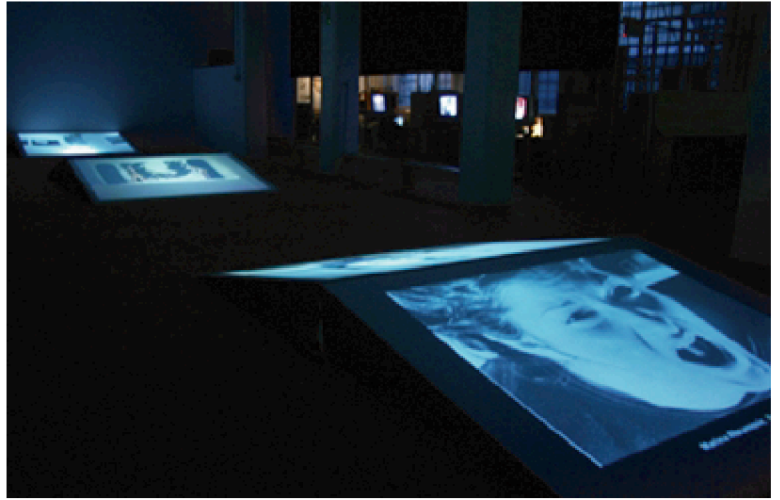


### AI Reviews: Exit Art's "Renegades" Retrospective

by  
Robert Ayers



Installation view of "Renegades: 25 Years of Performance at Exit Art"

NEW YORK, Jan. 19, 2007—Performance art has traditionally existed at the edges of the arts mainstream, often poorly funded, and often presented in alternative spaces that are administered by the artists themselves.

All the more appropriate, then, that the splendid retrospective "Renegades: 25 Years of Performance at Exit Art" should be presented in the gallery's rather out-of-the-way and still industrial-looking space near the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel.

Tracing decades of its activities, Exit Art has filled darkened rooms with text panels (each with its own little reading light), with custom-made Carousel Projector stands, various sorts of video monitors, and—in a lovely and appropriately imaginative solution—a series of projection screens that lie almost flat on the floor, with the projectors suspended somewhere up near the ceiling.

(And then, over in the corner, the Exit Art staff carries on with its business in a dimly lit wire cage.)

Those who regard performance art as the theater of weirdness will not be disappointed. There are shifting images here of fake severed hands and torsos, of a fully grown man playing with toy construction trucks amid piles of dirt, of a guy in a patterned shirt lying on the ground with an onion in his mouth and—at his crotch—another onion spinning playfully on the bit of an electric drill, and there is a woman swathed in rope crawling across the floor with a huge block of ice dragging behind her.

More to the point, though, those of us who have been around performance art all these years and applaud its ability to function as a social and political irritant (and, ever so occasionally, as a force for change) will be equally satisfied.

Established in 1982, Exit Art opened with a typically no-nonsense show entitled "Illegal America" by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo (the remarkable couple who are still its directors). And ever since, it has maintained a position at the critical extreme of arts practice in this city, and along the way supported and disseminated the work of a who's who of radical arts innovators: Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconci, Eleanor Antin, Joseph Beuys, Chris Burden, Valie Export, Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, Gilbert and George, Tehching Hsieh, Paul McCarthy, Linda Montano, Bruce Nauman, Yoko Ono, Dennis Oppenheim, Orlan, Gina Pane, Rachel Rosenthal, Carolee Schneemann, Stelarc ...

It's not a bad list is it? Except that this roster isn't drawn from the whole 25 years of Exit Art history. It is in fact a partial (!) listing of artists included in only one (admittedly mostly documentary) show from 1995 called "Endurance."

I could not begin to count how many artists Ingberman and Colo have worked with during their own heroic quarter-century endurance. When they celebrated their 20th anniversary in 2001 they supposedly attracted a million visitors to their events. Now, it must be way more than that, which is a pretty good indicator of how significant Exit Art has been—and especially the work that they have championed.

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Photos courtesy of Exit Art.