

Zetlin, Minda. "Garbage for Art's Sake." *Games* (October/November 1987).



COURTESY RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS, NEW YORK

**Ukeles's mirrored garbage truck reflects her unusual aesthetic.**

## GARBAGE FOR ART'S SAKE

Call their work trashy and most artists would be outraged. Not Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Ukeles, 48, is the New York Sanitation Department's first—and so far only—artist-in-residence. It's a position she takes very seriously, though not everyone else does.

"People both inside and outside the department hear my title and laugh," she says. "But it's not my intention to be comic. The reason people laugh is that they think garbage is the farthest thing from art. That's exactly why I do it."

For Ukeles, looking at culture from the bottom up is a form of artistic games-playing, which, she admits, can unintentionally serve as comic relief. In a work of performance art called "Follow in Your Footsteps," she followed sanitation workers down the street, mimicking their movements as they lifted garbage and dumped it into their trucks. "It cracked them up," she says. "They also told me that I was doing it wrong, that my balance was off."

Recently, at a New York gallery, Ukeles exhibited a 75-foot-long corridor for visitors to walk through, composed of various garbage materials—old tires, glass bottles, plastic cartons, and the like—seen midway through the recycling process. Accompanying the exhibit were recorded sounds of recycling machines at work, which she says sound curiously like a gigantic di-

gestive system.

Ukeles has also created three sanitation-related ballets: one for six mechanized sweepers; one, performed in Rotterdam, for sweepers and garbage trucks; and a water ballet for six garbage barges and two tugboats.

A creation of which Ukeles is particularly proud is a mirror-covered garbage truck she made several years ago. "Everyone recognizes the shape of the truck, but what they see is the reflection of the street and themselves," she says. "As it moves down the block, reflections kind of peel off it."

The truck, however, has to be exhibited only under special conditions, such as a parade. "It's extremely disorienting," notes Ukeles. "Once I nearly drove into it in a parking lot."

—Minda Zetlin

## B. T., PHONE HOME

First it was the London Bridge. A one-of-a-kind souvenir, it ended up in Arizona. Now another familiar symbol of Britain is headed Stateside: The bright red telephone booths that dot the streets of London are up for sale.

British Telecom is replacing these classic call boxes with streamlined, graffiti-resistant plastic kiosks. The Brits had the wits to realize the old booths were collectors' items and began selling them.

At first, British Telecom was cautious about prospective purchasers. "It