
THE BOX

April 1–30, 2013

Barbara Bickart

WHEN: Memphis (2011)



Image courtesy of the artist

WHEN: Memphis is the first in an on-going series of large-scale video installations, made by interdisciplinary video artist Barbara Bickart, which explore the histories of violence and tragedy that live in our national landscape in the form of landmarks and monuments. Selecting sites that hold specific cultural and historical significance in our collective American psyche (Independence Hall, which houses the Liberty Bell, in Philadelphia, Kent State University in Ohio, and the Lorraine Motel in Memphis), Bickart seeks to challenge the function of traditional monuments by exploring our physical relationship to them.

WHEN: Memphis was created on the site of the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in 1968, which is now home to the National Civil Rights Museum. Filmed in the months preceding the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination, the video witnesses the pilgrimage of visitors to the site. Comprising three individual static shots that are shown simultaneously, the piece unfolds as any normal day does, with visitors walking past the site, some pausing to read the plaque that formally "marks the monument" and others simply passing by. The simplicity of the fixed frame shifts the focus from the place itself to the presence of bodies inhabiting and interacting with space. Bickart's work transforms the "pedestrian performance" of the visitors as they enter, linger in, and leave the camera frame into what she calls "found choreography."

Although initially conceived as a multichannel video installation, the larger *WHEN* series has evolved to include site-specific performances that underscore and expand Bickart's interest in "found choreography." The subtle gestures captured on camera become the basis for collaborative live performances that she develops with local residents and movement-based artists.

WHEN: Memphis premiered in Memphis on April 20, 2007, and was part of the 40th anniversary commemorative exhibit, titled *From Memphis to Atlanta: The Drum Major Returns Home*, at the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia. The project was supported by the University of Memphis and FedEx Institute of Technology and Lantana Projects. It was made with the cooperation of the National Civil Rights Museum and was completed with the support from Wexner Center's Film/Video Studio Program. *WHEN: Philadelphia* and *WHEN: Kent State* are currently in progress.

Barbara Bickart is an interdisciplinary video artist whose work takes the form of video installation, video performance, and experimental documentary. Her work has been presented in theaters, galleries, and museums internationally. She has received support for her work from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, New York State Council on the Arts Electronic Media, and Film Fund, ASTRAEA Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Legacy Foundation, the Fund for Social Change, and the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, among others. Recent projects include *we call it the river...*, an interdisciplinary video performance piece that was exhibited in April 2008 after a residency at the Jersey City Museum, and *Inside 4 Walls*, a video counter-monument project, made in collaboration with artist-activists in Croatia and Hungary. In 2009 she was an artist in residence at the Village of Arts and Humanities in north Philadelphia, where she developed *WHEN: Philadelphia*.

Bickart received a BA from Rutgers University and an MA from the New School for Social Research in Media Studies. She lives and works in northern New Jersey.

Jennifer Lange
Curator, Film/Video Studio Program

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20 mins. 20 secon, video
Courtesy of the artist

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