

16BeaverGroup.org

Monday Night -- 2.16.04 -- Lisi Raskin – Women Don't Lie --

February 16th, 2004

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1. About this Monday

What: Artist talk / discussion / presentation

When: 7:30pm

Where: 16 Beaver Street, 5th Floor

Who: All are invited

Bring your flashlights and sleeping bags and join us for a discussion about:

Boyhood and the Landscape as a location/site for ideas, thoughts, art practice, play, subversion, pollution, sex acts between minors, taking drugs.

Private property/Public Property/Trespassing

The frontier myth and motion or vehicle mediated experience:

From the horse to the Nachtzug

American automobile culture,

European high speed train culture.

the bus from Vilnius to Salzburg.

And within all of these constructs of motion and ownership and motion again... What is pictorial, picturesque and sublime? Where can you find it these days? What mechanisms make these notions viable/selling points within the frame work of consumer culture? Is the car window analogous to the television screen?

Home ownership, car ownership, pride in ownership, ownership, ownership, ownership

Hope to see you there!

2. About Lisi Raskin

Lisi Raskin was born in Miami, Florida just a few miles from Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant. From a very early age, she explored the multi dimensional landscape of suburbia as a play space with her brother and friends. To this day, the landscape, its dangers and pathologies continue to be

a stage for her work. In the summer of 2003, Lisi visited the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant in Lithuania as a research trip for an installation she did at the Contemporary Art Center in Vilnius. Other projects that involve the landscape and nuclear history/pathologies include an installation entitled “Research Station” at the High Desert Test Sites in Joshua Tree, California and a forthcoming mill tailings enclosure at the Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, New York that will open in May of this year.

3. About her work

I projected everything into the future where there was the possibility of representation, especially if I could fill in the pertinent cultural information. So with a modernist brush and the palette of an entrepreneur/real estate developer, I set off to create a new world. Leave this one, fuck it, it’s fucking fucked. After all we are harder, colder and faster now. Even though I feel slow and stupid. Anyway, I wasn’t thinking about utopia when I was envisioning the Off World Colonies, instead I was thinking about a way to subvert the utopian reflex in people around me – I mean I know that everyone in New York is soooo over the utopian reflex that it is on its way back again as art but this isn’t the same as the utopia reflex in Asheville, North Carolina where I happened to be living. The people had somehow escaped/rejected the cynicism of the northeastern part of the United States. But this type of idealism, yoga, hippy spirituality can get really aggravating, especially when you are living in a world where it is goddamn obvious that utopia had failed. People lived in yurts outside of Asheville and had all kinds of nostalgia for “nature” which mostly existed in the form of constructs by Fredrick Law Olmstead like the Blue Ridge parkway. So I was thinking about a way to subvert this specific type of utopian reflex and I realized that creating a world where pathology shaped the trajectory was the way to go. To hell with idealistic, technological progress. Progress is bullshit anyway.

3.1 Nukepack Website

<http://www.nukepack.com/>

4. Time and Space Travel: an interview

Time and Space Travel
An interview with Lisi Raskin

Kristina Inciuraite: 1984 is the title of a book by George Orwell. This book was about mass control and this idea is still a very hot issue today within the problems of globalisation. Your installation for 24/7 is entitled 84. Are there some references to George Orwell’s writing in your work?

Lisi: I suppose that a reference to George Orwell is inescapable when referring to the year 1984. I must admit that this book had a huge influence on me when I read it as a teenager in the early 1990’s. The title of our installation for 24/7 refers to the year 1984 because that is the year that I learned about Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and Nuclear Power. In 1984, the cold war atomic reality was reflected in popular culture in a massive way and I was 9 years old; I consumed a lot of popular culture. Some of the things that influenced me included, Nena’s hit song 99 Luftballons and a very scary movie called Silkwood about a woman who gets contaminated at the factory where she works. This factory manufactures plutonium rods for use in nuclear plants, I think. Anyway, in the film there are these horrific scenes when contaminated employees get

scrubbed down in the showers with wire brushes. There is a lot of screaming. Fear was paramount. Meryl Streep plays Silkwood and she was fantastic. There are many other moments of popular culture that influenced my thinking and play in the year 1984.

