

Art in the twenty-first century



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ART IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY Eleanor Antin was born in New York in 1935. She is an influential performance artist, filmmaker, and installation artist. She has also worked for many years in drawing, writing, and photography. She investigates and indulges herself into history, whether of ancient Rome, the Crimean War, the salons of nineteenth-century Europe, or her own Jewish heritage and Yiddish culture, as a way to explore the present. She has had one-woman exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Wadsworth Athenaeum, as well as major installations at the Hirshhorn Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Jewish Museum in New York. She's an artist who expose her many selves. Her most famous persona is that of Eleanora Antinova, the tragically overlooked black ballerina of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Appearing as Antinova in scripted and non-scripted performances for over a decade, Antin has blurred the distinction between her identity and that of her character. In the process, she has created a rich body of work detailing the multiple facets of her beloved Antinova, including a fictitious memoir and numerous films, photographs, installations, performances, and drawings. She has written two books (*Being Antinova* and *Eleanora Antinova Plays*). In her 2001 series "The Last Days of Pompeii," Antin lingers behind the camera to stage the final, catastrophic days of Pompeii in the prosperous hills of La Jolla, California. In "The Golden Death" from this series, the imagined citizens of Pompeii drown in the excess of their own wealth, an ironic parable of American culture in the throes of over-consumption. Eleanor Antin received a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1997 and a Media Achievement Award from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture in 1998. She has had numerous solo exhibitions, including an

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award-winning retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1999. Antin is a highly respected artist and teacher, and has been a professor of visual arts at the University of California, San Diego since 1975. She lives with her husband and son in Southern California.

Antin's work is largely concerned with issues of identity and the role of women in society.

EVALUATION

Title: " The Artist's Studio" from The Last Days of Pompeii

Material: Chromogenic print

Size: 46 5/8 x 58 5/8 inches

Year Completed: 2001

Style: Contemporary

Content: The swaddled skull on a shelf in the studio of a male sculptor who is translating a voluptuous nude female into stone becomes a vanitas symbol; a plate of half-eaten pomegranates signals the desire of a man being tantalized by a snake-wielding priestess. Costumes are appropriately theatrical, with characters swathed in togas slung with cloaks in vivid hues of red, purple and gold. The gleaming white Neo-Classical garden set is, presumably, in California, where Antin makes her home. Its parapets, grand staircases and sheltered side gardens are used to great effect (Heartney, 2002).

Meaning of the Work: What is the artist trying to say

" Pompeii, with its grand murals, flourishing gardens, excavated relics of everyday life, and ash covered corpses has haunted western culture since its discovery over 300 years ago. The images of the flourishing Roman town living the good life on the brink of annihilation has always suggested

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uncomfortable parallels with the contemporary world, where the sunlit world turns out to have dark shadows in which cruelty, pain, and death lurk at the edge of consciousness. It's easy to see the connection to the affluent beach towns hugging the turbulent earth and slippery coast of my own Southern California. And part of the fascination is Rome itself, the great empire that owned and then lost the world. Every century has reinvented her in the light of its own desires, fears and lies. Seeing it through a scrim of 19th century salon painting (Alma-Tadema, Lord Leighton, Puvis de Chavannes) that I am recreating as a set of large color photographs of my own images, I am excavating a Pompeii of my own invention in which beautiful, affluent people live the good life, innocent of the disasters waiting just around the corner (Antin, 2001)."

" Pompeii is a photographic sequence. It's directing a whole host of actors placed in another historical period, and it deals with art, theatricality, and with what I think is our present-day situation (Antin, 2001)."

R E F E R E N C E

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