

New York

Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison

Ronald Feldman Gallery

As artists who work with real-world issues of urban planning, ecology, and habitat restoration, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison raise many questions about the nature of art. How is their process different from that of the scientists, planners, and civic organizers with whom they work? How does their vision interact with all of these forces?

Better known in Europe than in the U.S., the Harrisons have long been engaged in visionary dialogues about land use, watershed restoration, and the re-envisioning of our interactions with nature. This densely packed exhibition documented projects completed or begun in Holland, England, Germany, and Yugoslavia over the past 15 years. These include smaller-scale studies of specific watershed regions, as well as visions of Europe as a unified ecosystem where "the poetry of the whole" is considered.

The current Peninsula Europe project, documented in the main gallery, was initiated by Expo 2000 and the Schweisfurth-Stiftung in Germany. Coinciding with the emergence of an economically unified Europe, the Harrisons were



Above left: Natalia LL, *Hortus Eroticus*, 1995. Photographic installation, dimensions variable. Work included in "Architectures of Gender."

Above: Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison, *A Vision for the Green Heart of Holland*, 1995-96. Mixed media, installation view.

protect the high ground, the source of the rivers so crucial to the ecology of Europe, and now so threatened. Confronting the economics of their proposed remediation strategies, they suggested a modest tax, which would be used to create a "self-sustaining, self-nourishing, self-paying system" once established.

In dialogues played by sound columns in the exhibition, the Harrisons discuss their process, always linked to local arts and governmental organizations. Among the questions that they feel are central to the work, they ask: "How can the process of fragmentation

Harrisons' iconic forms and abstractions are used to help visualize a possible reality, such as a "green net," which can help to protect the natural world from some of the excesses of human activity.

Previous projects documented in the show also involve specific river basins, such as the Mulde in East Germany and the Sava in Yugoslavia. The Harrisons' proposals, along with the complex responses they engendered, are discussed in the exhibition and accompanying book. They consider this navigation of opportunity and resistance as part of their artistic process. The extraordinary scope of the Harrisons' work challenges conventional ideas about art. Their ability to step outside established disciplines and boundaries, and to create an image or paradigm that shapes our view of reality, asserts the primacy of vision and the potential role of the artist engaged with the world.

—Donna Brookman