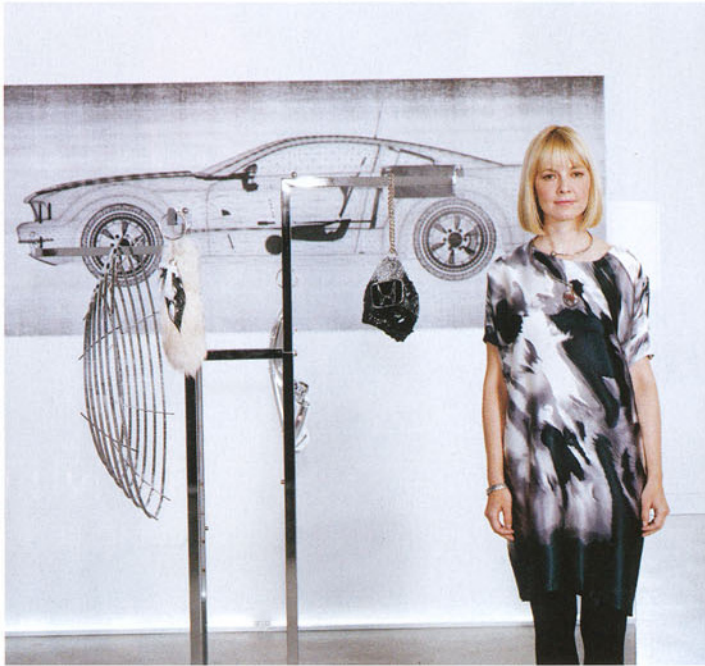


letter from the editor

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ON DISPLAY ELIZABETH DEE, WITH INSTALLATION BY JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER, AT HER SELF-TITLED GALLERY IN NEW YORK, PHOTOGRAPHED BY TINA BARNEY.



