

Flash Art

R E V I E W S

Adrian Piper

Elizabeth Dee Gallery



ADRIAN PIPER, *Everything #9.1*, 2005-07. 9 photographic prints, 33 x 33 cm each. Courtesy Elizabeth Dee, New York.

Adrian Piper, a conceptual artist since the late '60s, has deftly sidestepped the unintended tautology of some of the genre's linguistically bent practitioners. Her admixture of politics and art, of ethics and aesthetics, has remained intelligent and visually poetic enough to never succumb to didacticism. Piper's art has maintained a philosophical dimension that equally interrogates identity politics, for example, as it does the political side of the ontological. Her (in)famous *Cornered* (1988) questioned rubrics of race while updating the self/other dichotomy and the Cartesian mind-body problem. More recently, a project presented individuals living with texts marked with henna on their foreheads that stated in reverse: "Everything will be taken away." This last collaborative performance piece was the thematic axis of her recent solo exhibition.

Consisting of video, works on paper, installation and sculpture, the pieces all had the word "everything" in their titles. Although their focus was politics, articulated no less acerbically than in the past, they were more open-ended in their narratives. They critically targeted recent and historical events including the Bill of Rights, the Hurricane Katrina disaster, assassinated politicians and racially motivated hate crimes. It is fascinating how Piper has remained topically and formally current: a large, two-channel projection included four chairs placed in a row, two facing one screen and the other two facing the opposite screen. This configuration was hardly one of convenience; it is a quintessential artistic strategy. As was the case with this and earlier work, Piper corners her audience, not only to prompt a more proactive experience, but ultimately to question the viewer's complicity in a culture of complacency that beneficially foment an uncritical social body and impotent body politic.

Raul Zamudio