

# The New York Times

THURSDAY, JULY 4, 2002

## Avant-Garde Directors as Decorators

By MEL GUSSOW

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In a third room there is a long, narrow showcase of shoes: sneakers, sandals, sabots, slipper socks, boots, cothurni, all of them reportedly worn by the artist in performance. At the end of the line is a single orphaned shoe. Was that for a one-legged dance? In the center is a table with three suitcases on it, "Three Singing Suitcases. Lift Lid Gently." Lifting the lid, one hears deep sighing.

The rooms are the inventions of Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman and Meredith Monk, respectively, and other areas are filled with the creativity of Anne Bogart, Peter Schumann and Reza Abdoh. All are on display in "Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time," an evocative exhibition of installation art through Aug. 17 at Exit Art, at 548 Broadway in SoHo. It is as if each one had not only furnished a room but was also there in residence.

These experimental directors — all are living except Mr. Abdoh, who died in 1995 — have created individual environments in an attempt to form a kind of self-portrait focusing on their early work. In each case objects come from the

artist's personal archives, artifacts from diverse theatrical worlds. For the visitor the effect is almost like entering a production onstage and waiting for the audience to arrive and the performance to begin.

The installations resonate with the spirit of the artists: Mr. Wilson, austere yet boldly inventive; Mr. Foreman, the philosopher poet chronicling his life of the mind and dreams; Mr. Abdoh, violence aforethought; Ms. Bogart, relentlessly inquisitive and interpretive; Ms. Monk, purity spied through a muslin curtain; and Mr. Schumann and the Bread and Puppet Theater, on the march with a flag and a placard of political awareness.

Each room is distinct but not divorced from its neighbor. Mr. Schumann and Ms. Monk share adjoining spaces, as if the Bread and Puppet maskmakers were about to invade the choreographer's tent. On Mr. Schumann's side, the room is the equivalent of a Bread and Puppet atelier, filled with white, shrouded totemic figures on the verge of being animated. On the walls dunces cry slogans in cartoon balloons, "Thou Shalt Eliminate Evil" and "Coffeeables Unite Against Junk Mail." In the center is a machine that looks like a waterwheel or a torturer's rack but actually makes wind sounds for theatrical effect.

Though disparate in their work, Ms. Bogart and Mr. Foreman uncover a symbiosis within their installations. Each chronicles a career. Ms. Bogart's is a photographic record — an open book of memory, beginning in 1975 with her first New York show, "Macbeth," and including "At the Bottom," her variation on "The Lower Depths," in which she asked herself What would happen if a bunch of East Village skinhead punks found the play and decided to perform it once a week in a deserted basketball court. Then there is the Emission Project: "A new play each week performed in a different location. Audiences called my answering machine to make reservations and find out where to show up."

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of the artists against absurdly diverse public events, reaching from the 1960's ("Psycho released," "John F. Kennedy assassinated") to the 2000's ("World Trade Center attacked," "Enron collapsed").

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On the floor of his room Mr. Foreman offers one of his many edicts, "Only being a tourist can you experience a place." Following that advice, a tourist should walk slowly, wander from place to place and come back again to Exit Art, in order to assimilate the emanations and reverberations of these voyagers in the avant-garde.



