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ARTISTS SPACE

Ei Arakawa

Social Muscle Rehab

September 22 - November 27, 2021

Sunday, October 10, 6pm: Book release for the monograph *Performance People*

Saturday, October 16, 3pm: Outdoor performance in Cortlandt Alley

Artists Space is pleased to present *Social Muscle Rehab*, an exhibition of new work by Ei Arakawa. In his first solo institutional exhibition in New York, Arakawa locates two specific nodes of exploration. The first is the erection of ad-hoc outdoor dining corrals throughout New York City as a means of maintaining sociability through the pandemic, which Arakawa and his collaborator Gela Patashuri interlace with a circulatory system of ocean water transported from his hometown of Fukushima, Japan. The second is the mediated world of professional tennis as particularly evident in the complex public image of its most visible star Naomi Osaka.

As the show was entirely constructed on-site in the week leading up to its opening, Artists Space posed a few questions to Arakawa concerning the tenets of this endeavor.

Can you say a bit about “Social Muscle Rehab” as a title?

I lived in New York for 21 years, but left in 2019. For this Artists Space show, I came back briefly. I was trying to hear the tone of the city for this show. My impression of NYC was more vulnerable and kinder after 2020. Everyone I know is tired of being inside. Many people got used to a non-existent social life. I felt like I needed to move my “social muscle” slowly after a year and half. This show and performance propose various kinds of “rehab” to be social at the right amount each time.

What struck you as most interesting about New York’s outdoor dining corrals?

I didn’t know what to call them, and then Jay Sanders started to call them corrals. Maybe he was the only one who called them that. Other people have said outdoor dining, patio, platform, shack, hut, shed, etc. I was just impressed when I saw the variety of corrals in the winter. One had a kotatsu structure. What is the most interesting is the mixture of survival mode, making money while trying to be hospitable. Also this temporal street architecture is regulated by various laws such as 18” perimeter walls, 1:12 slope wheelchair access, or ¼”-per-foot pitch raise for gutter tilt. Those laws are for controlling but also the repetition of these buildings in the street expresses the city’s spirit. A weird mixture of desiring and being safe.

How do you hope visitors might interact with your exhibition?

I want them to see this corral structure as a portal to multiple real corrals in this city. After you come to the show, maybe you see them elsewhere differently, as an idea, a symbol, and a collective monument. Also this place can be a waiting room for contemplating where we can go next ... I asked Artists Space staff to play their playlists any time during the show. I am also happy that this show will be a site for Segue’s weekly poetry readings. Too bad there’s no drinking allowed at this moment.

I know you worked with a collaborator to build the structure. What can you tell us about him? How did you meet and what has been your history of collaboration?

Gela Patashuri built this structure by himself (with a little help from me) in only four days. We are both good at building something quickly. He built the Georgian Pavilion once at the Venice Biennale. We’ve been working together now for over 10 years. Now my national status has changed from Japanese to American, and he is also trying to become an American citizen from Georgia as well.

Why this water?

This ocean water was sent from my mother and brother who live in Fukushima, Japan. It took 2 months to travel here by ship, and it is sweet to see it since I haven't been able to go back for 2 years now. It's one of the internationally vulnerable waters right now because the Japanese government announced the release of contaminated water from the nuclear disaster into the ocean in 2022. I wanted to make a meeting point where this water meets the current mood of NYC. It's quietly alarming as the sound of water tickles your ears, making you anxious and relaxed at the same time.

What do you imagine might happen on October 16th?

I chose this day because it happens to be Naomi Osaka's birthday. We will do an outdoor group performance in Cortlandt Alley. It will be another form of "Social Muscle Rehab."

What about professional tennis, and Naomi Osaka in particular, is interesting or inspiring to you right now?

Naomi Osaka made lots of statements about performance expectations and the mental health of tennis players. My last Cortlandt Alley performance in 2019 was related to taking care of babies, and I am now interested in having children myself in the USA. I want to know more about her dual identities and want to be inspired by her because my children might share this duality.

Are there any other inspirations you might like to share?:

Here are some quotes I am thinking of in relation to this work. They're from Hojoki by Kamo-no-Chomei, which was written in 1212. The original Japanese was translated by Moriguchi and Jenkins:

In our glorious capital the rooftops of the houses of the high and lowly stand in line and seem to jostle for prominence. They appear to have endured for generations, but look more closely - those that have stood for long are few indeed. One year they burn down and the next are raised again. Great houses fade away, to be replaced by lesser ones. Thus too those who live in them. The place itself does not change, nor do the crowds. Even so, of all the many people I once knew only one or two remain. They are born into dusk and die as the day dawns, like that foam upon the water. People die and are born - whence they come and where they go, I do not know. Nor do I understand the transitory homes they build. For whom do they fret themselves? What can be so pleasing to the eye? A house and its master are like the dew that gathers in the morning glory. Which will be the first to pass? Sometimes the dew falls away while the flowers stay. But they will surely wilt in the morning sun. Sometimes the flower shrivels while the dew holds on. But it will not outlive the day.

Bios

Japanese-born American artist Ei Arakawa's exhibitions and performances are often created through fervent collaborations with artists (and at times their artworks), art historians, and with audience members themselves. His activities undertake the lo-fi mimicry, duplication, and embodiment of cultural forms—be they architectural structures, art historical legacies, or organizational systems—to reanimate their potentialities anew. Since the early 2000s, Arakawa has been at the forefront of renewing the visibility and advancement of performance art internationally, and has mined both its historical forms (such as Japanese Gutai, New York's Fluxus, Happenings, and Judson Dance Theater, and Viennese Actionism) as well as numerous contemporary manifestations of movement, entertainment, and togetherness. His work, initially appearing spontaneous or improvised, is underpinned by a deep commitment to collaboration as well as addressing the specific contexts of the people for which it is created. Arakawa's first monograph *Performance People* is co-published with Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany.

Gela Patashuri was born in 1974 in Tbilisi, Georgia and trained in the painting department of the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts. A longtime collaborator of Ei Arakawa, Patashuri's work has been shown around the world, with shows at Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis; CAC Bretigny, France; Casco, Utrecht, The Netherlands; Kunsthalle Zurich, Switzerland; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland; and at the 55th Venice Biennale, Italy, where Patashuri constructed The Georgian Pavilion. He currently lives and works in New York.

Corral Building:
Ei Arakawa with Gela Patashuri
NYC Corrals & Iwaki Ocean's Temporal Visit
2021
Dimensions variable

Water Circulation on the wall:
Ei Arakawa with Gela Patashuri
NYC Plumbing & Iwaki Ocean's Temporal Visit
2021
Dimensions variable

LED on Cortlandt Alley:
Ei Arakawa
@naomiosaka, 11:24am, Aug 29, 2021
2021
24" x 48"
6496 LEDs (WS2813, 100 LEDs/m, black) on hand-dyed fabric with grommets, T-300K controller, 2GB SD card with LedEdit 2014 files, 3x 5V 80A power supply with 22 AWG stranded wire

Net in the back:
Ei Arakawa
Social Muscle Rehab
2021
Dimensions variable

Video:
Ei Arakawa
Social Muscle Rehab (early edit for exhibition)
2021
5:19 minutes
With Dan Chen, Danielle A. Jackson, K.O. Nnamdie, Masako Shiba, Kenneth Teng, Ivanny Pagan, Britnie Williams
Camera by Lazar Bozic (Ortvi.com)

