

DARA BIRNBAUM BEFORE WONDER WOMAN



March 30, 2011

**ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX
Celebrating 40 Years**



DARA BIRNBAUM: BEFORE WONDER WOMAN

Early Performance Video

Screening and Conversation

EAI is proud to present a screening and conversation with pioneering video artist **Dara Birnbaum**, whose provocative analyses of television and mass culture have been highly influential. Marking the publication of a major new book, *Dara Birnbaum: The Dark Matter of Media Light*, Birnbaum will screen and speak about her earliest videos, which preceded and informed her well-known single-channel works—including the classic *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*—of the late 1970s and '80s.

In the mid-1970s, Birnbaum created a series of black-and-white, performance-based video exercises that represent her earliest experiments with the medium. Rarely screened in public, these remarkable videos, which were restored by EAI, are being presented together for the first time in New York as part of EAI's ongoing 40th anniversary programming.

SCREENING PROGRAM **Total Running Time: 58:48 min**

Mirroring 1975, 6:01 min, b&w, sound

Control Piece 1975, 5:55 min, b&w, sound

Chaired Anxieties: Abandoned 1975, 5:15 min, b&w, sound

Bar(red) 1975, 3:30 min, b&w, sound

Everything's Gonna Be... 1976, 10:57 min, b&w, sound

Pivot: Turning Around Suppositions 1976, 9:52 min, b&w, sound

Liberty: A Dozen or So Views 1976, 11:30 min, b&w, sound

Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman 1978-79, 5:50 min, color, sound

Note: The program will be preceded by **EAI's 40th Anniversary Intro** by artist Takeshi Murata (2011, 1:04 min, color, sound), which was commissioned by EAI.

The evening will include remarks by Karen Kelly and Barbara Schröder, editors of *Dara Birnbaum: The Dark Matter of Media Light*.

Following the screening, Birnbaum will appear in conversation with Lori Zippay, Executive Director of EAI.

*The following text is excerpted from *Dara Birnbaum: The Dark Matter of Media Light*, published by S.M.A.K. and Fundação de Serralves in association with DelMonico Books·Prestel, 2011.

Mirroring 1975, 6:01 min, b&w, sound

In this early performance-based work, Birnbaum investigates the notion of video as a mirror to create a psychological self-portrait. Devising a simple but ingenious formal exercise, she layers real and reflected images to articulate metaphorically the duality of internal and external selves.*

Control Piece 1975, 5:55 min, b&w, sound

Birnbaum explores the physical expression of psychological states, trying on different extroverted or introverted attitudes. The artist's motions seem ritualistic and practiced...[Her] erratic behavior reaches a climactic fervor; and then she faces the camera one last time with a soulful, hurt expression, simultaneously implicating the cameraperson and the viewer in her physical and emotional exposure.*

Chaired Anxieties: Abandoned 1975, 5:15 min, b&w, sound

Performing in front of a fixed camera, Birnbaum enacts a series of poses that engage the chair as prop and support...[Her] self-consciously choreographed posing, together with her careful framing of the image—tape on the floor appears to mark out the positions of the chair and her body—calls attention to the artist's awareness of and relationship to the camera.*

Bar(red) 1975, 3:30 min, b&w, sound

As in other early videos...Birnbaum combines introverted and extroverted performances for camera, either closing herself off from the camera's gaze or opening herself up to it, laying bare the complex dynamics between the camera, performer, and viewer.*

Everything's Gonna Be... 1976, 10:57 min, b&w, sound

Everything's Gonna Be... features one of Birnbaum's earliest uses of materials appropriated from mass-media sources. The artist brings together performance, photographic images from magazines and newspapers, handwritten and spoken texts, and popular music in a fragmented narrative collage. As such, *Everything's Gonna Be...* represents a departure from her earliest performance video exercises and a move toward her seminal investigations of the cultural and political meaning of mass-media texts.

Pivot: Turning Around Suppositions 1976, 9:52, b&w, sound

This early single-channel video is an investigation of the physical and psychological roles played by director, camera and performer in the film or video shoot... [It] establishes a duality between the camera and its subject, pivoting between a moving camera recording an immobile performer, and a moving performer acting for a stationary camera... [T]hese roles have gendered significance; Birnbaum herself is cameraman Michael Lanley's object, a loaded dynamic demonstrating a woman's subjection to a male gaze.*

Liberty: A Dozen or So Views 1976, 11:30 min, b&w, sound

The title of this early video has a double meaning. Taken literally, it describes the iconic Statue of Liberty, seen from multiple vantages aboard the Staten Island Ferry. As the ship crosses New York Harbor, Birnbaum interviews a dozen or so of her fellow passengers, asking them a series of classificatory questions about their weight, height, eye color, and race. These questions liken the interviews to the registration of immigrants arriving through the Port of New York at Ellis Island...*

Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman 1978-79, 5:50 min, color, sound

Technology/Transformation is recognized as a seminal work in the history of video art for its groundbreaking use of appropriated television imagery to deconstruct its language and meaning. Birnbaum applies a feminist critique, re-editing and manipulating pop-cultural sources to examine representations of women and female sexuality. Of her early appropriation-based video works, Birnbaum has written, "I see them as new 'readymades' for the late twentieth century—composed of dislocated visuals and altered syntax; images cut from their original narrative flow and countered with additional musical texts."*

Dara Birnbaum received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Carnegie Mellon University and a B.F.A. in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute. Birnbaum has taught at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax; California Institute of the Arts, Valencia; Princeton University; and the School of Visual Arts, New York. She has received numerous grants and awards for her work in video, from institutions including the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Tate Gallery, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; among others. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held at The Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Jewish Museum, New York; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Wilkinson Gallery, London; IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia; and the Musee d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, among others. Retrospective screenings have been presented at The American Film Institute, Los Angeles; Kunsthhaus, Zurich; and Kunstmuseum, Berne, Switzerland. Birnbaum was the only video artist invited to participate in Documenta 7, Kassel, Germany; the 1985 Carnegie International, Pittsburgh; and the 74th American Exhibition, Chicago, where she was awarded the Norman Wait Harris Prize. In 2010 she was honored with a USA Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz Fellow award from United States Artists Fellowship Program. In 2011 she was awarded a Creative Artist Residency at the Bellagio Center of the Rockefeller Foundation and a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant. Birnbaum was honored with a major retrospective of her work at S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst) in Ghent, Belgium, in 2009, and the Museu Serralves in Porto, Portugal, in 2010.

EAI: Celebrating 40 Years: Founded in 1971, Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) is one of the world's leading nonprofit resources for video art. A pioneering advocate for media art and artists, EAI fosters the creation, exhibition, distribution and preservation of video art and digital art. EAI's core program is the distribution and preservation of a major collection of over 3,500 new and historical media works by artists. EAI's activities include viewing access, educational services, extensive online resources, and public programs such as artists' talks, exhibitions and panels. The Online Catalogue is a comprehensive resource on the artists and works in the EAI collection, and also features extensive materials on exhibiting, collecting and preserving media art: www.eai.org

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the Experimental Television Center. The Experimental Television Center's Presentation Funds Program is supported by the New York State Council on the Arts.



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