Peter Schumann



Robert Wilson photos: Sara Krulwich/The New York Times



Richard Foreman's room

# the village VOICE

THEATER

June 11, 2002

An Exhibit of Auteur Directors

## THE ARTIST AS YOUNG DOG

BY FRANCINE RUSSO

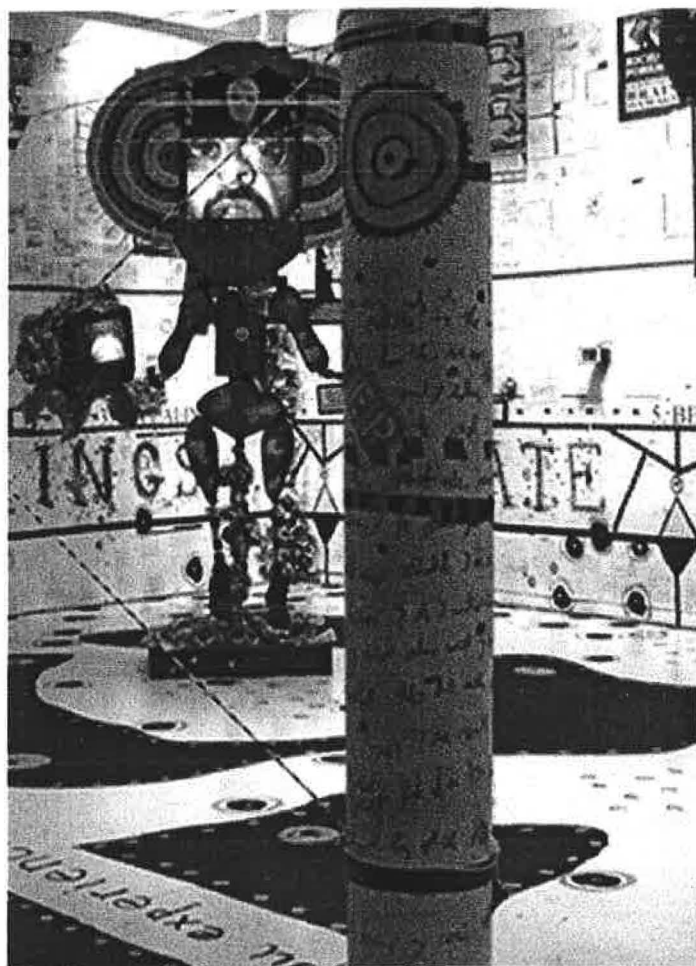
Richard Foreman's psyche is open for viewing. His words spew ceaselessly from a video monitor atop an ungainly robot. Birthday-party squiggles of paint curlicue over walls and floor, where crumpled-up newspaper grows like fungus. You could be right in his mind, or on his stage. Yet you're not in a theater at all, but in an art gallery.

The Foreman space is one of six clamorously contrasting installations in "Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time," at Exit Art through August 17. Foreman, Anne Bogart, Robert Wilson, Peter Schumann, and Meredith Monk each created a "self-portrait" for the exhibit; the estate of the late Reza Abdoh worked with curator Norman Frisch and associate curator Jodi Hanel to compose one for him.

"We asked them to portray themselves as young artists first starting to make a career in New York," explains Frisch, "and to trace how these early ideas are still present in their work—or not. To connect the dots. It's important for young people to understand that even the most famous artists at 20 or 21 were just like them, arriving on the bus or the train or the plane, and having to figure out their mentors, their colleagues, where to work, how to work."

The show is the brainchild of Exit Art co-founder Papo Colo—a passionate homage, he says, to these directors whose aesthetic is so strongly visual. The curators invited each director to participate and funded the project generously—which shows in the sumptuous mounting and scale of the exhibit.

Bouncing from one director's area to the next, you're assailed by how starkly these downtown iconoclasts differ from each other. Moving from Foreman's bombardment of words and color, you relax into the spare tranquility of Bogart's geometric space, which is divided by decades of rehearsal photos hung on wires. Her "Room," enclosed within her exhibit, vibrates with white noise; large-type instructions prompt you on how to behave to maximize its sensory effects. "It's a reinterpretation of what she does in a workshop with actors," explains Exit Art co-founder Jeannette Ingberman. Robert Wilson places his series of modernistic chairs on industrial carpeting and serenades you with a music and dialogue collage from *A Letter for Queen*



### EXIT ART'S FOREMAN ZONE

*Victoria* (1974); Abdoh's area displays Annie Liebowitz's bizarre cast photo from *Tight, White, Right* (1993) and streams videos of his performances. The homespun simplicity of Robert Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater figures contrast startlingly with Meredith Monk's high-tech "Fire and Ice." In Monk's installation, video flames blaze out, engulfing a female figure—elements from her *16 Millimeter Earrings* (1966); on an opposite screen, from *The Rally From the Quarry* (1976), tiny figures in black and white creep over huge rocks while hypnotic chanting reverberates.

