



Creative Participation—the visitor provides content for part of a work that has been created by an artist.

While some of Mel Chin's work fits into the directed participatory category, *Project Pay Dirt* fits into the *Creative one*. When asked by the city of New Orleans to see what creative solutions to problems created after Hurricane Katrina, Chin, overwhelmed started with analyzing the soil.

Personal note: I worked with Mel Chin for 6 months during my graduate program.





A soil sample from a property in New Orleans' 8th Ward collected as part of a citywide analysis underway by *OPERATION PAYDIRT*, a massive art/science project to take on lead pollution in the city where soil lead levels are as much as five times the level considered hazardous by the EPA.

Photograph by Amanda Wiles



Based on the recommendations of the team and his own creative direction, he developed the project, *‘operation paydirt’* that would involve people in the community and across the country. These photos are of a community barbecue and dance party to roll out the project.

Recognizing it was going to take money (estimated cost is \$300,000,000), Chin created the “Fundred Dollar Bill Project” to raise awareness and encourage Congress to provide necessary funding for the clean up of the lead contamination.

<http://melchin.org/oeuvre/operation-paydirtfundred-dollar-bill-project>





The Fundred Dollar Bill Project is designed to involve 3 million school children and teachers from across the country that creates art for change. Participating children draw or color on specially designed \$100 bill worksheets to create their own Fundred Dollar Bills.



According to Chin, by allowing students to enact the creation of **Fundred Dollar Bills**, children, who are most susceptible to the environmental hazards of lead, are given a voice.

Through their engagement with art, they are exposed to environmental responsibility, social responsibility and as activists, they exercise and consider the power of their collective voice.

Thomas Hirshorn--In the 1980s, Hirschhorn worked in Paris as a graphic artist. He was part of the group of Communist graphic designers called Grapus. These artists were concerned with politics and culture, displaying impromptu creations and posters on the street mostly using the language of advertisement. He left Grapus to create the hypersaturated installations he is known for today, using common materials such as cardboard, foil, duct tape, and plastic wrap.



Do you think his decision to use everyday materials is ‘political?’

Thomas Hirschhorn—

He has described his choice to use everyday materials in his work as "political" and that he only uses materials that are "universal, economic, inclusive, and don't bear any plus-value"

These everyday materials are nonetheless symbolically charged. References to fashion, art, politics and philosophy intermingle paradoxically in his work





A piece by Thomas Hirschhorn that moves into the collaborative participation level is the Gramsci Monument.

--Commissioned by Dia Art Foundation, *Gramsci Monument* took place on the grounds of Forest Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development in the Morrisania neighborhood of the Bronx, New York. It functioned as a temporary community center.

<http://www.diaart.org/gramsci-monument/index.php>



Gramsci Monument is based on Hirschhorn's will "to establish a definition of monument, to provoke encounters, to create an event, and to think Gramsci today."

Lectures
Radio station
Computer rooms
Art & craft rooms
Library



The Gramsci Monument opened on July 1 and ran through September 15, 2013. It was open seven days a week, from 10 am to 7 pm. People in the housing project and community were welcome to participate.

<http://www.diaart.org/gramsci-monument/index.php>



Personal Note : Professor Bellisio and I went to Gramsci monument. Ask one of us about it.

Created with cheap materials, press board, duct tape, found furniture, etc. the monument functioned as a community center constructed directly in the common area of the housing project.

The forth in a series of projects dedicated to famous thinkers, this monument pays tribute to the Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), famous for his volume of *Prison Notebooks* (1926–1937).



Project Row Houses: Third Ward Houston, Tx



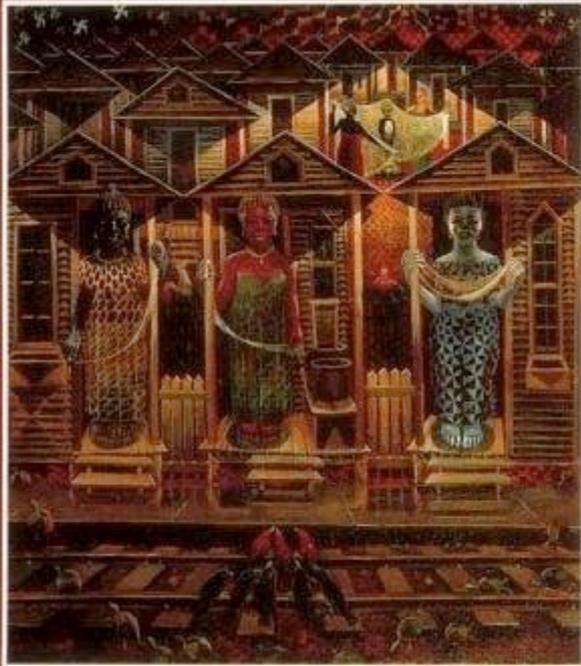
Rick Lowe— artist, architect, urban designer, businessman, activist



