

The Museum of Modern Art

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DISLOCATIONS

October 20, 1991 - January 7, 1992

A major exhibition featuring new installations by seven artists--Louise Bourgeois, Chris Burden, Sophie Calle, David Hammons, Ilya Kabakov, Bruce Nauman, and Adrian Piper--is on view at The Museum of Modern Art from October 20, 1991, to January 7, 1992. Organized by Robert Storr, curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, *DISLOCATIONS* leads us to question some of the familiar mental landmarks by which we orient our thinking. The term dislocation implies calculated shifts of location and point of view. In the exhibition *DISLOCATIONS*, artist and audience collaborate in mapping previously unimagined spaces or remapping those taken for granted as self-evident.

Several large-scale interiors are among the installations that have been created especially for this exhibition. They are spread throughout the Museum, including portions of galleries devoted to the painting and sculpture collection, and their elements range from monumental sculpture to found objects. Given the quantity and diversity of installation work being done today, the artists have been selected with the aim of bringing together a broad range of formal, poetic, and social practices. Although they vary in background, age, and aesthetic approach, they share a goal of challenging viewers by presenting unfamiliar situations that test habits of observation and call in to question settled attitudes.

The context of the exhibition creates a dialogue among these disparate visions. As Storr writes in the exhibition catalogue, "Representing themselves rather than any tendency or generation or group, the artists and their work..."

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mix origins, ages, purposes, and styles in a way that meaningfully complicates the attitudes and ideas expressed by each on their own and so constellates a whole of intricate connections and equally telling disjunctions."

David Hammons has worked for nearly twenty years on the streets of New York, creating often impermanent constructions in public parks or vacant lots. Random possibility is central to his work, and he sees parallels with his activity in the improvisational music of such artists as Sun Ra and Ornette Coleman. Frequently employing found objects that have included bottle caps, paper bags, cigarettes, records, tires, and human hair, these works reflect the artist's cultural rootedness in urban reality and in his African-American heritage.

Active since the mid-1960s, Ilya Kabakov, like Hammons, is interested in the detritus of daily life, and his art is subtly political. His work for this exhibition, *The Bridge*, is a reconstruction of a housing project tenants' club in the Soviet Union--a room containing furniture that might be found in such a gathering place and paintings by unofficial artists which were to have been the subject of a lecture. These have been pushed aside, however, to make room for the bridge of the installation's title. The artist describes his intention in metaphoric terms as an attempt to make a place within contemporary art for a "mystical" dimension of experience.

Adrian Piper's work has centered on problems of racial identity and self-identification. *What It's Like, What It Is, No. 3*, the third in a series of recent installations, is a square room, approximating a perfect cube, which is a kind of amphitheater with stepped seating. In the room's center is a square, tall column with video monitors at the top. On them is seen the head of a black man who recites a text in which he denies a litany of racist stereotypes.

Absence and presence obsess the French artist Sophie Calle. For *Ghosts*, Calle asked Museum staff members what they recalled of several paintings that she selected to be removed from their usual locations in the galleries. From verbal responses and sketches made for her, Calle has created composite images of the missing works and has placed these images in the locations normally reserved for the actual works. Her project prompts subtly disconcerting thoughts on the relationships between cultural icons and personal memory.

Chris Burden's early performances made literal the threat of danger or discomfort to himself and sometimes to his observers. In his work since the late 1970s, he has extended that concern by finding ways to make abstract concepts, particularly regarding institutional or political attitudes, startlingly concrete. For this exhibition, he has created *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, a counterpart to the Vietnam memorial in Washington designed by Maya Lin. Burden's work is an immense book, a large construction of metal plates affixed to a central axis, which commemorates the estimated three million Vietnamese deaths during the American phase of the Vietnam War. In Storr's words, Burden's piece "is less a matter of laying blame than of accounting for the sheer magnitude of the slaughter in which this country took part."

Louise Bourgeois's long artistic career derives much of its singularity from the formal and material diversity of her work. She has said that assemblage is a means of establishing a reason for being for exiled things that have lost their normal function. *Twosome*, consists of two huge steel cylinders, disused gasoline storage tanks that had been unearthed on orders from the Environmental Protection Agency. One is inserted into the other, creating a chambered lair of obvious and ominous sexual connotation that is big enough for someone to crouch

inside but difficult to enter. It is a place to hide and, should the inner tank retract definitively into the outer one, also a trap.

Over the past twenty years, Bruce Nauman has framed structures, composed phrases, juxtaposed images, and compounded contradictions that put the viewer on the spot. Apparently indifferent to the issue of developing a style, he utilizes many formats, intent on following his ideas wherever they take him. His video installation for this exhibition, *Anthro/Socio*, exemplifies that process. It is set in an empty room where calls for help emanate from a number of monitors and projectors. The script is based on an earlier text-drawing "*Help Me/Hurt Me, Feed Me/Eat Me.*" In its pairing of the concepts of nurture and abuse, the work is consistent with the artist's present preoccupation with learned dependency, suggesting that a plea for help is an admission of powerlessness that in turn grants power to others.

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