My brother Kenny and I would hang out in these abandoned and somewhat dangerous spaces, I guess you would call them transitional. For example, we used to play in a field beneath massive power lines. Being in the landscape of Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant really brought all of these experiences back into focus.

Kristina: Institutionalised societies and military structures build atmospheres of power and discipline, but don't guarantee safety. Tension always appears inside/ outside these powerful structures. It creates a fear, which maintains discipline among the members of the society.

However, this fear can activate imagination and even very crazy ideas. I think the 11/09 terrorist hits became such a crazy manifestation. The roots of such a horrible spectacle were in pop culture, and before the attacks there was a virtual game that showed the attacks on the NYC twin towers. The imagination through fear is hidden in our sub consciousness and keeps in step with sexual and death related imagery. The imagination becomes stronger when it is crazier. That is good inspiration for artistic activity.

So, in the territory of Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant you revived your memories about scary pop images and your childhood games in dangerous places. Nevertheless, you used/documented the Ignalina NPP territory with the sense of irony - for you this place was like a viable home site. Can you comment this?

Lisi: I actually don't think that I went to the power plant with intentions of irony. Instead I went to the landscape around the power plant trying to achieve a romantic, pastoral, even picturesque experience. See, I wanted to be seduced by the natural beauty of the lake district and even the beauty of radioactive things or the fear/perception of such things. The biggest issue for me was how can I obfuscate the fear of a melt down and subsequently will I be able to sustain this sense of obfuscation long enough to have a romantic experience while shooting photographs; one of the most relaxing and interesting activities for me.

I think that the viable home sites idea really comes out of the fact that Kenny and I used to live in such suburban places and that where we are from, almost every piece of green space that is not protected by a state or national park is fair game for developers.

We have a shared attitude about such spaces, maybe it is a bit of dark humor about accidents, science and progress but it is not a "ha ha" kind of humor. This shared attitude made our collaboration possible and necessary.

I think that there is a certain sense of optimism about capitalism and progress, especially in Lithuania regarding the pending EU status. But in America we are living in a decrepit stage of late capitalism. Kenny and I have seen progress spin out of control especially regarding the development of real estate. There is a shopping center in Miami that has been torn down and rebuilt 3 times. It took them three different groups of investors, three different architects and 10 years to figure out how to make people come to this particular shopping mall. Such are the problems of late capitalism.

So in the fiction that I have been building, I have an alter ego or character named Herr Doktor Wolfgang Hauptman. Hauptman is the leisure class scholar son of the CEO of NukePack, an invented corporation that manufactures the NukePack, a personal battery pack that functions like a western European nuclear reactor. Anyway, Hauptman is the lead scientist of NukePack's research division and because of the events surrounding a nuclear mishap in New York, he has discovered a fungus that can revitalize the landscape around a former nuclear power plant. Hence this character has utopian leanings, not ironic leanings. I think that irony is something that a viewer can always bring to any artwork but I am trying to go deeper in terms of my engagement with my subject matter. For example, I was truly terrified the entire time we were at Ignalina NPP, in Visaginas and even while we were in the country at that beautiful lake house. I had nightmares every night about a meltdown and the contamination of my own body from time spent at Ignalina NPP, I was even happy when our permission to enter the plant was denied. I did not want to go inside.

But still, I'm never sure if an acute ambivalence about things like nuclear power can be interpreted by viewers but I certainly feel things like this especially about Ignalina NPP. When I was doing research on Ignalina and I learned that it provided 80% of Lithuania's power, from this point on

my relationship with the prospect of nuclear power could no longer be a “for” or “against” kind of a thing. If the entire economy of Lithuania depends on Ignalina NPP how could I simply say, I am against nuclear power so shut the plant down - I continuously find myself thinking about the lives of the people living in Lithuania and depending on the prosperity created by the sale of such power.

