

Innovative Public Art 'to Trip Over' in Springs

By Jess Frost

(8/12/2008) Anne Pasternak, the curator of the Fireplace Project's upcoming exhibit "Intimacy," is the president and artistic director of one of New York's most innovative public art organizations, Creative Time.

When one hears the phrase "public art," the most obvious manifestation is a monument-like sculpture whose purpose is the beautification of public space. Creative Time and the artists it supports have pushed the boundaries of this tradition, finding ingenious ways in which to combine public space and artwork, not only to beautify, but to communicate meaningful ideas.

Working with artists on important issues in a complicated public domain poses a wide range of challenges, but seems fueled by the relationships and enthusiasm these projects bring to her organization.

"I get to work with artists, but I get to work with scientists and politicians and community activists and carry folk in Coney Island, whoever it may be," Mrs. Pasternak said recently. "I don't think most people in the art world can say the same."

Creative Time was established in 1974 as part of a movement of alternative arts organizations born from artists' essential need for more innovative ways to exhibit works without the restrictions of traditional venues. This original "necessity" remains at the core of what Creative Time does, which, Mrs. Pasternak said, relies heavily on a combination of three pursuits.

The concept of "realizing an artist's dream project" is where these projects begin. This idea secures a certain authenticity, as the artists are not being hired to make something determined by an outside source, but are given practical support to realize a long-term goal or vision.

"Creative Time is almost like a Hollywood studio where you commission



Donovan's "Untitled (Paper Plates)" will be in an exhibit curated by Ms. Pasternak at the Fireplace Project in Springs.

Tara



Creative Time

Anne Pasternak

Creative Time is almost like a Hollywood studio where we commission someone to do something and then we go off and produce it,” Mrs. Pasternak said, “fund raising, finding sites, negotiating sites, dealing with insurance, security, putting together a team, promoting the project. . . . We’re a full-service operation.”

The second priority involves Creative Time’s history of working in an activist spirit. “We have a commitment to artistic excellence, and work that we hope is important at its current time and over time. But just because the artist is the focus doesn’t mean we’re not thinking deeply about the public.”

An example of this is now on view in Coney Island. An installation by the artist Steve Powers, “The Waterboarding Thrill Ride,” is an interactive animatronic display based on the controversial interrogation technique. Mrs. Pasternak explained that the work is “trying to raise a consciousness about who we are as a people” and that “torture is a relevant issue, and not one that’s being addressed in the media.”

The third component, and one that has both practical and aesthetic purposes, is responding to and incorporating noteworthy public sites that are either remote or closed to the public.

For example, the program “Art in the Anchorage” has been running during the summer months for over 20 years at the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage (the anchor, or base, on the Brooklyn side of the bridge).

The program transforms the site’s cavernous and cathedral-like rooms into exhibit spaces, housing everything from an interactive halfpipe skate ramp by Maura Sheehan to a video work by Shirin Neshat, as well as a range of performance, music, and sound installations.

“We have a kind of wonderful history of working with sites in transition,” said Mrs. Pasternak, who takes great pleasure in making these compelling but derelict spaces accessible to the public at large.

Perhaps the most well-known project produced with the help of Creative Time is “Tribute in Light,” the collaborative art installation at the site of the World Trade Center, in which two vertical columns of light invoke remembrance of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Another is Doug Aitken’s 2007 piece “Sleepwalkers,” which transformed the brick and mortar of the Museum of Modern Art’s facade into a projected cinematic work that wove together the individual lives being led inside the architecture of New York City. Mrs. Pasternak said it took seven years to convince the artist to take on the project.

Creative Time’s Web site presents an online archive of an astonishing number of projects dating as far back as 1974.



“Double Portrait: The Artist and His Mother, May 2008” is a work by Jim Hodges that can also be seen in the show.

The 30-plus years of innovation the site represents is inspiring to say the least. Cee Scott Brown, a Sag Harbor resident since 1996 who works in real estate, was the director of Creative Time for eight years, until Mrs. Pasternak took over in 1994.

“This is public art at its most effective, in my opinion,” Mr. Scott Brown said. “No appointments to go someplace special and probably pay to get in — just tripping over it in one’s daily practice.”

“I feel, though, as we become more of a year-round community out here,” he said, “we should have more opportunities to be stimulated and provoked by artists creating guerrilla-tactical works of art that surprise, ignite imagination, and don’t cost the public a cent.”

“Trip on it, laugh at it, cry with it,” he said. “Go for it.”

With so many projects running at once, you wouldn’t think Mrs. Pasternak had time to curate an exhibit “on the side,” much less consider it a treat, but that is how the curator refers to the show at the Fireplace Project in Springs.

“When Edsel asked me to do this,” she said of Edsel Williams, the gallery’s creative director, “I thought, I haven’t curated a group show in a space where a whole lot of artworks talk to each other in a long time, and I want to do it.”

“The thing about Edsel is, it’s a commercial gallery, but he’s trying to think of it as a lab, and I think that’s great.”

According to Mrs. Pasternak, the show’s title, “Intimacy,” speaks as much to process and technique as it does to content. “I didn’t want work that was overtly sexual, it was more about time and process and the way the artist addressed the audience,” curatorial priorities that seem to closely match those of Creative Time.

Almost all of the artists included have made new work for the show, and several, such as Jim Hodges and Ugo Rondinone, have worked with Creative Time in the past. Mrs. Pasternak said she would like to work with others, like Glenn Ligon and Wolfgang Laib, in the future.

The curator did admit to breaking her own rule by including a work currently presented by Creative Time. The video, called “Shallow,” is by Malcolm McLaren, an artist and musician.

Mr. McLaren edited pornographic films from the 1960s — down to the moments before and after seduction. By revising the clips, altering their soundtracks and speed, the artist has created a series of “musical paintings,” considerably altering their meaning and social value.

This series will be running as part of Creative Time’s “At 441/2” program, in which video projects are presented on the MTV HD video screen in Times Square.

“Intimacy” will be on view at the Fireplace Project tomorrow through Aug. 25, with an opening reception on Saturday from 6 to 8 p.m.

Many of the works in the exhibit seem to address subjects of a private nature through materials that magnify their meaning, such as Jim Hodges’s “Double Portrait: The Artist and His Mother,” represented by objects that poignantly represent the characters described in the title.

The exhibit will also feature works by Ricci Albenda, Nayland Blake, Kerstin Bratsch, Sophie Calle, Peter Coffin, Ann

Craven, Tara Donovan, Tracey Emin, Tony Feher, Spencer Finch, Ceal Floyer, Lyle Ashton Harris, Sharon Hayes, Jamie Isenstein, Matt Keegan, Wolfgang Laib, Sol Lewitt, Glenn Ligon, Donald Moffett, Not Vital, Adam Putnam, Ugo Rondinone, Frances Stark, and Guido van der Werve.

This show will benefit the work of Creative Time. Information about the programs mentioned above and more can be found at www.creativetime.org.