Beginning as neighborhood clean up, the artist volunteers began to create things on the windows and construct installations in abandoned houses. Lowe soon saw these two blocks of condemned row houses as part of a community that spoke to the African American experience.

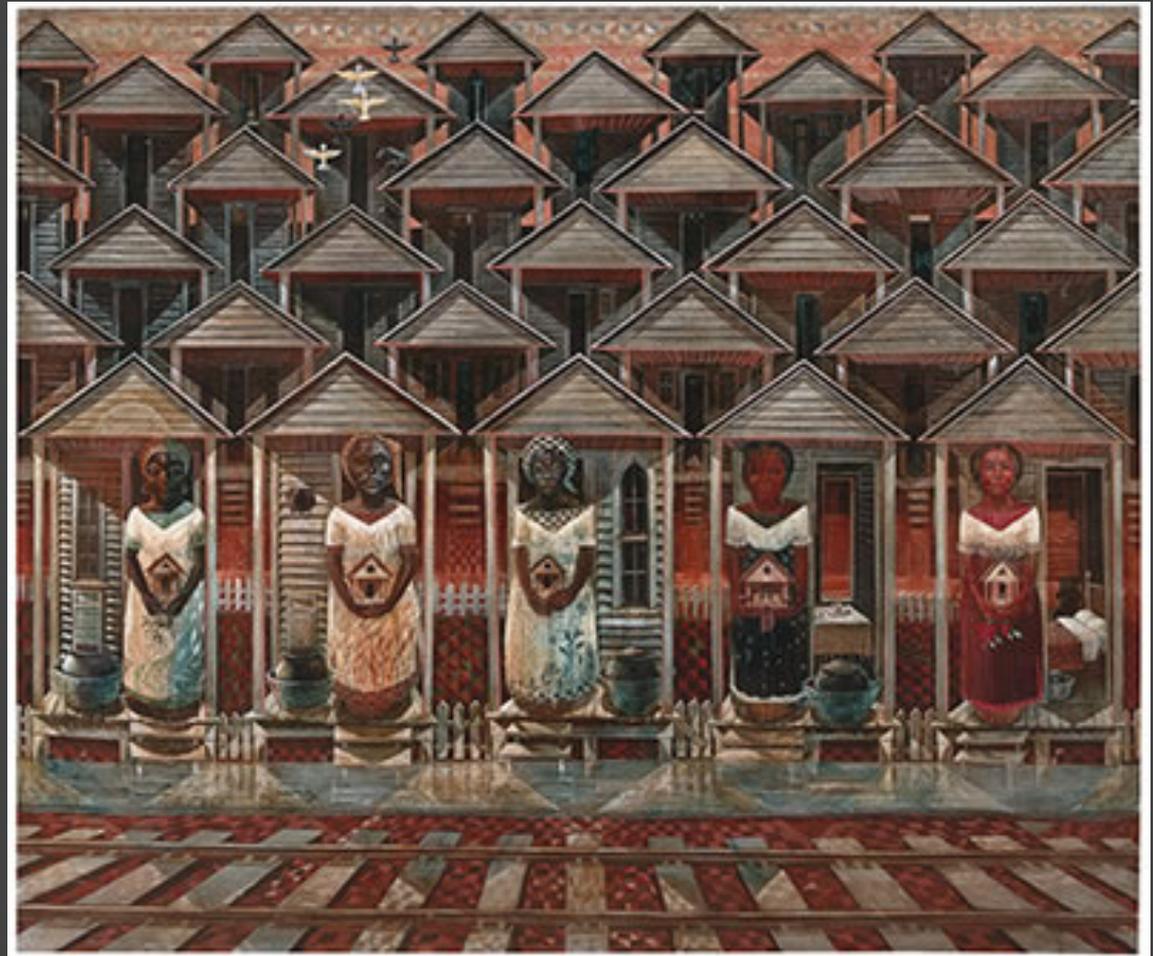


and wanted to reclaim the houses in a way that would recall the paintings of John Biggers.



