

C.O.L.A.

2005 Individual Artist Fellowships

Department of Cultural Affairs
City of Los Angeles

This catalog accompanies an exhibition and performance series sponsored by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs featuring its C.O.L.A. 2005 Individual Artist Fellowship recipients in the Visual Arts, Literary Arts, and Performing Arts.

EXHIBITION DATES:

May 13–June 26, 2005

Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

Barnsdall Park

PERFORMANCE DATES:

May 14; June 3, 4, 5; June 10; June 24, 25, 26, 2005

Barnsdall Gallery Theatre

Barnsdall Park

Given the archival dimensions of Kaucyila Brooke's project, her challenge has been to document a public life that seems at odds with posterity and the permanence of an archive.

GABRIEL CIFARELLI

Kaucyila Brooke's artistic practice has long dealt with gender political issues and the relationship of sexuality to public space. In her work, the distinction between the natural and the man-made is called into question, particularly the degree to which the built environment—or the natural environment, for that matter—is accepted as natural when in fact it reinforces a political order. In her piece *Madam and Eve*, the founding myth of the Garden of Eden, which legitimates as "natural" the union between a man and a woman, is deconstructed to reveal its gender bias. Even the original space of the garden itself is shown, in fact, to be always already man-made.

The work Brooke will be doing for C.O.L.A. continues to explore the implications of lesbian space, but in a much more current time period. Her series, *The Boy Mechanic*, documents the waning of lesbian bars in the San Diego area. Begun in 1996 during the Republican National Convention, the piece was part of an exhibition of

artists whose work brought to light groups that were not included in the Republican agenda.

The subject has been presented in multiple forms, from installations to large scale photographs of the façades of the area's lesbian bars, and most recently as a split screen video documentary accompanied by 10 postcards, each one depicting a lesbian bar. In the photographs of the bars' façades, very little architectural detail reflects the use or meaning of the site. Only their cheeky or exotic names, including "The Box Office" and "Lilly's," give an indication of what they have in store. The reason for this is alluded to in the series' title, *The Boy Mechanic*, which refers to an old how-to book. The denizens of these bars have to create a suitable space for their social group out of pre-existing sites.

The documentary meanwhile interviews the women who frequent these establishments. Split into two screens, the right half focuses on the

exteriors of the bars where the viewer is led by a guide to the sites of both current and defunct lesbian meeting places. Playing concurrently, the left screen tours the interior of the two remaining lesbian bars in the area. Once inside, we see the active negotiation between the bar owners, the customers, and the space itself, creating a freeform flexible environment that, in turn, reflects the exterior space of these bars and their relationship to the geography of the city.

In addition, Brooke presents these sites in the form of postcards, a decision that comments ironically on their unstable condition. The "wish you were here" cliché, that a postcard assumes, underscores the fact that most of the bars are no longer "here" and, in this lesbian bar scene, "here" is a constantly shifting entity.

Spaces such as these, occupied by resistance groups, do not particularly lend themselves to architectural memorializing or find themselves



considered by city planners for preservation. Given the archival dimensions of Kaucyila Brooke's project, her challenge has been to document a public life that seems at odds with posterity and the permanence of an archive. The artist has responded to this contradiction by creating a work that takes different forms in response to the environment in which it is exhibited. As the series moves on to the Los Angeles phase of the project, her work will continue to transform and evolve in response.

EDUCATION

- 1986 M.F.A., Photography,
University of Arizona, Tucson,
Arizona
- 1974 B.A., English Literature,
University of Puget Sound,
Tacoma, Washington

EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 *The Boy Mechanic*, platform,
Berlin, Germany (solo)
3rd Berlin Biennial for
Contemporary Art, Berlin,
Germany
- 2001 *Tit for Twat*, Art Resources
Transfer, Inc., New York, New
York (solo)
The Wasteland, Atelier Augarten
of the Oesterreichische
Gallerie Belvedere, Vienna,
Austria
- 1992 *Effected Desire*, Carnegie
Museum, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
- 1991 *The Return of Visual Pleasure*,
Whitney Museum of American
Art, New York, New York

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Frueh, Joanna. "How Do You Play? The Deviant Narratives of Kaucyila Brooke," *Afterimage*, Vol. 17, No. 9,
April 1990
- Hankin, Kelly. *The Girls in the Back*
Room; Looking at the Lesbian Bar,
University of Minnesota Press
- Prinzhorn, Martin. "Kaucyila Brooke—Borderlines," *Camera Austria*
International, Graz Austria, Vol. 86,
2004, pp. 7–16

kaucyila brooke

Born 1952, Oregon City, Oregon
Lives and works in Los Angeles, California
and Vienna, Austria