

The New York Times

Art in Review

Adrian Piper

'Past Time: Selected Works
1973-1995'

Elizabeth Dee
548 West 22nd Street
Chelsea
Through Dec. 11

First, a cheer for the art dealer Elizabeth Dee. In 2009 she was the brains behind X Initiative, a yearlong nonprofit showcase of special projects housed in the former Dia Center building on West 22nd Street, and she organized one of the outstanding ones with a survey of early films by Derek Jarman. Now, with X Initiative gone, she's making creative use of the space again, this time for a **two-decade career overview** of Adrian Piper, an artist she represents.

Ms. Piper has had an incalculable influence on generations of younger artists, yet the breadth of her work continues to be underestimated. It is often, and rightly, associated with themes of race and racism, and she hits these topics hard in several familiar pieces here that mix performance, photography, words and pop music in precise and slicing combinations.

But she applies the same formal means to other subjects as well. In the 1980 installation called "It's Just Art," about the Vietnam invasion of Cambodia, video photographs of Southeast Asian refugees appear against a soundtrack of Ms. Piper's reading of a polemical essay from *The New York Review of Books* and the voices of Rufus and Chaka Khan singing "Do You Love What You Feel."

Ms. Piper can be terrifically witty, as she is in the 1983 video "Funk Lessons," which finds her instructing a class of white university students in the methodology of shaking booty African-American style. At the same time, in the 1995 "Ashes to Ashes," a wrenching account in words and family photographs of her mother's death from cigarette-related emphysema, she is forthrightly autobiographical.

"Ashes to Ashes" marks the show's end-date but by no means puts a cap on Ms. Piper's career. She has followed it with an impressive body of work emerging from her interest in Hindu philosophy and yoga, which, in interesting ways, circles back to her very early abstract Conceptualist work. It is the combination of Conceptualism's bare-bones physicality and speculative thinking and an uncompromising, sharp personal and political content that defines Ms. Piper's work so far. And as influential as she is, there is still no one like her.

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