John Biggers, Shotguns

Bigger's paintings reflect a neighborhood of vibrant creativity, intergenerational exchange... a social safety net





Lowe's problem was how do you create that in a place that is regarded by society as having no value.

Realizing he needed social services, educators, architects and lots of volunteers, a network was established.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHkdQaWt7H8>



Art Exhibition Spaces



Several dozen renovated homes, new homes, a library, multimedia center, childcare, workshops, small businesses, affordable housing were all part of the project.



Shirin Neshat— is an Iranian-American artist whose work addresses issues related to her culture, in particular women's issues. She works with her own conflicted feelings about being Muslim and Female, considering current Fundamentalism in Iran.

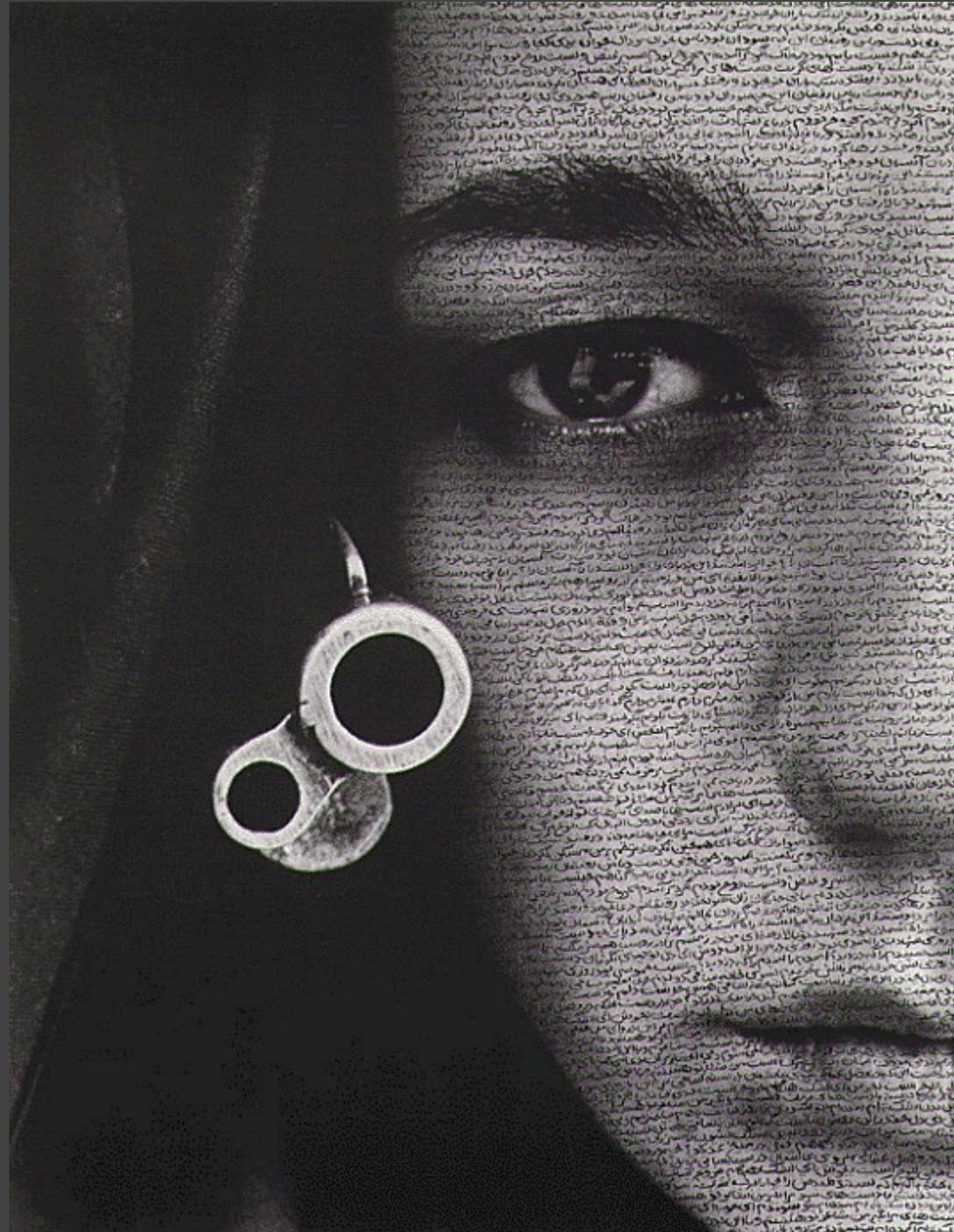




Her work refers to the social, cultural and religious codes of Muslim societies and the complexity of certain oppositions, such as man and woman.



