

Lorenzo Minissale
Integrative Seminar
Zoe Carey
02.26.2017

Maintenance Art

Mierle Laderman Ukeles is a New York City-based artist known for her feminist and service-oriented artwork, which relates the idea of process in conceptual art to domestic and civic "maintenance". During our visit at the Queens Museum we had the privilege to view the Maintenance Art exhibition and her work of various sorts. Her installations varied from 3D sculptures, video and infographic projects in which she decided to unveil the domestic and civic maintenance sector. This could also be identified as the transit system. The entire museum reflected her thoughts on glorifying what we commonly live through everyday but do not appreciate enough. Throughout the exhibition a particular piece caught my attention. Ceremonial Arch IV. This specific work can be represented as a tree of life.

This tree is a representation of all the different sorts of maintenance workers around the city. She used structural pipes and objects used in common construction sites as the main body and created branches and leaves using gloves of the different workers around the city. The branches categorized in the following sectors; subway, garbage removal, construction workers, electrical engineers and other general maintenance jobs. Thanks to all these hard working groups we can live a normal everyday life which is a lot of work especially in a city that operate at such high speed. This representation of the transit system was displayed as an arch. One could walk through it and contemplate all the different angles of the work. From under the arch one could notice the

crowdedness of gloves and the little space for maneuver. A red light with a spinning motor was placed in-between all the gloves to draw attention in addition to the bright colors of vests and materials to create a sense of importance and attract people towards it. The over all goal of this project was to represent all the jobs which people are not necessarily willing to do due to the hard work and poor conditions in a beautiful way. I personally think it was a success and it is one of her most document pieces. The interesting part of this art piece is that the concrete evidence of this is omnipresent within the work. She is representing the workers from the different industries which from far is hard to notice but once we get closer and take the time to analyze the piece we start to understand and value them more. This simple thought shows us that we do not appreciate enough the work that is put into these infrastructures to help the city function. This piece might not be her only one given that it is named Ceremonial Arch IV which implies she has created another 3. The other works represented around the museum were more discrete but still as powerful. She has attempted to cover every sector within the city in many different ways. Wether she used dirt, glass or recycled plastic she managed to turn each piece into something informative, emotional and aesthetically pleasing. From used material to art she has manage to convey the importance of these operations within systems of the city.

Finally we can discuss the message she is trying to convey; is this a critique on society or a description of a system? We can understand that she is conveying a message about the systems we do not see and maintaining unequal systems, including class, gender, culture, environment, and others.