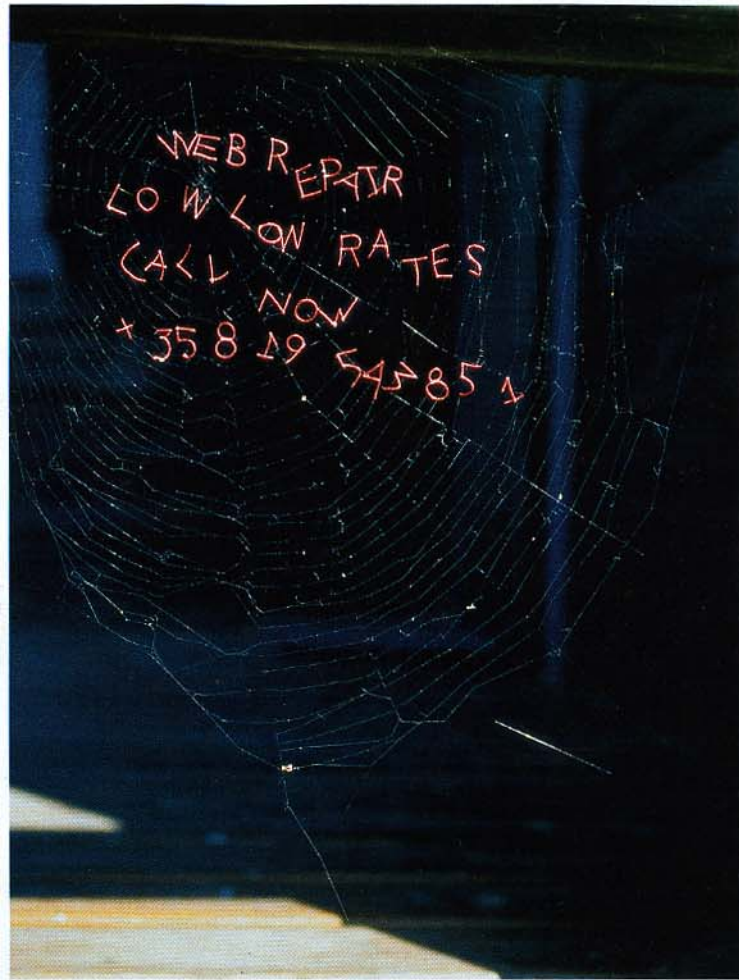


Nina Katchadourian puts five questions to her artistic hero, Mierle Laderman Ukeles



ABOVE: Nina Katchadourian, *Marketing Tips for Spiders*, 1998. Cibachrome print, 30 x 20 in. Courtesy the artist; Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York; and Catherine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.

RIGHT: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Romeo and Juliet Sequence," 2003. Performance view from *Snow Workers' Ballet*. Color photograph, 20 x 16 in. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

Mierle Ukeles is one of my artist heroes because of the way she combines sincerity, rigor, and play. Her work stands as an example to me of the best kind of socially engaged practice: rather than talking a whole lot about how things could be better, she just gets on with the task.

—NINA KATCHADOURIAN

1. What nonartist has most influenced the way you think about and make your work?

Since I just finished a big piece for the show "In the Beginning," at San Francisco's new Contemporary Jewish Museum, I have to say: the Eternal Creator of the first seven days of Genesis.

2. Has there ever been a piece you wish you hadn't made?

Around 1963, I got into trouble at Pratt making *Bindings*, my first original art: wrapped, knotted, painted, dyed soft objects stuffed with wet, gluey rags and stuffed animals. They started as fat paintings and turned into room-size installations. The heads of the grad school said I was "obviously oversexed" and making "pornographic art." They told my teacher, Robert Richenburg, "Make her stop doing that." He refused, said I was making important original work, and kept exhibiting them at school—for which he was fired! I had thought these works were abstract symbols of energy.

3. What would you save in a studio fire?

This is complicated because I don't have a studio. I have an office at New York City's Department of Sanitation as official unsalaried Artist in Residence and "Percent for Art Artist" of Fresh Kills Park [formerly Landfill]. Much of my work is off-site. So I would save from my office: my drawings from the 1960s, original slides and negatives from the '70s and '80s, stuff that isn't digitized, original videos, and audiotapes. After 9/11, I ran in to my office on Beaver Street, about 10 blocks away from the World Trade Center, and dusted the "white dust" off all my Fresh Kills eight-plus hours of video by hand with no mask, like an idiot.

4. If you hadn't become an artist, what could you imagine you might have been?

For a long time, I wanted to be the secretary general of the UN. In college, I majored in international relations. After graduation, on the basis of my senior thesis on the development of the Independence movement of Tanganyika Territory, I was appointed to President John F. Kennedy's delegation to the Uhuru [independence] celebrations in 1961 of the new country of Tanzania—as the aide to Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr., the head of the delegation. I was dismayed by how constrained the on-site US foreign service professionals seemed. I felt I had more access to Africans in New York than in "official" Africa. So, upon return, I headed off for a future as a free, unconstrained artist.

5. Who is an artist whose work you are really embarrassed to admit that you love?

I'm not embarrassed about anyone I love. ♦

