



Cindy Tower Statement

Process as Performance

In 2000 I switched from building installations to simply painting ones that already exist. This has been a deliberate choice. Instead of using common everyday objects to build things out of, I now use common, everyday sites to make paintings of. I studied with Allan Kaprow and attribute this to why I have adopted an anti-aesthetic, realist approach to painting that includes a performance aspect as well. For years I've been almost as interested in the process of making art as in the product itself. Since the eighties, I've been performing as I go about making artwork.

Currently I require a full-time bodyguard and a life-sized dummy to paint with in East Saint Louis. I've been making short videos about the sites and the unique circumstances and chance encounters that take place in them. It is almost as if paintings have become props for real-life experiences. I trespass a lot; deal with weather, season, time, wild dogs, crack addicts and homeless residents. Sometimes I paint with a hard-hat if sites are condemned and bricks are falling. In the winter I have to heat up coco and eat hot dogs cooked on a 55-gallon drum to keep warm. I hoist a 25-foot-high extension ladder to get into some ruins and daily hide and camouflage my paintings because they are too big and wet to transport back home each night.

Painting methods cannot be separated from the subject matter. Everything gets used and becomes part of the piece. Paintings get rained on, hoisted, buried, driven over, stolen, ripped; sometimes charcoal, blood, grass-stain, iron filaments are incorporated. Sometimes works get hit with paintballs or stuck with an occasional hypodermic needle. The act of painting becomes performance. Even the hired bodyguard becomes part of the act. Together we trespass, chase wild dogs, search out new sites, climb over walls and make fires in barrels.

Early on I was aware of the spectacle involved in making art. I have always performed as I have gone about making artwork. While chain sawing the "Men with Meat" series in the eighties, I dressed as a butcher and dyed sawdust red as I went about carving pieces. Odd fragments of wood were transformed into unique slabs of meat as I went about carving--stopping to paint pieces with tromp'loie effects. For "Pirate Cindy" at Tran Hudson Gallery, New York, NY, I rewelded my pick up truck into a pirate ship; complete with a gangplank. Gallery columns served as masts and I dressed as a pirate. Rum and coke was served at the opening and performance artist, Uzi Parnes, cussed out the audience dressed as pirate with a live parrot on his shoulder. As resident artist of Yosemite in 2000, and since Yosemite is rather magical, I wore a self-prescribed park "fairy" uniform to paint in front of the general public--complete with pink tulle serving as mosquito netting and jingle bells keeping away the grizzlies. In this outfit, I spent the summer holding court on top of Half Dome and backpacking.

In my installations I regard viewers as participants as well. For The New Museum's exhibition, "Westward Expansion Inwards", I transformed the gallery into a National Park the viewer hiked through complete with park signage. "Gardenia", at the New Jersey Center for the Visual Arts in Summit, NJ, functioned more as a community garden in which the community actually helped create artwork for the exhibition. "Tank" in San Antonio, TX, was comprised of hundreds of hollowed appliances from a landfill in which the public was invited to install art works under the glass of old televisions, driers, and ovens. In "Hibachi" students from a nearby public school performed the piece in a giant "Fire Dance" on Roosevelt Island, New York.



I make other pieces intended to be performed by nature. For "Man's Ray", at Art Omi, New York, I sewed a giant pair of lips to see what they would whisper when the wind blew. For "Easle", I used tree branches to create erasure drawings when the wind blew the branches.

Today I am performing as I paint highly articulated works in raw conditions with encyclopedic detail in hopes that I can provide evidence of their making in situ and engage the viewer in a visceral, otherworldly experience. Composite views of decrepitude become metaphors for bodily functions and reflect the political climate of our modern world. Wet, gloppy oil paint is loosely applied with control--in a manner in which subjects miraculously dematerialize and reemerge continuously. The additive painting approach mirrors the concept of gradual accumulation and provides an exhausting, claustrophobic sensation that raises questions regarding the complexity and saturated level of exchange in our modern world. As a culture, we've accrued so much wealth that we're outsourcing. Nothing is being made except for art and we've attained a tryptophan-like overload, wallowing in the afterglow of our accumulations.

This year my painting style has changed. I've switched mediums (from working with artist-grade oil paint to left-over, industrial-grade paint salvaged from dumpsters) and am applying paint more loosely. To me, the melting of painting surfaces mirrors that of the economy's deterioration. I feel as though I am painting the actual recession.

Consumption, intimacy, obsolescence, loss, and transcendence, the paintings are an overwhelming celebration of materials and process. They hope to provide the viewer with a visceral, physical experience that not only engages but also actually engulfs the viewer in the self-contained environment of each work of art. Paintings become installations, and I am a performer.

Daughter of a test pilot, Cindy Tower was born on Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Tower hitchhiked to New York upon receiving her BFA from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and became an early pioneer of the Williamsburg art scene in the early eighties. Tower received her MFA from the University of California, San Diego in 1988 and studied with Allan

Kaprow and Eleanor Antin. Tower focused on installation art for over twenty years and painting for the last decade.

Tower has exhibited nationally and has been the focus of numerous one-person exhibitions including the New Museum of Contemporary Art, Patrice Landau Gallery, Trans Hudson, Serge Sorokko Gallery in New York, Bruno David Gallery in St. Louis, and most recently, at the Crisp Museum, Cape Girardeau, MO, where her Workplaces series was shown.

Tower has survived as a free-lance artist in New York working in the Television and Publishing industries. In 2005 she moved from New York to St. Louis to paint disappearing industries, and has been visiting assistant professor of painting at the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. She has lectured and taught at The New York Studio School in New York, and will be a visiting artist at The Savannah College of Art and Design in 2010.