

Alexander Gray Associates inaugurated their new West Chelsea space with "What's Left: Artworks Made by a Public" (through March 13), a group show highlighting performances activated by viewer engagement alone. Part survey of political art since the 1960s, part object lesson in audience participation, the overview was provided by four historical and more recent performances by Alison Knowles, Karen Finley, Lorraine O'Grady and Paul Ramirez Jonas, in which the originals were reframed as both documentation and archive. Another part of the show's investigation was how such performances can continue in any case to exist objectively.

The opening reception saw Knowles reperform her #2 *Proposition (Make a Salad)*, a seminal Fluxus work from 1962. Elevating the banal act of making a salad to high art, the piece has been reperformed continuously for nearly four decades, with recent incarnations at the Tate Modern and Wexner Center. As always, the performance begins with musicians playing a Mozart duet for violin and cello, which is then followed by Knowles and her assistants chopping away at salad ingredients, eventually combining them in two large plastic vats. After the salad was seasoned, servings were distributed among the audience. As everyone hungrily ate their salads, the strangeness of the situation soon gave way to a sense of familiarity and continuity with the past.

The show's remaining three performances were arti-



facts withdrawn from resurrection or reenactment. O'Grady's 1983 *Art Is...* was originally a response to an acquaintance's remark that "avant-garde art doesn't have anything to do with black people," which led to a joyous participation in Harlem's African-American Day Parade in September of that year. The black Boston artist and 15 young actors and dancers, all dressed in white, hopped on and off a slow moving float, on which a huge antique gold frame had been installed. Anything that happened to find itself "framed" in this way was declared a work of art. At the same time, people in the crowd had smaller empty gold frames held up against them by O'Grady's crew, who shouted phrases at them like "That's right, that's what art is, WE're the art!" Present here only as photo-documentation, the performance's carnivalesque atmosphere still shined through. Ironically, given these ghostly traces of a long-ago occurrence, the original gesture was not at all advertised as an art event, O'Grady having rather chosen to leave it as a fleeting moment in time, in the manner of Duchamp. For the next five years, O'Grady withdrew from the art world to take care of her ailing mother.

Finley's 1991 *Ribbon Gate* was first presented at The Kitchen in New York and L.A.'s MOCA. The public was invited to tie multicolored ribbons to an aged wrought-iron gate in memory of someone they knew who had died of HIV/AIDS. Since then, Finley's work has noticeably aged. The thousands of ribbons have faded, as have the names or prayers written on them. A more recent work was Jonas's *Talisman I* (2008-09), a triptych containing objects from his contribution to the 28th São Paulo Biennial. Addressing the biennial's "in living contact" theme, Jonas got hundreds of São Paulo residents to exchange their house keys for those to the main exhibition hall. He had each participant sign a contract that detailed in several different languages the rules of access to the space. The contract, which each participant was free to enter into, is premised on the artist's longstanding interest in exploring the interaction between art and a public, where one must give in order to receive.

Potlatch is the moral that unites all four works in this small, yet powerful exhibition: by freely giving their time or participation, in turn audiences were given the opportunity to be part of a community of players whose gestures are of an ephemeral nature. While documentation and subsequent reperformances attempt to capture the atmosphere of what originally took place, the resulting experiences are unique to those who continue to make them possible.

-Harry J. Weil