In the voice over for the video, at least the English version, I was trying very hard not to read the text ironically but instead read it earnestly. I guess it is hard to know how these things will come across especially when we have been living in an age of irony for so long. Often times I find myself laughing at the fact that we even use nuclear power and transport the waste around the United States on tractor trailers but I am not laughing because I think it is funny but rather, I don't know how else to process the stupidity of policy makers and I think this goes back to what you referred to as “the tension that appears inside and outside of power structures”. Laughter is often a tension breaker.

Kristina: I remember my childhood experiences at the youth summer camp, we had some Lithuanian-Americans participants. Our guests were totally afraid of the living conditions in the forest located in the Northern part of Lithuania. This camp was near the river that was contaminated with a chemical leak from the factory that was a few kilometers away. This river changed color sometimes, but we drank the water, as other normal water was nonexistent. At the very beginning there were some children that had illnesses, but later organisms adapted to this shit in the water. A contamination in Lithuania was the reality, not a fiction. And for me there was no irony at all. Actually many rivers or lakes were contaminated during Soviet decades as the cleaning facilities were very expensive then. Our ecosystem suffered a lot.

Now the situation is better. For instance, the lake Drukshiai close to Ignalina Nuclear Power plant is not contaminated at all. You saw how many fish the fisherman hooked in the lake, right? I read in a report from the Austrian institute of ecology that the Ignalina NPP is the safest among European NPP with RBMK reactors (The Ignalina nuclear power plant, like all the stations with RBMK reactors, has a direct cycle configuration - saturated steam is formed in the reactor proper by passing the light water through the reactor core and is fed to the turbine at a pressure of 6,5 MPa. The light water circulates over a closed circuit). The German newspaper “Frankfurter Rundschau” announced this news in 2002. The most dangerous reactor in Europe is in Armenia. So, the EU demand to close Ignalina NPP is simply the political, but not economic or ecological solution.

You're right, there is quite a beautiful landscape around Ignalina NPP. There is a lot of greenery in Lithuania that isn't inhabited still as compared with American suburbs, which you named 'fair game for developers'. For the installation at 24/7 exhibition you will use photos with the landscape view from Ignalina NPP territory with the task to build a real estate sales office. Can you describe what spectators will find in this office?

Lisi: We have also had instances of contamination and pollution of rivers and lakes in the United States. There is a river next to Bull Run coal plant in East Tennessee that is so polluted with PCB's that there is a sign out front asking people not to fish, but they still do. I never will believe any journalist, scientist or policy maker that tells me that nuclear power is safe because the effects of nuclear accidents are too totalizing. I don't believe that Ignalina is any more dangerous than any other nuclear plant. What is safe when you're dealing with plutonium, a substance that causes cancer no matter how small the dose? These issues are the nature of my fears, not whether RBMK graphite moderated reactors are more dangerous than nuclear reactors designed in the west, etc.

In the sales office, there will be a promotional video about Ignalina Heights with both an English and Lithuanian version, a brochure for Ignalina Heights, various floor plans and renderings of houses, binders that contain 'options' for those wishing to customize their homes and other such sales literature. There will also be several large posters or advertisements for both Ignalina Heights and Terra-Clean, the product that Hauptman discovered, the one that helps revivify the landscape surrounding the plant.

Then I will make a large drawing using the photographs that Kenny shot at Ignalina in conjunction with these arial maps that we got at the land planning office in Asheville, North Carolina. There will also be some composite drawings of HorizonMars homes in the landscape around Ignalina.

Kristina: Safety is more problem for the workers who deal with the plutonium inside the nuclear power plants each day, but not for us, who are keeping quite safe distance. On the other hand, how

many unexpected things daily life brings to us: natural calamity, crash, war, bad food, depression, etc. Do you believe in destiny?

I guess, even your interest in dangerous objects can be called a play with the destiny. You are selecting material for your installations so precisely. In the meantime, you are living inside the problems, which you are showing. I wondered about the fact that your objects of attention are taken from the male zone of interests. Could your art be considered feminist?

