

Rickey, Carrie. "Eleanor Antin."
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If Karras, Adams, and Miyatake address the role of the expatriate, Todd

and Benston the romance of the expatriated, how do I describe ELEANOR ANTIN's position? In her installation and videotape *The Nurse and the Hijackers*, she tackles more problems in art than any other artist threatens, and, more often than not, she immobilizes her opposition.

Let's say video art has two tendencies: television-as-information and television-as-diversion. (Allow the work of Ira Schneider to represent the former, the work of William Wegman the latter.) Antin would fall into the latter category. But her videotapes have always had more in common with the narrative structure of movies than with the sitcom or commercial. *The Nurse and the Hijackers* is Antin's *Airport '78*. With paper-doll characters and a cast of dozens, Antin serves as the voice and the operator of all the dolls' movements. Since the "sets" used for the tape are on view, the installation has the quality of a Universal Studios tour of a set, with a movie that was shot there being screened. The tape, roughly 90 minutes, might very well be the first video narrative epic.

There are more layers to Antin's work than to Diane Keaton's wardrobe. Narrative. Presentation. Self-presentation. Politics within the narrative. Politics within and without the presentation. Antin aspires to be postmodern woman, wanting to cover all the bases in art's new ballpark. She steals bases, she bunts, she hurls, she homers. As the entrepreneur of this enterprise, Antin brings together her work as an actress, writer, director, painter, designer, sculptor. In Hollywood, a practitioner of such a variety of endeavors is called a hyphenate, and the maker of a work that attracts a cross-section of the market is called a crossover. Antin is both.

The subject of *The Nurse and the Hijackers* is . . . petrol-culture. It has the standard plot of a disaster movie—lots of characters in overlapping stories all affected by the hijacking of their plane, but the hot potato Antin keeps picking up, dropping, passing on, is our oil economy, how it affects the situation in the Middle East, how airplane transportation is a most prodigal use of fuel, and the cul-de-sac American radicals find themselves in when they try to do something about it. This is a surprising topic to find at the Long Beach Museum of Art (Long Beach is a city whose major industry is oil pumping), as it is for most any gallery or museum, but is a sensible venue for the transmission of a political art.

For the way Antin chooses to transmit her postmodern politics is eloquently to argue several sides of the dilemma up to the point where her own position is carefully obscured beneath the contradictions of the situation. For art-world delectation she casts artists like the late Ree Morton, Martha Rosler, Patricia Patterson and Max Kozloff as her cardboard figures; for mass market she includes plenty of romance and violence and a plot including everything but the Shah selling out; for the petroleum cognoscenti she supplies at least three different takes on the situation. In view of the fact that this was made in mid-1977, it's staggering how many of the plot machinations that struck me as cynical humor have turned out actually to occur.

Antin casts a paper doll of herself as the innocent, the nurse who witnesses this struggle and doesn't quite get the ramifications. Antin is not innocent, and she's clearly casting against type. Her work is the most exercising presentation around. Antin's view of America is the meeting of a nation of immigrants with expatriates looking for a home. Ultimately, Antin's heroine, Ree Morton, certain that things must be more idealistic in the revolutionary country to which she hijacks the plane, realizes, like Dorothy in Oz, that there's no place like home. —CARRIE RICKEY



Eleanor Antin, *The Nurse and the Hijackers*, 1977, color videotape.