

## Eleanor Antin

### 'Roman Allegories'

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
31 Mercer Street, SoHo  
Through March 12

Over the years the role-playing Eleanor Antin has been — among many other personages — Nurse Eleanor, a takeoff on Florence Nightingale, visiting soldiers during the Crimean War; Eleanora Antinova, a black ballerina and diarist who swanned through improbable roles like Pocohontas in Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*; and Yevgeny Antinov, an exiled Russian moviemaker of the 1920's whose poignant (real) movie, "The Man Without a World," revisits the vanished shtetl culture of the past. Besides film, she pursues her elaborate personifications in photographs, stills, video, performance and installation art.

At times she has emerged from her brilliantly conceived identity confusions. In 2002 she showed here "The Last Days of Pompeii," a Cecil B. DeMille-style epic in 12 large-scale color photographs that recast the upscale coastal town of La Jolla, Calif., as the doomed Italian city. Now she's back with "Roman Allegories," another sequence of a dozen color photos that record the wanderings of a down-at-the-heels troupe of traveling actors, in ancient garb and lots of bare skin, through landscapes dotted with picturesque ruins.

The actors are deployed in various tableaux that send up painters from Poussin to Bouguereau: orgiastic revels of nymphs and satyrs; a toga-wearing gambler pitting himself against Death (a skeleton in a gray shroud); a woman lying on a bier before a painted backdrop of moonlight over water, guarded by a beefy sentinel as a pair of lovers play at games nearby.

This group may not reflect Ms. Antin at her most focused (her "Pompeii" with its dark hints of contemporary humanity in crisis won an award from the International Art Critics Association). "Roman Allegories" sometimes looks like a college dramatic society on its own without a director. Still, it doesn't destroy her reputation as one of the wittiest Conceptual artists.

Wait: strike that Conceptual modifier. She is one of the wittiest artists ever.

GRACE GLUECK