Photography and films colored by religion, gender and a sense of cultural displacement are seen in her work.



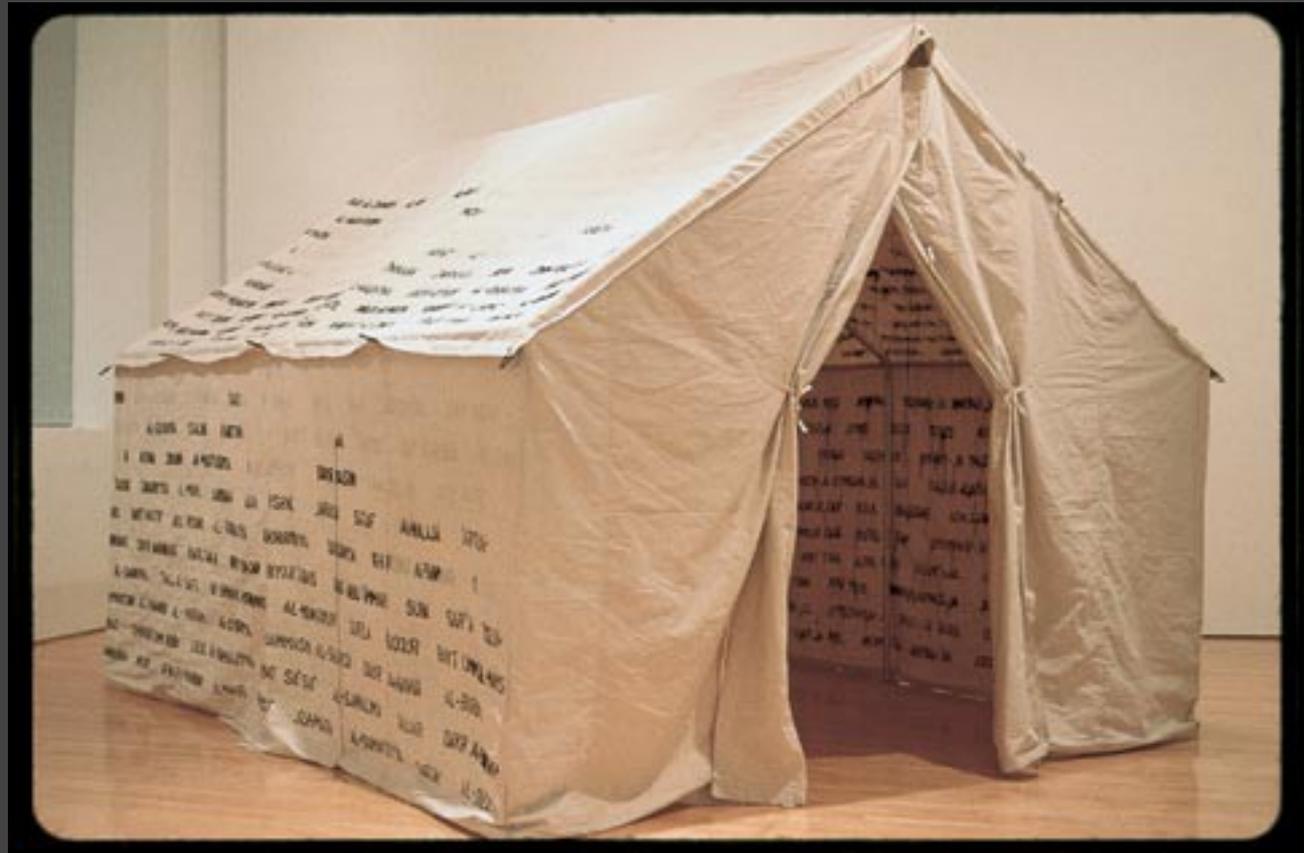


Neshat often emphasizes this theme showing two or more coordinated films concurrently, creating stark visual contrasts through motifs such as light and dark, black and white, male and female.



