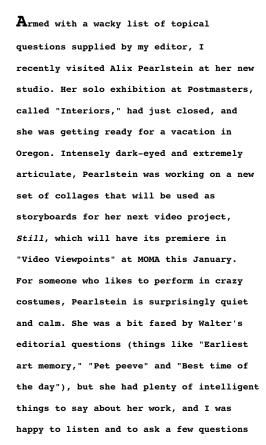
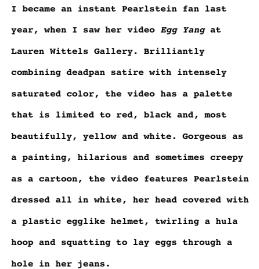
News

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studio visit: alix pearlstein

by Elisabeth Kley





of my own.



Alix Pearlstein in her studio.



Still from Egg Yang.



Interior with Artist and Ceramic Vase in the Studio, 1996, collage.



Video still,
Interiors, based
on Interior
with Artist...
collage.

"Interiors," the installation at

Postmasters, included 17 collages,
combining tiny images of famous paintings,
elegant modern furniture and animal and
human characters, including Jackie O, Woody
Allen and the Kissingers. Six of the
collages were used as storyboards for a
video shown in an elegant viewing area
(also modeled on a collage). Pearlstein
appears onscreen as a real kitten, a sex
kitten and the Energizer Bunny, among other
roles, in narratives exploring the bizarre
ways modernist esthetics translate from art
to interior decoration and advertising.

In our conversation, Pearlstein revealed a tenacious desire to reduce her art to essentials. She has, appropriately, moved her work into two narrow rooms, one furnished with filing cabinets and a few tables, and the other with monitor, tripod, camera and a few plastic chairs. Like an empty office, windowless and bare, the studio is a blank slate, ready for future transformations.

If her plans don't change, the delicious colors in Egg Yang and the art in Interiors will be replaced in Still by pure black and white. In the collages, simply dressed figures, alone or in groups, move within boxlike spaces -- floors, ceilings and walls indicated in exaggerated perspective. Filmed as simply as possible, the new video will be concerned, Pearlstein says, "with actions in which there is an inherent stillness or wherein an action must abruptly come to a halt or pause, physically or psychologically." She is especially pleased that the new studio will allow her to film the ceiling and floor in one frame, just as was planned in the collages. A simple environment, easy to control, the studio is an ideal working space for the many takes and extensive editing Pearlstein requires to reach the intrinsically flat and artificial beauty of video space.



Pearlstein's mother is an interior

Installation view, "Interiors," 1996, at Postmasters.



Pearlstein's studio.



Paradise Syndrome, 1989, chrome, flocking, mirror, rubber.

decorator and her grandfather was an architect. As a sensible undergraduate, Pearlstein majored in design, although she had always wanted to be an artist. During childhood, she often visited the permanent collection at the Whitney Museum. Her earliest art memories are of a live bird in a sculpture by Edward Kienholz and of Pop art, especially the George Segal sculpture, apt recollections for the future video and performance artist. Combined with an MFA in sculpture from SUNY Purchase, N.Y., Pearlstein's design background may have helped her develop the analytic ability to discover and solve new problems in each successive body of work.

In one of her first solo exhibitions, at Laurie Rubin Gallery in 1990, Pearlstein transformed assorted toys, accessories and design items into eccentric sculptural objects. Very soon thereafter, she made a decision of obvious brilliance -- that making art should be fun, not boring. Moving in a more conceptual, less material direction, she decided to make her working techniques reflect the activities she enjoys. Out went the gluing and sawing, which gave no particular pleasure. Shopping remained. Shifting her emphasis from object to narrative, Pearlstein began to dissolve her previous methods. Untitled (Floor Crack Fuzz) (1991), flirting with invisibility, consisted only of cotton fluff placed in the cracks of the gallery floor. In Suspended Fly (1992), by stretching an invisible nylon thread between three bricks to hold up a plastic fly, she created the suspended image of an instant in time.

Video, the next logical step, is a

delightfully straightforward medium. The

natural impulse, for Hannah Wilke, Carolee

Schneemann and other video pioneers, was to

"set up the camera, strip and perform," she

said. For Pearlstein, a lifelong dancer,

moving her body has always been an

instinctively satisfying form of

communication, and video has brought dance

into her work. Future plans for additional



Eggs, 1994, string, plastic, 2 x 32 x 42 in.

performers will make movement and choreography even more significant.

Pearlstein enjoys giving orders, she claimed, and she is looking forward to directing, and even jokingly confessed to being a bit of a megalomaniac.

As she described her artistic development,
Pearlstein spoke of "finding a rigorous
formal means, by a process of exclusion, to
achieve narrative and representation, and
bring minimalism into a totally different
psychological and cultural context." Using
her design background and astute conceptual
thinking, she has inverted minimal
strategies to generate weirdly austere yet
outrageous arenas for lucidly enigmatic
events. Pearlstein's intention is, she
reiterated, through "working with physical,
visual, and perceptual issues, to create
situations that will trigger the viewer's
imagination."

ELISABETH KLEY is a New York artist who writes on art.



Pearlstein as a cat in Interiors, 1996.

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