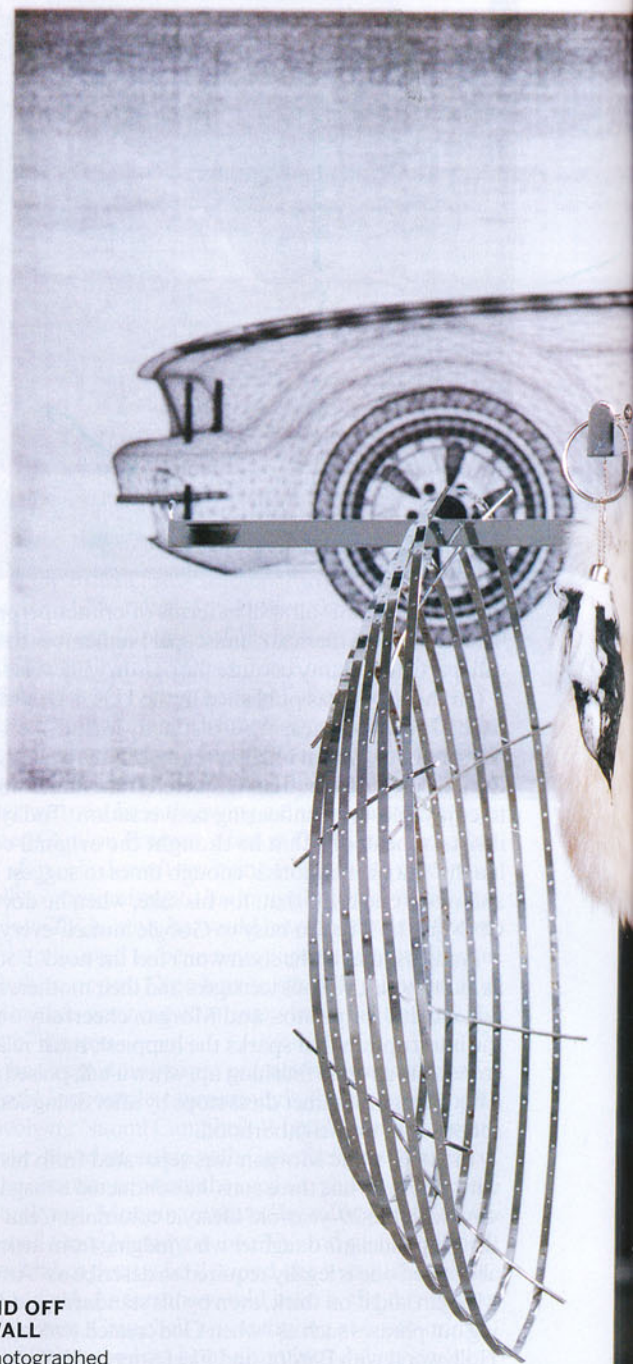
DEE'S DAY

VOGUE
OCTOBER

Gallery owner and impresario Elizabeth Dee finds imaginative ways to present new kinds of art for our changing times. Dodie Kazanjian reports. Photographed by Tina Barney.

In bad times, art sometimes gets more interesting. Hollywood's marvelous period of screwball comedies, starring Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, Claudette Colbert, and other immortals, coincided with the worst years of the Great Depression. The 1970s, when the oil crisis stifled a burgeoning art market, was seed time for video art, photo-based art, and other new forms that would soon become dominant. And now, in sync with our current economic troubles, many young artists are expanding art's range with collaborative ventures that defy traditional categories and market values, and a few young dealer/entrepreneurs like Elizabeth Dee are finding new ways to support and present their work.

Dee was the catalyst of last year's X Initiative, an eye-opening example of what can be done in a short time, with practically no money, to show a lot of cutting-edge art and create a community around it. She persuaded the owner of 548 West Twenty-second Street, a four-story industrial building that had been vacant since the Dia Art Foundation moved out in 2004, to let her have it for one year, rent-free, as an exhibition space, and put together a board and a program that included twelve scintillating shows and more than 50



ON AND OFF THE WALL

Dee, photographed in her New York gallery, featuring installations by Josephine Meckseper. Les Petites dress, her own. Art Smith necklace. Hair, Arsen Gurgov at Louis Licari; makeup, Stevie Huynh at the Wall Group. Details, see In This Issue. Sittings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.



JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER, *Untitled* (Honda, Cobra, Fire, Oil Spill), 2010; Car headlight, fur tail, metal mesh with plaques, and car ornament, metal lamp, fire, and chains on chrome stand, 63" x 40" x 40"; Background: *Misting (White)*, 2010; Black-and-white photocopy, 36" x 99.25" / Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York (2).

events—town-hall meetings, performances, panel discussions, all free and open to the public. By the end of the year, more than 75,000 people had come. “X Initiative,” says Jeffrey Deitch, the New York dealer who recently became the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, “was one of the biggest contributions to the New York art community in the past five years.”

On a hot July day, sitting in her tiny one-bedroom apartment in Chelsea, Dee tells me how X Initiative got started. Thirty-seven years old, blonde, and stylish in an Issey Miyake blouse, Stella McCartney pants, and Chloé flats, she’s highly articulate, something of a village explainer, with a lengthy list of talking points on her laptop to bring me up to speed on her whirlwind activities. “The recession was the impetus,” she says. “Everything on television was about the economy being in crisis. Our community was at a standstill in late 2008. People were really frightened. Would culture continue to be supported if there were no resources? The logical answer for a lot of us was to keep working on projects together but to work with artists in new ways. How could we do that collectively? The fact that the Dia site was available was a great opportunity.”

Dee knew that the building was for rent, but because of the financial climate, there were no takers. “I sat down with the owner and said, ‘I have an idea. Dia was one of the best institutions in the city, and symbolic for the art world. Let’s do something with this building.’ And after we’d talked for a while, he said, ‘I can’t believe I’m saying this, but yes.’”

MULTIPLATFORM

Adrian Piper’s mixed-media installation *The Big Four-Oh*, 1988. BOTTOM: Ryan McNamara’s video *I Thought It Was You*, 2008.