Emily Jakar—

What is it like for a Palestinian-American artist to make art when each day Palestinians are suffering at home because of the Israeli occupation and the current political situation? How can art help bridge borders and open peoples' eyes to the realities of the Palestinians? r,



“Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948.” Refugee tent and embroidery thread, 2000.

Jacir asked dozens of Palestinians unable to return to their homeland a simple question: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" She then acted on their requests and documented her actions, including kissing one person's aging mother, walking the streets of Nazareth and eating a favorite dish at a restaurant.



Here are some examples:

"Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street."



"Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and place flowers and pray."



The Korean artist, Kim Sooja's epic eleven-day journey *Cities on the Move* — 2727 Kilometers Bottari Truck (November 1997) retraced sites in her memory.

She traveled to different cities and villages where she used to live, carrying colorful bottari on a flat-bed truck. Kim considers the performance "a social sculpture, loaded with memory and history, which locates and then equalizes physical and mental space.

http://www.kimsooja.com/works_video_cities-on-the-move.html





[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=0le-hqLVJm0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0le-hqLVJm0)

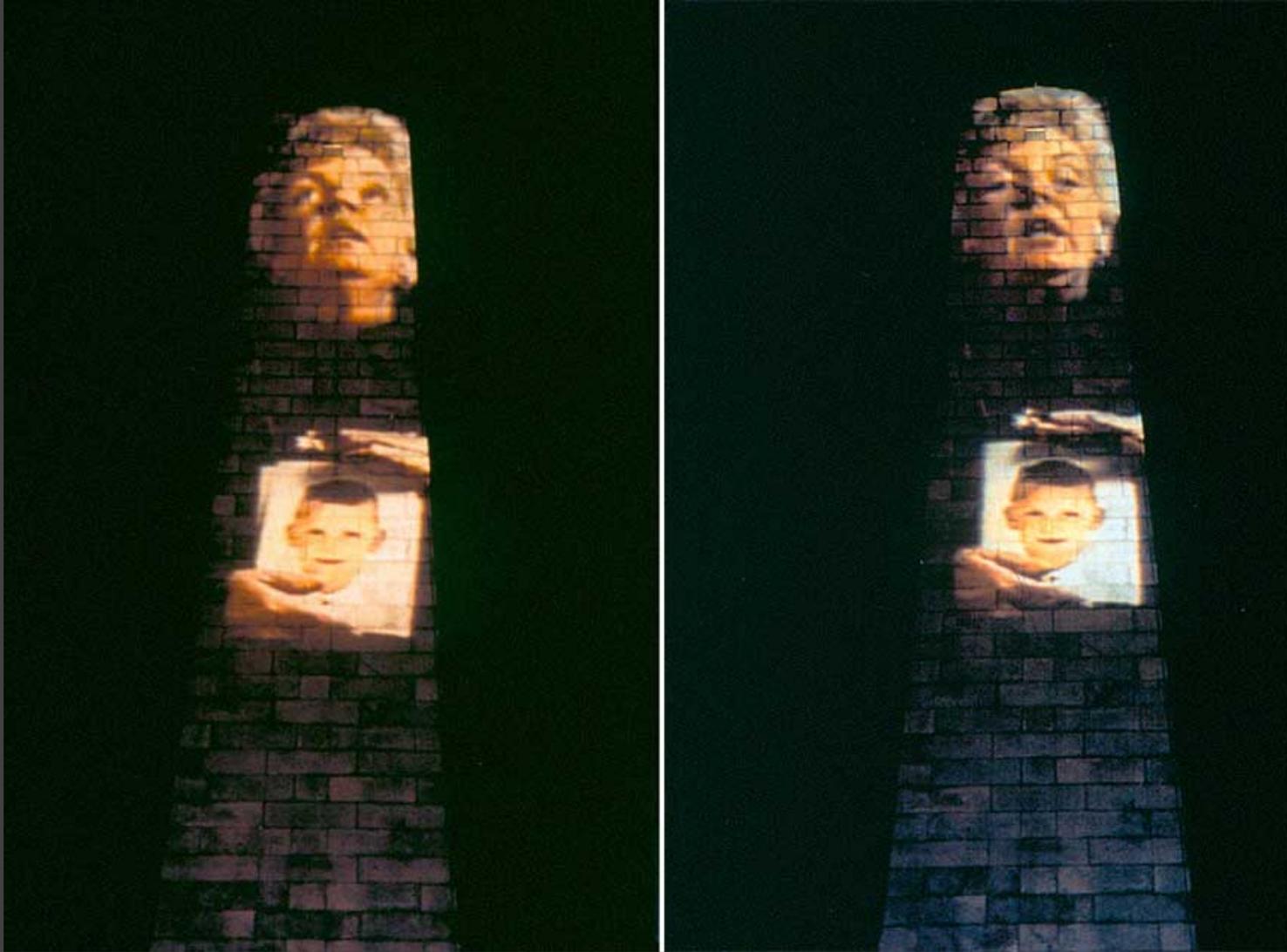
Some of the other performances have political implications, as suggested by *A Beggar Woman* or *A Homeless Woman — Delhi* (2000), in which Kim lies down on the sidewalk of a busy street. The lack of a direct message advocating social change does not affect the two pieces, which render suffering as intrinsic to our condition. Indeed, the indirectness of Kim's premises actually enhances her expression, which feels inevitable in light of its universality.

