

"Participants' Commitment to a Better World is an Integral Part of a Performance Art Installation at YU Museum." *spider.mc.yu.edu*, February 5, 2010, <http://spider.mc.yu.edu/news/index2.cfm>.

Participants' Commitment to a Better World is an Integral Part of a Performance Art Installation at YU Museum



Feb 5, 2010 -- Mierle Laderman Ukeles' art installation, *Tsimtsum/Shevitrat Ha-Kelim:Contraction/The Shattering of the Perfect Vessels - Birthing Tikkun Olam*, is a blend of site-specific art in its most contemporary form and traditional religious elements reminiscent of the Western Wall. The installation is part of "In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis," an exhibit that will be held at the Yeshiva University Museum through Feb. 28.

In the piece, two-sided mirrors are interspersed with pieces of paper on which participants have written a "covenant" to make the world a better place. "The idea of the individual mirrors is that I ask people to look in the mirror and see the sacredness of you," Ukeles explained.

When the installation opened, it was comprised only of mirrors. But on a recent Sunday afternoon, Ukeles invited participants to a "Day of Transfer and Exchange" in which each participant traded a covenant for a mirror, ultimately leading to the replacement of about one-third of the mirrors. Through this exchange, "the site of the art is going to move out into the world, and with it, the acts that you will do," Ukeles said. Covenants range from the succinct "I covenant to listen better" to pages several paragraphs long illustrated with tiny drawings.

Ukeles is best known for "maintenance" artwork. Her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969* may have coined the term. The manifesto proposed merging boundaries between art and routine activities of everyday life such as house cleaning, cooking and snow removal; most of Ukeles' pieces are performance studies involving such mundane activities. One of her best-known projects, *Touch Sanitation*, involved shaking hands with more than 8,500 workers in the New York City Department of Sanitation while saying "thank you."

The artist's work was chosen for the exhibit because "in addition to its aesthetic beauty and physical presence, the installation echoes and engages with key themes of the creation story," said Jacob Wisse, the museum's director. "The participatory nature of Mierle's piece, and of the performance in particular, bring that home to the visitor. That forms an important part of our presentation and reflects core ideals of the Museum."

Courtney Malick, a graduate student at Bard College who is writing her thesis on Ukeles, said that she "wrote a commitment to become a curator and bring new artists to the forefront." Malick said that prior to seeing the installation, she was unable to envision how this work—with its religious/spiritual themes—connected with Ukeles' more familiar maintenance art. "At first they seemed really separate, but I realized that this piece really informs her other work," Malick said. "I love that she describes maintenance and sustainability."