Dee and her artists—she represents nineteen of them at her Chelsea gallery—have been increasingly visible lately. She’s just back from the Basel art fair, where she introduced two young

newcomers from her stable, Ryan McNamara and Amir Mogharabi, to the international art world. Mogharabi, 28, whom she’d never shown before, is an installation and performance artist. McNamara, 31, is someone she describes as “the next chapter of live performance art, after Marina Abramović, after Tino Sehgal.” His performances center on himself and his own life, past and present. At the current “Greater New York” show at MoMA PS1, he can be seen taking daily lessons from a variety of professional dancers (a Radio City Music Hall Rockette, the American Ballet Theater star David Hallberg) in preparation for his own museum-wide, personally choreographed solo on October 16. “I’m really nervous about it,” McNamara tells me when Dee arranges for the three of us to have lunch together. “If I don’t become a good dancer, is it a failed piece? I don’t know.” His work, he says, is “not a declarative statement, not manifesto art. That’s not what’s happening now.”

“Art is not meant to answer questions,” Dee asserts. “It’s meant to demonstrate possibilities.”

What’s understood is that most of Dee’s artists don’t make paintings, sculptures, or any other kind of readily salable objects. For his first show with Dee last April, McNamara filled the walls with childhood photographs and personal memorabilia for five days, and gave what he calls “guided tours of my life.” And Dee found an enlightened collecting couple—MoMA PS1’s vice chairman, Philip Aarons, and his wife, Shelley Fox Aarons, who is on the board of New York’s New Museum—who agreed to buy the piece for five figures. What they were buying was an experience, one that could be reactivated only by having the artist come and repeat the tour. “This is a great example of how collectors can be visionaries,” she says, “as much as artists can.”

The day after our lunch with McNamara, she’s off to Los Angeles, where the 29-year-old Ryan Trecartin’s *Any Ever*, a seven-part video epic (coproduced by Dee with Trecartin), is about to open at LA MOCA. Trecartin’s anarchic, scripted videos of mostly transgender young people enacting surreal narratives have brought him widespread acclaim—*New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl anointed him as the “star” of the much-discussed 2009 “Younger than Jesus” show at the New Museum.

Both Trecartin and Dee decided that *Any Ever*, which was three years in the making, was too complex and ambitious for presentation at a gallery. Dee arranged for it to premiere at the Power Plant, the contemporary-art center in Toronto, on the first leg of a tour of several international museums. At LA MOCA, the next stop, Jeffrey Deitch plans to accent the work’s innovative éclat with an iPad catalog (a museum first), one of whose features is an interview with the artist by Cindy Sherman, an early and ardent Trecartin fan. “Ryan Trecartin is a great example of how art can be mobilized to be seen from

different perspectives—museums, theaters, YouTube, interactive/online,” Dee tells me. “It’s listening to what the artist’s ultimate community is. If it doesn’t exist, build it. If it does exist, expand it and help shape it. That’s all part of my role.” The show comes to MoMA PS1 next year.



The Big Four-Oh, 1988; ADRIAN PIPER. Mixed-media installation: table, television, video, bloody bandage in jar, sweaty towel in jar, vinegar in jar, one notebook with blank pages and a handwritten text, 40 (hard) baseballs, fourteen pieces of a knight's armor. Dimensions variable. / Thought It Was You, 2008; RYAN McNAMARA. Digital video, duration five minutes/Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York.

