

ARTFORUM

Adrian Piper

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

548 West 22nd Street

October 23–December 11

In step with the retrospective nature of many gallery exhibitions in New York recently—including Charlotte Posenenske at Artists Space over the summer and ACT UP at White Columns last month—Elizabeth Dee presents several works produced between 1973 and 1995 by the American Conceptual artist and analytic philosopher Adrian Piper. The cavernous second floor of the former home of the Dia Foundation in Chelsea easily accommodates the photo-text installations, sculptures, and videos on view. One of the merits of the show—besides its defense of work by a black female Conceptual artist rarely shown in the US as compared with her white male counterparts—is that we are able to discern several crucial transformations that occur in her artistic production over these two prolific decades. The most significant of these is a shift in the site of critique: If Piper initially dismantles Minimalism's fetishization of phenomenological experience via her own body, she later extends this critique to photographic and textual invocations of bodies other than her own.

For instance, in the early performance cycle *Mythic Being*, 1973, she walks the streets of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York in an Afro wig and a fake mustache, while repeating a mantra taken from one of her own journal entries. The work collapses her own identity as a young woman with the stereotype of the threatening black male, thus undermining the latter's legitimacy. By 1990, Piper's work had come to rely primarily on large-scale photo and text installations, often combining complex historical and cultural references and implicating the viewer in relation to such representations. *Vote/Emote*, 1990, for example, comprises four voting cubicles wherein, upon entering, one is faced with a photograph of protesters from the Civil Rights era behind a windowpane. A notebook asks the viewer to write responses to directives such as LIST YOUR FEARS OF WHAT WE MIGHT THINK OF YOU or LIST YOUR FEARS OF HOW WE MIGHT TREAT YOU. Piper thereby transforms the sacred site of rational democratic participation into its opposite: a profaned confessional booth, wherein one's fears and anxieties, even when repented of and forgiven, are increasingly difficult to dispel.



Adrian Piper, *Vote/Emote*, 1990, four wooden cubicles, each with wooden shelf; four windows, each with silk-screened light boxes; four notebooks placed on each wooden shelf, each with pen and preprinted paper, 84 x 164 1/2 x 48 3/4".

— Jordan Troeller