Lisi: What do you mean by a male zone of interest? And what is feminist art?

Kristina: Dangerous zones like nuclear power plants and land planning offices can be metaphorically understood as zones of power - male zones of domination. In other words, the phalocentric majority is playing an important role in the daily politics, where questions of power and competition for space is very active. You are participating in these so-called male zones of interests. But you are going even further by revealing critical reflections about late capitalism, contamination, etc. I think these critical reflections can be attached to the label feminist.

Lisi: I think that many men are in the process of critically reflecting on late capitalism like the American writer Don DeLillo, the American painter Marc Handelman, the theorist Paul Virilio and certainly Noam Chomsky for years. Would you be willing to attach a feminist label to the work of these people as well?

I guess I understand that men are predominantly responsible for the decisions made in structures like nuclear power plants, state governments, etc and I suppose you mean that I am participating in these zones of power through the making of this fiction and the making of Hauptman. Using this logic, we could say that the entire world is a male zone of power.

I'm just ambivalent to label interests according to gender and then to go further and consider gender as something fixed. For example, I am certain that every morning, the director of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant puts on his game face and goes to work. For the sake of his job he must project an image of absolute confidence in the INPP and this is a performance in and of itself, not because he isn't convinced but because he probably worries about the safety of the plant and these worries probably wake him up late at night. I have no doubts about this situation and as far as I'm concerned, both realities are simultaneously possible. And these spaces of doubt and paranoia, especially in men are at the heart of what interests me. I try to consider the character of Hauptman according to this duality.

Kristina: The discussion about male zone of power prompts us come back to the beginning – the tension inside and outside powerful structures, which create a suspension of time - the fear, doubt or paranoia that something will happen. I guess such suspension shifts back to slowness at some point. This slowness is becoming a feature of contemporary life while the high speed of consumption of time and space has evoked criticism of late capitalism. And finally, according to Chris Dercon, a director of the Haus der Kunst in Munich: “speed is the false liquidation of art, instead slowness seems a becoming utopia”.

Kristina Inciuraite (CAC curator and artist)

Lisi Raskin (artist and writer)

The short description of your project for 24/7 newspaper:

The installation for 24/7 is entitled 84 after the year that HorizonMars Development was created. Incidentally, 1984 is also the year when I began to learn about the US/Soviet Nuclear arsenals, Nena's hit 99 Luftballoons was #1 on the US charts and many other popular culture phenomena in the United States pointed to a shared and long lived cold war anxiety.

In many ways, 84 is an attempt to synthesize the issues of land use in the case of nuclear power and its pathologies using a typically American, global capitalist approach to land use via the model of the suburban housing subdivision. Aside from Kenny's and my interest in the modular home industry and the new urbanism model of architectural planning, our intentions when entering the landscape around the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant were multi faceted. On one hand we were trying to view the landscape as a real estate developer would: as though every space were a viable home site. On the other hand, we were trying to lose ourselves in the possibility of a pastoral, picturesque or sublime

experience while in the presence of such a dangerous and mammoth monument to a specifically Soviet era notion of progress.

The installation of 84 will consist of a mock sales office for the real estate tycoon Bernhart Bruno of HorizonMars Development. We will present everything that an individual interested in buying a home in Ignalina Heights Planned Community would need to know. This includes carpet and siding samples, floor plans and architectural renderings of houses, a sales video in both English and Lithuanian, a brochure and various photographs of the landscape surrounding the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. Some of these photographs will include composite drawings that merge housing samples into the picturesque landscape surrounding Lake Drukshiai.

5. About this Series : Women Don't Lie !

Women Don't Lie ? They do! they lie!

a lie : a consciously untrue statement which is not considered criminal; a falsehood rendered venial or praiseworthy by its motive.

“ A Lie is That which is not intended to injure any Body in his Fortune, Interest, or Reputation but only to gratify a garrulous Disposition and the Itch of amusing People by telling Them wonderful Stories.”