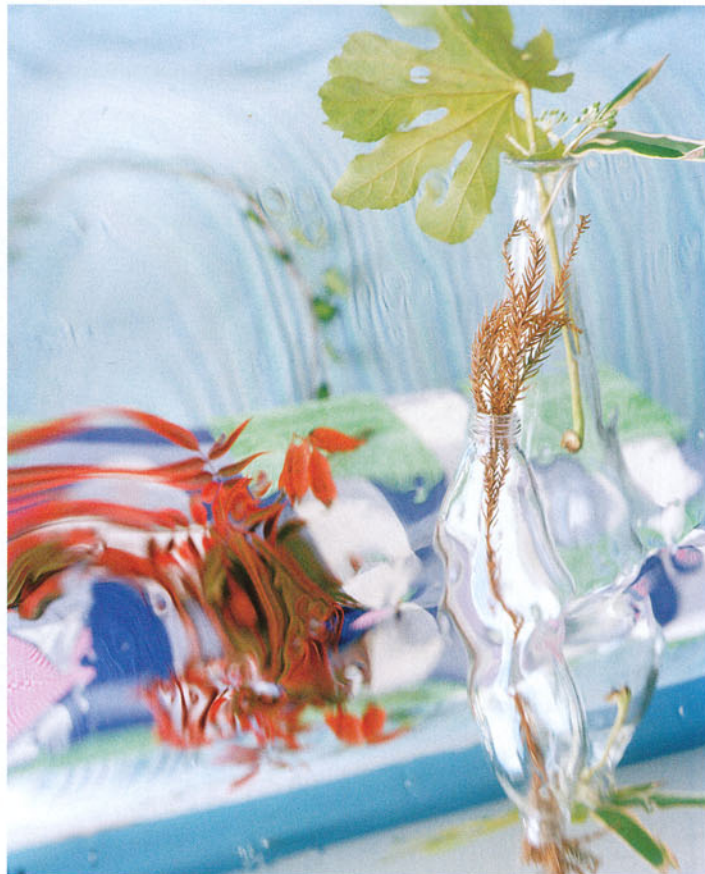
Born in a Chicago suburb, Dee and her younger sister grew up in Troy, Ohio, a small town about an hour's drive from Cincinnati. Her father was a businessman, her mother a housewife. A book-loving child, Dee played cello with a traveling orchestra. The family moved to the Detroit area in 1987, and her high school was Cranbrook Kingswood, part of the internationally famous Cranbrook Academy of Art. She enrolled in an after-school Great Books Program led by her philosophy professor, and developed a keen interest in feminist theory. As a result, she decided to go to a women's college—not the usual choice then—and she chose Mount Holyoke. “I loved every minute of it,” she tells me. “And I think you see that feminism is present in the program of my gallery.” Nearly half of the artists in the Elizabeth Dee Gallery are women, including Josephine Meckseper, Alex Bag, Miranda Lichtenstein, and Adrian Piper, the veteran feminist artist whose work and thought, says Dee, are “critical to my whole program, and to the whole development of feminism in the arts.”

After graduating in 1995, Dee had a summer internship at the San Francisco Cinematheque. “I wanted to work in the arts, but I wasn't entirely sure what that meant,” she says. “I started going to galleries, which was a new experience for me—I hadn't been to New York at this point.” Her

favorite gallery was Daniel Weinberg, which showed Lee Bontecou, John Wesley, Joel Shapiro, Sherrie Levine, and other artists who emerged in the sixties and seventies. This led to a job as Weinberg's assistant. “Dan was my first mentor. I ended up staying there for two years, and then Dan said I should go to New York. So I did.”

Her path smoothed by Weinberg, she spent two years working for the Danese Gallery, then two more at Luhring Augustine, where she found that what she really wanted was to work with artists of her own generation or younger. A Luhring Augustine artist named Les Rogers offered her his unrenovated loft space at 118 Mercer Street, rent-free, and in 1999 she made some makeshift renovations and turned the loft into a private space for art and conversation. She cooked informal dinners, served wine and beer, and more and more people began climbing the three flights of rickety stairs—among them, dealers Gian Enzo Sperone and Jeffrey Deitch, Jeff Koons, and any number of young artists. “I was in my late 20s,” says Dee, “and learning that this is how you foster a community, around ideas.”

In 2000, she started a gallery on West Twentieth Street with Carolyn Glasoe, a frequent visitor to the Mercer Street space. Two years later, Dee went solo with the Elizabeth Dee Gallery, a few doors west on the same block, where she is today. From the beginning, her gallery has functioned as a laboratory and a community, on the model of Colin de Land's legendary American Fine Arts; when de Land died in 2003, Dee took on two of his artists—Gareth James and Alex Bag. Her gallery now represents four generations of artists (Piper is 62), nearly



all of whom are hard to classify and not what you'd call market-oriented.