Throughout the gallery, video screens play tapes of the directors' theater pieces, many shown for the first time. In the café, you can grab a java and watch any archival film you request—from Foreman's *Rhoda in Potatoland* (1975) to Bogart's *History, an American Dream* (1983). Many of these are videos transferred from 16mm films shot by a director's pals to document the performance. "Most of the directors weren't part of the theater world of their day," Frisch explains. "They created an alternative world. Foreman's friends, for example, were all filmmakers."

So you can relive the downtown scene of those years. Or you can travel to that strange land for the first time. The kids coming in don't find this stuff dated at all, says Colo. "They're saying, 'This is now.'" ■

# NEW YORK The Sun

AT NEW YORK CITY

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THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 2002

METRO N.Y. 50¢ (\$1.25 OUTSIDE METRO)

## GALLERY-GOING

By TALYA HALKIN

Fairy tales, myths, and fantasy narratives have been the subject of several recent New York gallery exhibitions. "Into the Woods," at the Julie Saul Gallery, gathers together works that reflect the narratives of magical rituals and transformations.

Most of the works are concerned with reconstructing childhood experiences of wonder through staged scenarios in which the boundaries between reality and fantasy are blurred. In Joan Banach's painting "Stage Fright," an ornamental tangle of branches and leaves opens onto a wooded landscape. Alyson Sholtz's "Still Life," a series of leafy rubber plants shooting up to the sky above a reflective surface, similarly hints at magical passageways to otherworldly realms.

Not surprisingly, staged photographs are a large part of the show. In one photograph by Simen Johan, an eerily illuminated forest serves as the backdrop for a large rock, hung with dozens of small, colorful animal dolls. Touching

upon the uncanny presence of the inanimate and of death, it is at once cheerful and foreboding. A photograph by Orit Raff includes a childish figure in an artificially lit forest clearing. Like Mr. Johan's work, it captures a mysterious, ominous scene staged for the camera's lens.

Abelardo Morell's "The Cheshire Cat," part of a series about "Alice in Wonderland," also draws on a familiar, pre-existing narrative to create a quaint, 19th-century-inspired image.

Some of the most interesting works in the exhibition are, in fact, the older antecedents to these recent works. The Victorian photographers' fascination with the staging of dreamy biblical and mythological themes carries into two early 20th-century photographs by Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston. In Frances Griffith's 1917 "Iris and the Gnome," a little girl plays with one such fantastical creature. And perhaps the most intriguing work in the show is a small and exquisite anonymous photograph taken in

1900, in which a procession of figures in animal costumes crosses a bridge over a stream and into the woods, suspended between the everyday and the otherworldly.

♦ ♦ ♦

"Into the Woods" demonstrates how theatricality, the banished Other of modernist art, has been become an increasingly important component of contemporary art works. "Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time" explores the opposite pole of this cross-disciplinary inspiration. Don't miss this important exhibition at Exit Art, which celebrates six theater directors whose work has been shaped by visual aesthetics.

Anne Bogart, Richard Foreman, Meredith Monk, Peter Schumann, and Robert Wilson have all been central to the eruption of avant-garde theater in New York City over the past four decades. Their individual, self-created retrospective installations are exhibited alongside an installation dedicated to the

work of the late Reza Abdoh, who died of AIDS in 1995 at the age of 32. A media café and archive allow visitors to view videotapes of performances and interviews by the featured artists.

The writing on the wall in Anne Bogart's installation guides viewers on how to interact with the exhibition, composed of photographs from Ms. Bogart's plays accompanied by her own commentaries. Richard Foreman's own face tops a larger-than-life puppet from his 1987 "Symphony of Rats," surrounded by densely scribbled pages from Mr. Foreman's personal journal and sketches and photographs from his theater's performances. Piles of crumpled newspapers refer, perhaps, to the "psychic cost" of press reviews, cited in one of the framed aphorisms concerning "Ten Things I Hate About the Theater."