Kim Sooja, *Beggar Woman*: Times Square Friday, March 11, 2005 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. Times Square, NYC (Broadway and 44th street). Planned in conjunction with *The 59th Minute*, a Creative Time project. 2005

Krzysztof Wodiczko

has addressed timely political, social, and psychological issues through his work as an artist for 30 years.





The Bunker Hill Monument, in Boston, involved projecting images of individuals from the community who had experienced violence in their community, the one surrounding the monument.

“What are our cities? Are they environments that are trying to say something to us? Are they environments in which we communicate with each other? Or are they perhaps the environments of things that we don’t see, of silences, of the voices which we don’t, or would rather not, hear.

The places of all of those back alleys where perhaps the real public space is, where the experiences of which we should be speaking, where voices that we should be listening to, are hidden in the shadows of monuments and memorials. ...

One of the objectives behind my projections is to bring to light all of those voices and experiences, and to animate public space with them in a kind of inspiring and provocative way—maybe in a way of protest”.

Krzysztof Wodiczko



The Bunker Hill Monument, in Boston, involved projecting images of individuals from the community who had experienced violence in their community, the one surrounding the monument.

Krzysztof Wodiczko

The *Homeless Projection*, 1986–1987. Outdoor slide projection at the Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Memorial, Boston, organized by First Night, Boston. Homeless individuals were interviewed and video taped so their voices could be heard. Audio and video was projected on famous monuments in the city.



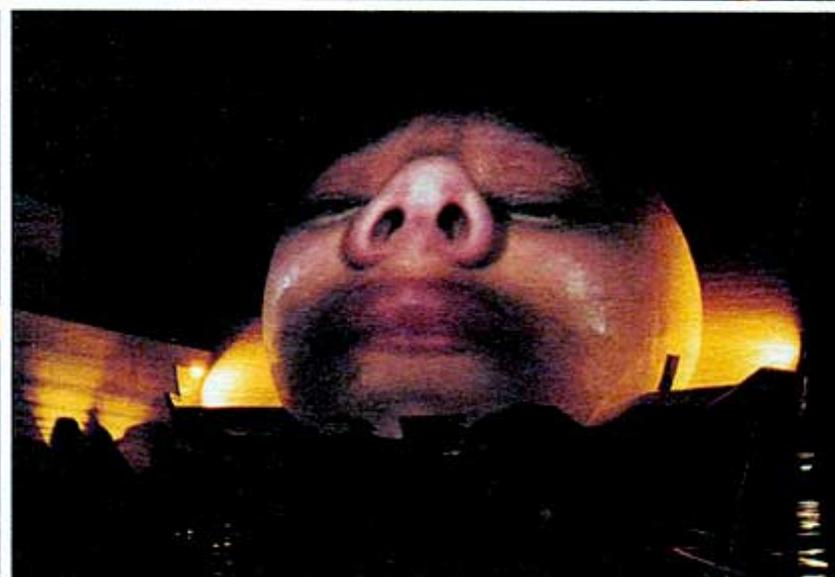
In "The Tijuana Projection", 2001 Wodiczko designed a Public projection onto the Centro Cultural de Tijuana, Mexico. The building, the Centro Cultural de Tijuana, is a symbolic structure, a symbol of the city.

Participants tell their painful and personal stories while their faces are projected onto the public building.