As Dee describes it, just about every waking moment is taken up with her artists. “I've never had the same day twice,” she says. A marriage in 2006 to Doug Wada, who had been one of her gallery artists, ended last year. This past summer, however, she broke all precedent by taking a vacation, part of it in Europe with her new boyfriend, whom she declines to name.

Her schedule this fall is more than a little daunting: a full roster of shows at her Twentieth Street gallery and at the additional 10,000-square-foot space she's renting in the old Dia building, where the main event is a big show of Adrian Piper's rarely seen work from different periods. She's also inaugurating a publishing program that includes a book about X Initiative. In February, there's *(continued on page 336)*

OTHER VOICES

TOP: Miranda Lichtenstein's C-print *Untitled #4*, 2009.
 ABOVE: Ryan Trecartin's video *The Re'Search (Re'Search Wait'S)*, 2009–2010.

DEE'S DAY

(continued from page 301)

Independent, an extremely well-received four-day project she cofounded this year with Darren Flook of London's Hotel gallery in the former X Initiative space. Some 40 commercial and nonprofit art galleries from all over the world participated, and next year's version is already attracting dozens of applicants. "We saw it as a collaborative dialogue," she says, "something that was neither an art fair nor an exhibition but with elements of both."

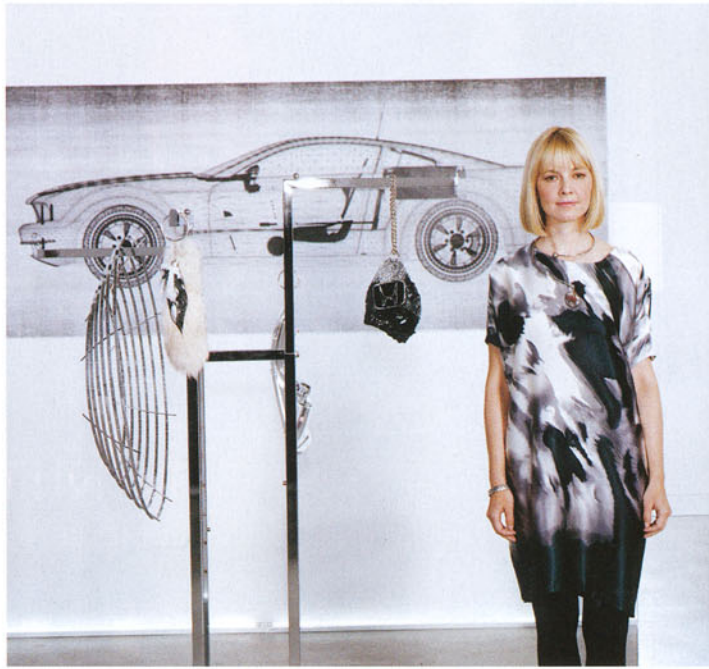
"Elizabeth has a thousand ideas a day, and at least one of them is good," says Cecilia Alemani, the independent curator who was Dee's choice to direct X Initiative. "Ideas are her power—and not being afraid of the word *no*. X Initiative came out of that."

"I always feel like I'm her only artist," Ryan Trecartin tells me, "and I've heard her other artists say that, too. When I met her, I'd been told that she would be really mad when she found out that I'd put all my work online. But she wasn't mad at all. She thought it was awesome. She understood right away that the work is native to the Internet, to theaters, to museums and galleries—all those contexts are important. She's not afraid of that, and she's figured out a way to talk about it." To talk about it to collectors, that is, and to anyone else who's open to the Dee brand of articulate enlightenment. "That's what I'm really good at," she says, "convincing people to do things."

"I feel like I'm very much at the beginning," she tells me, "but I also feel I'm in exactly the right place at the right time. We're in a time when people have a more open attitude to art expanding beyond the four walls of the gallery, and my artists are taking me beyond the gallery. Everything I'm doing comes out of wanting to work with the artist, to fulfill what the artist wants." □

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