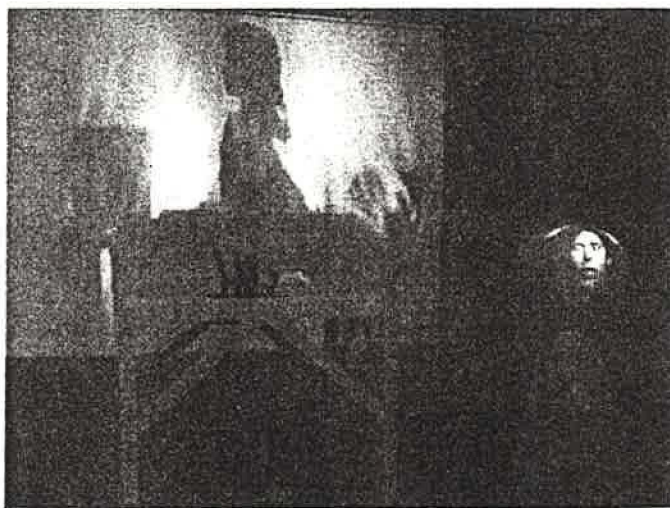
The dozen or so theater pieces — including the 1990 "The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice" — produced by Reza Abdoh during his short career are screened in the gallery dedicated to this director's

work. The videos manage to convey at least something of the excitement and energy of the live performances.

In an adjacent gallery, the sculptor Peter Schumann recreates part of the Vermont Bread & Puppet Theater Museum. It is filled with this theater group's life size puppets and hand-painted slogans that invoke its activist performance legacy.

A very different aesthetic vision is transmitted in Robert Wilson's streamlined presentation. An assembly of metal chairs designed by Mr. Wilson is surrounded by his black and white drawings, accompanied by dialogue and musical fragments from his 1974 "A Letter for Queen Victoria."

Meredith Monk's stylized installation includes her 1966 film "16mm Earrings." Originally part of a live performance, the film of Ms. Monk's face is projected onto a cage-like dome. The most visually compelling among the six, this installation both underscores and overturns Ms. Monk's statement that "I sometimes think that one



Meredith Monk's installation at Exit Art.

of the beauties of live performance is that it ignites a space and time and then disappears."

"Into the Woods" at Julie Saul Gallery until August 16 (535 W.

22nd St., at Tenth Ave., 212-627-2410). Price: \$500-65,000.

"Show People" at Exit Art until August 17 (58 Broadway, between Prince and Spring, 212-966-7745).

the village

# VOICE

May 21, 2002

## ShortList THEATER

**'SHOW PEOPLE'** "Downtown Directors and the Play of Time," Exit.Art's big new exhibit, displays the work of six director-creators whose theater work has been as much visual as dramatic, so much so that in some cases their detractors might argue it was wholly the former. Often multitalents who write, compose, or engage in purely visual art-making in addition to their theatrical ventures, the six are all big-name figures whose stage pieces have made a powerful impression and are likely to have a lasting influence: Anne Bogart, Richard Foreman, Meredith Monk, Peter Schumann of the Bread and Puppet Theater, Robert Wilson, and the late Reza Abdo of dar a luz. Seeing the visual pre-plans and post-show remnants of their engagements with live-action events should both underscore their importance and re-establish their links to the arts that don't move, as theater does, through space and time. It's also likely to reaffirm their commitment, often ignored by those in pursuit of heavier themes or theories, to that most fundamental element of theater, the spirit of play. **THROUGH AUGUST 17**, Exit Art, 548 Broadway, 966-7745. (Feingold)

