

la studio visit

by NANCY POPP

DORIT CYPIS has been drawing together disparate parts of personal identity, history, politics and social relations for over 30 years. Her project, "FabLab — The Artist and Her Archive" at 18th Street Art Center last year espoused her process of inquiry with the public as witness to her reflections and scrutiny. She created an archive related to her present identity at this particular moment. The display was actively framed by interpretive gestures — a scale attached to a camera that projected your image behind you as you stood upon it; a collection of gooseneck vanity mirrors gathered together in a bouquet of Medusa-like reflections. I had the opportunity to interview Cypis and talk about this project.

Artillery: These objects were extensions of you in some shape or form ...

Dorit Cypis: Extensions or portals, entries into memory; not just memory but also questions that have been a part of my consciousness for a very long time ... the objects are fence posts.

Almost like a visual minefield, a visual minefield of punctums?

Yes. In fact it's funny that you say that because sometime in the mid- or late-'80s, Baldessari, who was a teacher and a good friend, invited me to do one of my projection dance-things in his graduate class. I did, I performed it, and he came to me afterwards and said something that I've never forgotten because it was so jarring; he said, "Dorit, your work is like being in a cancer ward and being told you have cancer." There's no way out, you have to face what's going on. You're enmeshed in these images, there's no escape. You have to work through it. It's not separate from you, there's relation.

How did [Polish playwright] Tadeusz Kantor's history plays influenced FabLab?

Not directly, although he influenced everything I've ever done. But he influenced my relationship to the emotive, and to memory—and to history especially, the history that lives in a very visceral, ephemeral, transitory way in the body. You can never get it out. It's always there and it's not a fixed thing; it exists in whatever form we [inhabit] ... we are each different configurations of history.

Do you think of the objects in FabLab as



an extension of your physical body as well as your memory?

Some of the objects weren't necessarily extensions of my body, but I maintain curiosity about them because they're extensions of someone else's body — like the gum photographs.

From Venice.

On a pedestrian bridge that crosses the train tracks on the outskirts of Venice.

Where the trains come in right at the edge of the historical city ... that's an interesting place because of how framed and surreal Venice is.

It's very created, constructed. There's nothing natural about it. The Venetians say Venice is like an old lady, still made up with makeup and hair, on display, but old, still regal, very formal.

Your gum photographs are emblematic of the city too, the boundary of where that historicization, that overlay starts to appear. There's something very Baroque about the gum outside of the body, how complex and tangled it becomes.

It's a labyrinth. One of the first times I went there I happened by chance into the Jew-



ish Ghetto. I had no idea where I was until I found myself in the square, with the shops, very odd, very interiorized and ancient; it is from the 15th century. I came across a tiny shop with a little aged man, a glass blower, hand-painting on these beautiful blue glass wine goblets he had made. I looked at them and thought, "My God, my father gave me a goblet like that a few years ago! And he was in Venice! I wonder if he bought it from this man?" I went into the shop; he didn't speak English, I didn't speak Italian, we spoke some French together. He told me where I was, "This is the Jewish Ghetto. I make these artifacts, people come from all over the world ... and I keep a record of every person who has bought in my shop, they sign my journal." My father had just died, and I found his signature. I was at the place where he went to buy me this ancient signifier of this ancient Jewish Ghetto. How did I land here? Time and place have coincided with a time and place that is completely outside of there.

But still they're connected.

Completely. ☺

Above: Cypis' 18th Street installation, info at 18thstreet.org/projects/foreign-exchanges-dorit-cypis