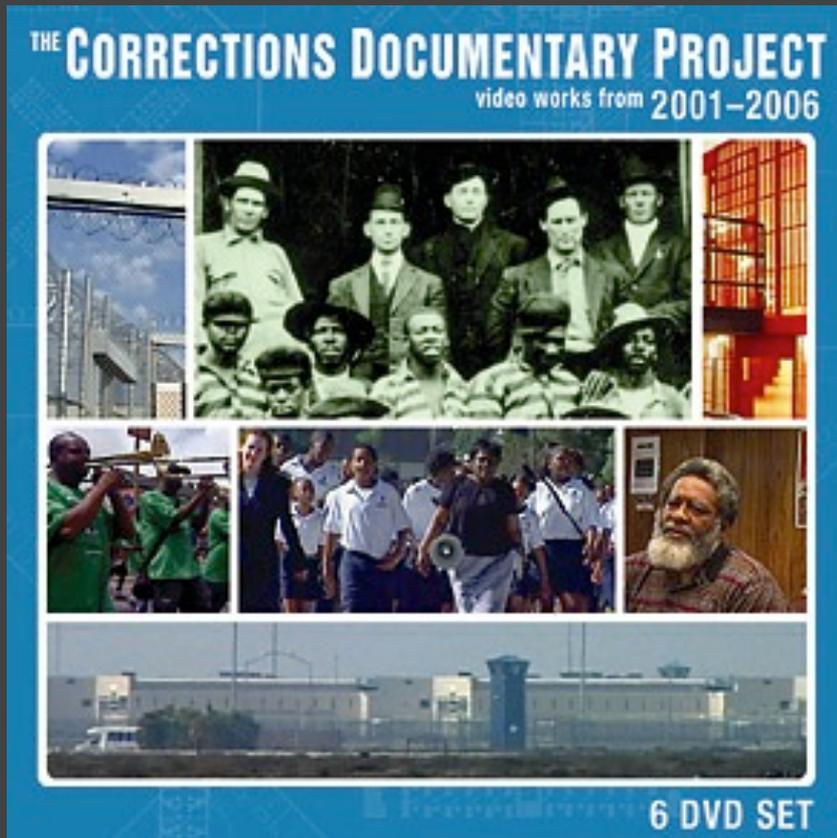


This highly public building becomes the site, the surface, the interface between the public and private as individuals open up and share painful experiences in this public space, things that are usually relegated to the private domain...or even silenced altogether.



Wodiczko's work exists as a form of communal therapy, a way of giving voice to the voiceless, to exposure hidden secrets and a way to see the role and function of the city as both physical structure and community support for everyone who lives there.

Ashley Hunt—Corrections Documentary Project is a self identified artist and activist using video, photography, mapping and writing to engage social movements, modes of learning and public discourse. He is interested in power structures, ones that allow people to accumulate power and ones that keep others from getting it. He views art and activism as complimentary, each informing the other as he draws from the history of social movements and cultural theory.