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## WORDS

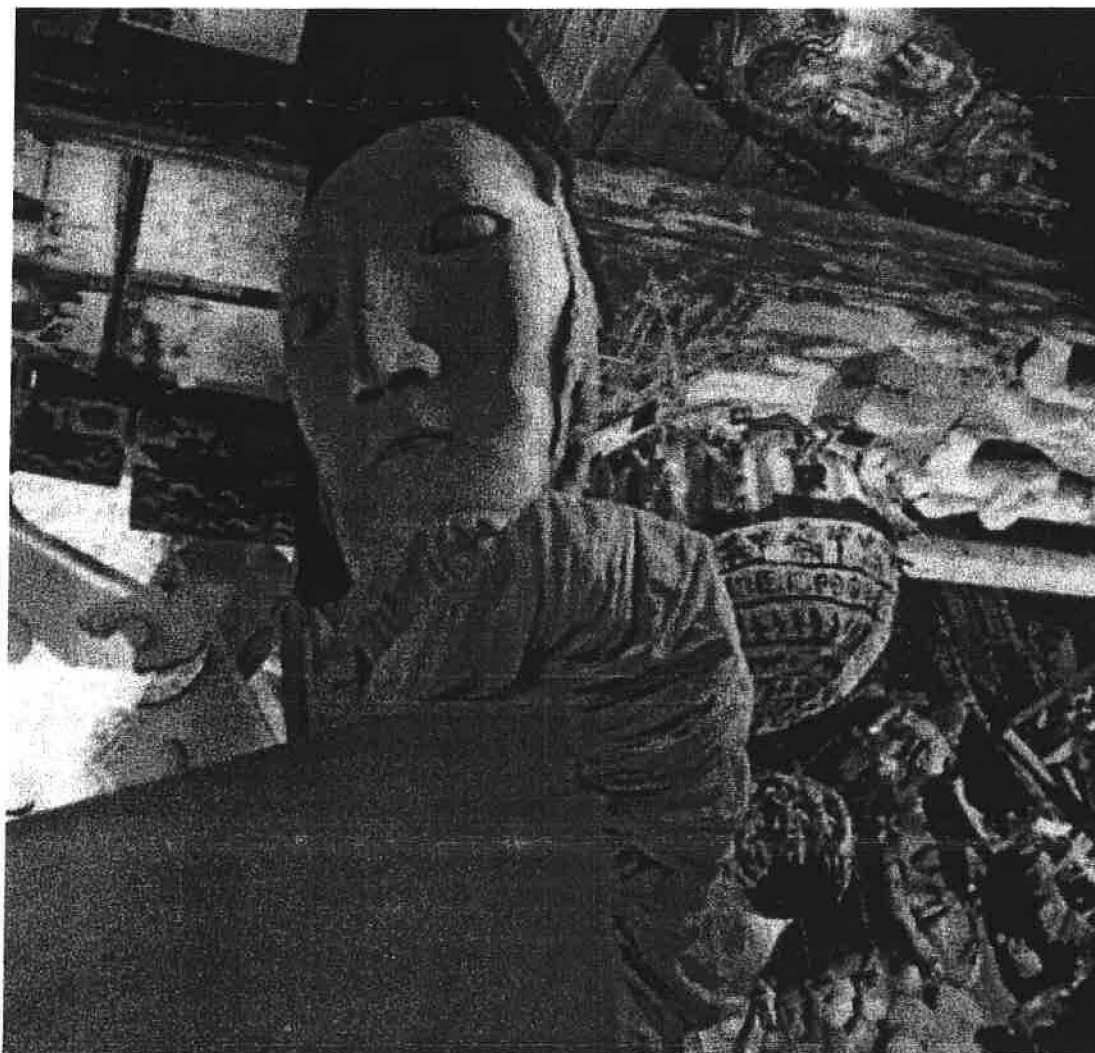
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**'FANTASTIC FICTION'** John Crowley's cult following includes sci-fi lovers as well as lit-crit bigwig Harold Bloom and poet Thomas M. Disch.

# Time Out

## New York

May 23-30, 2002



### Art

Lower Manhattan has received a lot of TLC since September 11. Now Exit Art is offering its own hurrah to the folks below 14th Street with an exhibition and a series of public programs about six stage directors whose work has contributed to the "Downtown" aesthetic. **"Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time,"** on view through August 17, traces the careers of Reza Abdoh,

Anne Bogart, Richard Foreman, Meredith Monk, Peter Schumann and Robert Wilson through video, journals, props, photographs and some of Schumann's famous puppets from the Bread and Puppet Museum, in Vermont (the museum is pictured), which stores them when they are not being used onstage to protest injustice and cross social boundaries.

www.nytimes.com

# The New York Times

ON THE WEB

July 4, 2002

## Avant-Garde Directors as Decorators

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