

# 5000

**5000 ARTISTS RETURN TO ARTISTS SPACE : 25 YEARS**

# 25

**artists space**

1995 SEP-OCT

Sept. 16-Oct. 28: **Project:** Greg Lynn, multimedia architectural installation (Peter Eisenman). Newspaper introduction by Peter Eisenman.

Sept. 26: Peter Eisenman talks with Greg Lynn.

→ © Greg Lynn

**Denise Fasanello** I worked with Connie Butler as a student intern, while I was a junior at Cooper Union. I helped her one or two days a week on a specific project, *Selections*. When Susan Wyatt left and Artists Space was without a director, I continued. I ran the Artists Slide File and later I was hired to work as Gary Nickard's assistant. I helped Artists Space make that gigantic move to SoHo and then stayed on with you (Claudia Gould).

I received the most seriously amazing education from looking at all those slides. I'd never seen anything like it before in my life. I saw real New York artists working, not artists you'd have to see through the gallery or museum system to know about. And I got to meet them. It's crazy to think about the work I was interested in as an intern compared to what I wound up interested in by the time I became Curator.

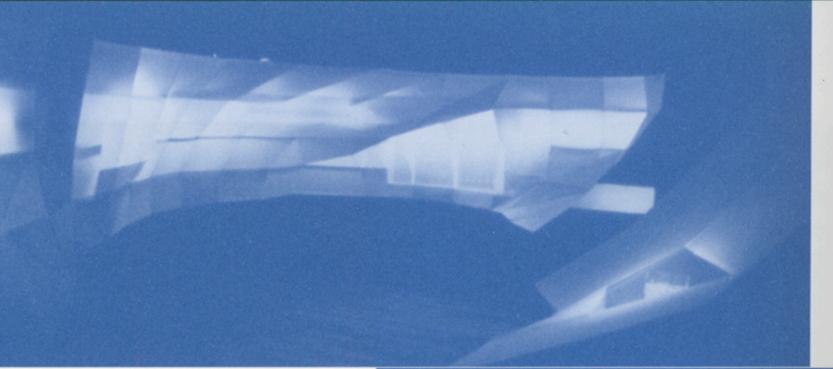
The administration was much bigger when I first started with Susan. Carlos (Gutierrez-Solana) scaled it down a bit. It wasn't until you (Claudia) tapered it to an even smaller team of four that I understood what was happening administratively with the debt and mounting deficit you inherited. That's also when I got the chance to seriously roll up my sleeves and work. When I became Curator, it was the first time I actually went out to look at art. That was Artists Space's biggest mistake—not since Connie Butler had anyone actively gone out into the community and looked at artwork. Shows were done differently by Carlos. He hardly made studio visits. This was one of the responsibilities you (Claudia) insisted on implementing right away. By the time I left our biggest complaint was that we were bogged down with administrative crisis after crisis and couldn't get out to look at more work, which is really what we were supposed to be doing.

I was Curator for only one year. It was certainly a phenomenal period. I became really good at balancing 50 million things at once. The *evansandwong* exhibition and fashion show was the first project I was responsible for organizing. Then it was great starting up the film and video series. I remember when we started to think about the idea for *Open Video Call* and having artists do the selecting. When we started to ask artists to select, it seemed so unfair to have the media artists come in for a day and push the other art aside. So we extended the downtime between shows and had nothing in the gallery but a couple of chairs for video viewing. It was really great. This became signature style for us.

