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Eleanor Antin: Detail from the installation *Minetta Lane—A Ghost Story*, 1994-95; at Ronald Feldman.

### Eleanor Antin at Ronald Feldman

A legendary San Diego-based conceptualist, filmmaker and installation artist, Eleanor Antin is interested in intersections of history, mythology and personality. In her new installation, *Minetta Lane—A Ghost Story*, video and theatrical set design combine in an affectionately satiric look back at bohemian lifestyles in post-World War II Greenwich Village.

The installation is meant to create a dreamlike effect. What seems to be the dilapidated hallway of a ramshackle tenement building leads you to a dark space. As your eyes adjust, you find that you are in a *Rear Window*-like courtyard from which you gaze through windows into three near-life-size video-projected apartment interiors. One is an artist's studio where a woman is working on

an abstract painting. To the right is a basement kitchen equipped with a bathtub in which a young interracial couple playfully bathe together. Behind, a bit higher up, an old man—"an elegant, elderly gay man," according to a gallery press release—tends to his caged songbirds.

As you watch over a period of about 10 minutes, each of these silent scenes is disrupted by a mischievous girl who remains invisible to the main characters. She paints a big

black X over the artist's canvas; she provokes a fight between the bathers; and she douses the chandelier lights in the birdman's apartment, which seems to put him to sleep or, possibly, to death. What this girl and her actions mean remains enigmatic. Perhaps she symbolizes the perverse unpredictability of life. Elsewhere in the gallery a pair of video monitors broadcast old newsreel footage of apartment buildings being razed by huge wrecking balls. This suggests a parallel and, maybe, a historical connection between upheavals in the private and collective spheres of modern life.

The tone of all this is subtly comic as Antin toys with various emblematic clichés: the ruin as gateway to the past; the artist, the lovers and the gay man as personifications of bohemian creativity and freedom; the Shakespearean sprite as an agent of change; the wrecking ball as a symbol of destructive modern progress. Underlying the irony, however, is a bitter-sweet sadness for what is lost in a world that's always changing too fast for individuals and for communities.

Antin's installation is amusing, poetically touching and formally inventive (it calls to mind the work of Ilya Kabakov), but at Feldman it was technically disappointing. Because the courtyard was poorly lit and the video projections were dim and unfocused, the experience was less vivid than one would have expected. That said, Antin's story is compelling enough that one wishes one could see it expanded into a full-length play or movie.

—Ken Johnson