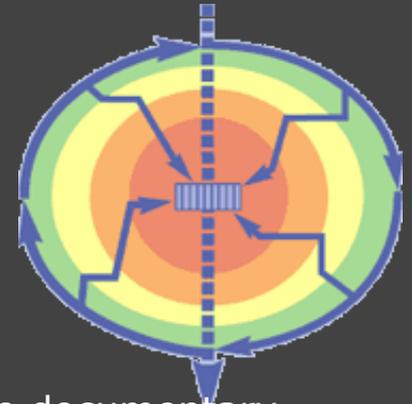


CORRECTIONS DOCUMENTARY PROJECT

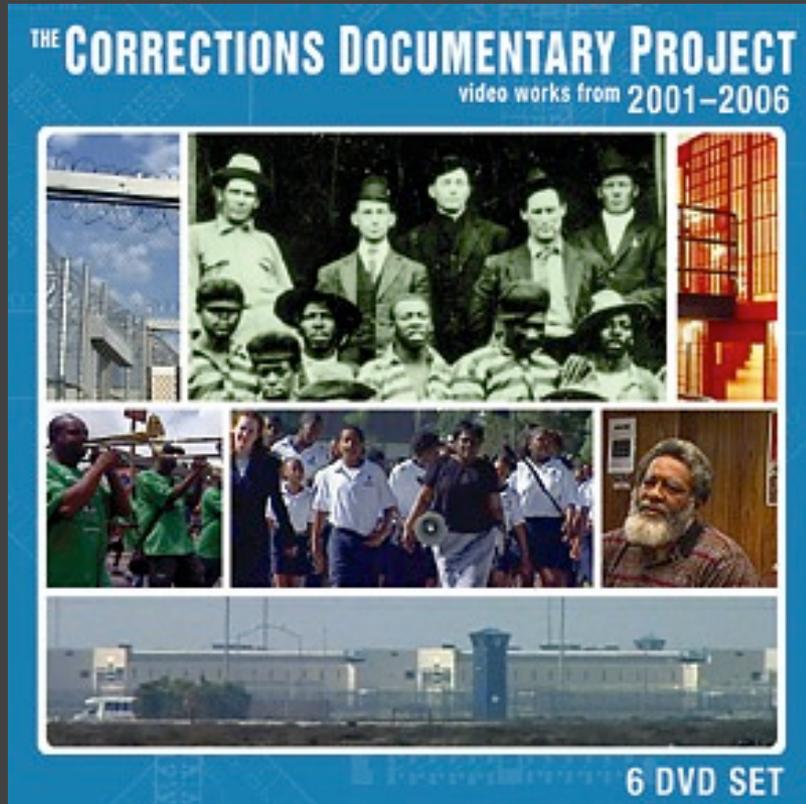
<http://www.correctionsproject.com/index.html>

The Corrections Documentary Project began simply as a single documentary, CORRECTIONS: a 56 minute feature documentary that uses "prison privatization" as a lens onto a larger set of cultural processes, centered around a prison system growing for reasons other than mere "justice."

While privatization was clearly an issue that needed to be debated publicly, it also opened up room for needed conversations about crime and punishment, about what is "natural" and what is built upon politics of race and class, disguised as something else.



Ashley Hunt



10 videos examining the U.S. prison system and its rapid expansion.

Documentaries include:

1. Documentary on Prison Privatization
2. Videos on rebellion, displacement of agriculture and profit making after 9/11.
3. Two videos following grassroots campaign to shut down a notorious youth prison.
4. Interview with activist about criminalization, labor, and obligation of artists.
5. Short on the refusal to evacuate the Orleans Parish Prison during Hurricane Katrina.

Hunt's, The Corrections Documentary Project, centers around the growth of the institution of the prison and its centrality to economic and power restructuring and the politics of race. Originally consisting of 10 videos, examining the US prison system and it's rapid expansion. The project has grown to include the website, maps projects, additional short videos and written documents (including study materials), including public events, all designed to speak to a variety of different audiences and communities.

CORRECTIONS is a story of *justice* turned to *profit*, where the 'war on crime' has found **NEW INVESTORS:**

VENTURE CAPITAL and FOR-PROFIT PRISONS, a story of how PRIVATE PRISONS have returned.

CORRECTIONS (+footnotes)

The Project

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As **CORRECTIONS** proved a useful tool for grassroots and activist groups, new opportunities arose to make further pieces focused on specific campaigns and circumstances. This led to the production of "**footnotes**" to **CORRECTIONS**, pieces which are each in a way a "footnote" to the larger, original piece.

The project is continuing to grow with footnotes and other related projects, continuing to investigate the relationship of mass incarceration in the U.S. and abroad to broader changes society is facing: from the lingering challenges of race, class, gender and sexual based discrimination, to larger philosophical questions as to the value of "the prison" as an institution.

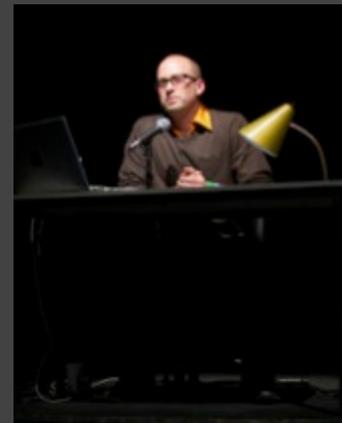


**PRESS PAGE
WRITINGS
WEBSITE FOR PROJECT DIRECTOR
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LINKS**

videos
projects
distribution
project
description
links



<http://www.correctionsproject.com/art/indexWritingframe.html>
Notes on the Emptying of a City.





<https://vimeo.com/20591681>

Notes on the Emptying of a City.

The art world has never been socially or politically neutral. Given this, many artists are recognizing the ability and responsibility to construct socially conscious practices.

There are many more artists working in social areas, working with communities, collaborating and using their creativity as artists for the social good.

Look at the artists listed on the website. You can link some or just Google them for more information.