When I first started at Artists Space the look and the feel of it was so different. Connie was a real curator. By the end of the 1980s, the shows were almost too museumlike. I thought, "Well, that's fun and all, but times are changing and it just doesn't seem hip anymore to do exhibitions like that." If Artists Space was supposed to be supportive at the beginning stages of someone's career, well then hell! We should be able to do whatever we want! Such as ask Michel Auder to pick a handful of weird quirky videos, some well known and some not known at all, change the physical space to make it look like a lounge, and have it up for only a couple of weeks; let's have none of these institutionalized exhibitions! Those steps were really important. But NYSCA was thinking, "You have to have a video program on women of color,

who live in wherever," etc. I just wasn't interested in exhibitions like that. They always pushed us to be more institutionalized. But the feel of the space is so important. Now Artists Space is more true to itself. To come into a space and always see something different is really important. The show Gary Simmons and Tony Oursler did felt like a great Artists Space show. The idea of drawing and video is very interesting and new. The Artists Space newspaper is also great. That was the other problem Artists Space had—getting out all the information it had to say. There had been a lack of consistency and continuity in the look of the space, which started to pull together after you (Claudia) came.

I have many close friends—artists and other curators—whom I met through Artists Space. It has helped me find a community. As an artist, Artists Space certainly taught me how to go about being in the art world, which is not an easy thing. At the Town Meeting in February 1994, Robert Atkins said Artists Space really killed itself with its own democracy. It neutralized itself and became about quantity rather than quality. That always echoes in my heart. If you say something changed with alternative spaces, it shouldn't be that it is now about running an orphanage, but about running a contemporary space with good work. You're not going to get everybody in there, but you're going to get more than most, and failing is part of the whole picture. That's truly the mission of Artists Space.





My challenge is to get more money for Artists Space, to develop the endowment, but without losing the look and feel of the organization. For me the "look" of Artists Space is very important. Taking the daily struggle away, stabilizing Artists Space should not make it more institutionalized. We need to be true to ourselves and I feel there can and should be a balance here. We should not lose sight of who we are and what we do best, which is to serve artists in our exhibitions, our Artists File, and now, our grant program. In the 1980s, the East Village looked like an alternative space and the alternative space looked like a museum. Everyone was wearing one another's hats.

RJ: It's true, many of the galleries appropriated the mission of Artists Space. In a way, Artists Space and those early galleries passed like ships in the night. How would you compare the difference between the mission of Artists Space in 1987 and its mission now?

CC: Again, the mission of Artists Space hasn't fundamentally changed, it has simply stretched. We are less institutionalized than we were in 1987. Our budget is less than half of what it was then. It's safe to say we are more like we were in the mid-70s than in the mid-80s, more grassroots because of economics. I don't think of it as a negative shift—as a matter of fact, it is good. In a strange way, this situation has saved us, made us more honest.

RJ: From where you sit today, what was beneficial about Artists Space's historical trajectory: the embattlement that Susan Wyatt suffered, the scrutiny of federal agencies, of Congress, and then the budget reductions?

CC: There is no doubt that the controversy surrounding the exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* (1989) was historic and interesting for the organization as a whole. I have some private thoughts about the entire sequence of events and how Artists Space handled aspects of it, but in retrospect, the episode was important. It shaped many things we still struggle with today—for instance, with our government and the NEA. It is another notch on our timeline.

DF: I wonder if you feel the weight and richness of Artists Space's history to be burdensome, in the sense that you feel competitive with it?

CC: In the beginning, I did. The glory days were long gone. I feel very free now, despite the constant struggle and juggling of money. I am able to look to the future without losing touch with the day to day. However, I am envious of the spontaneity with which they did shows in the past because of the unconditional support of NYSCA, the NEA, and the DCA.

Rags Watkins told me the story about the first time he saw the work of Laurie Simmons. Carroll Dunham showed Rags slides of Laurie's work. He then showed them to Helene Winer. A month later, Laurie had a one-person show at Artists Space. I love this immediacy. Other people have told similar stories.

RJ: If Helene's tenure is marked by the construction of *Pictures*, Linda's by multiculturalism and greater amounts of money flowing through the institution, Susan's by this embattled relationship with the government, and Carlos's by a commitment to the AIDS FORUM and an intensification of multiculturalism, what's yours? Is it the recovery of an earlier mission?