



Eleanor Antin

Since the mid-1960s, Eleanor Antin has been a pioneer in contemporary art, known for her conceptual works, live performance, video, film, installation, and photography. Antin has always been more interested in sticking out than fitting in. Emerging as an artist in New York at the peak of the minimalist paradigm, she explored narrative and social content in an art world dominated by abstraction and visual austerity. Throughout her career, Antin has demonstrated that art does not have to be pure to be serious, and that autobiography, romanticism, and wit can be potent ingredients in a rich and highly influential practice. Antin's early work has a special place within the canon of Conceptual Art. As an artist engaged with feminism, Antin tempered the



pseudo-objectivity of conceptualism with a jolt of the personal and the political. In works such as *Domestic Peace* (1971-2) and *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) Antin paired cool conceptual presentation with barbed subject matter drawn from her own experience. As well as interrogating the identity and status of the artwork, these pieces also explore the loaded relationship between a Jewish mother and daughter, and what it might mean for a highly self-conscious female artist to go on a diet. Attuned to the power dynamics within the art world as well as within the work of art, Antin has remained very much in control of her own work and its dissemination. Her epic and much-loved *100 Boots* (1971-3) may have begun as an ephemeral postal work, sent to art world friends and contacts, but after 2 years and 51 postcards, the cross-country adventures of the rubber boots had picked up enough creative momentum celebrity even show at the Museum of Modern Art, bypassing the commercial gallery system completely. Repeatedly, Antin's visionary determination has yielded successful works that could not have been foreseen within the constraints of the art world at that moment. A provocative and versatile performance artist, Antin has used alter-egos to investigate different modes of being. With the King, the Black Movie Star, the Nurse and the Ballerina, she explores what it might be like to experience another gender, race, or set of historically specific social codes. Antin lures us into the vivid worlds of these characters with richly visual props, sets and costumes, then confronts us with their idiosyncratic voices. Woven fearlessly from fictional and actual personality traits, each persona is deeply appealing, but also rounded out with enough troublesome attributes to reflect back critically on our own roles and relationships. This work is often funny, but it is never easy or comfortable. In an interview with Cindy Nemser in 1975, Eleanor Antin said, "My interests always were narrative because narrative gives you a way of moving." And indeed, Antin has sustained her love of narrative, and has continued to grow and change as an artist. Recent retrospectives have done nothing to slow her movement, and she is currently extending her long-term interest in mythology to ancient Greece (*Mythologies*) and Rome (*The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Roman Allegories*).

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