

Art on Borrowed TURF

New York's

Trans Urban Roaming Forum

proposes a creative solution
to downtown spaces in transition.

Rush hour froths about in New York City's midtown. Clogged traffic halts, then crawls, while pedestrians trickle through teeming sidewalks, amidst clanking horns and construction tape. Over in the large store window where mannequins once modeled the latest wares under bright commercial lighting, a grief-stricken woman stands perfectly still. Her sorrow

nal Street while at her day job in a real estate firm. She convinced the owner of the building to donate six floors of the space for two weeks in August 2001. Then, she invited different curators, assigned each to a different floor, and the uncannily named Ground Zero—an exhibit exploring the transformation of the building and the surrounding neigh-

hiring a cleaning person to organize the room and then documenting the subsequent messes and clean-ups. As the artist and cleaning person "reorder" each other's decisions, her documentation illuminates the subtle and rarely noticed choices all of us make in clean-up and construction of a home, as the residence itself was being prepared for a new identity.



TURF-sponsored artist Pia Lindman performs in Manhattan.

is unmistakable: Her shoulders are bent, with one hand holding up her head. As she changes her pose and appears to be weeping, several pedestrians stop in their tracks and stare at the odd and poignant spectacle in the Roger Smith Hotel window.

The woman is artist Pia Lindman, and her performance is part of a one-woman show titled *New York Times September 02–September 03*. Based on the images of grieving she collected from the newspaper from 2002 to 2003, Lindman created drawings of the gestures, then made a video of herself re-enacting the poses, and then used the poses as "instructions" so that she could perform a series of them in front of a live audience.

Preferring a busy storefront window to an art gallery, Lindman is able to reach a diverse audience, encouraging a dialogue with all types of people who lived through the tragedy and grieving process following the attacks on New York. Sponsored by TURF, the Trans Urban Roaming Forum, a nonprofit arts advocacy organization, and co-curated by Erin Donnelly and Susanna Cole, Lindman's exhibition gives New Yorkers the opportunity to thoughtfully ponder during their daily commute the nature of their own grieving.

Throughout New York City, TURF has sponsored countless other exhibitions and performances in, as they put it, "borrowed" spaces. The invention of cofounder and president Lin-i Liu, TURF began when Liu got a tip on an empty loft building on Ca-

borhood—was born. After the initial success and support for this event, Liu was inspired to continue the roaming exhibitions.

The aim of TURF is to create opportunities for emerging artists and curators in New York City where the amount of professional quality art exceeds the available exhibition locations. Combined with the notion that there is an abundance of temporarily unused real estate in the city, TURF is able to create whole new audiences and exhibitions for artists and curators while incurring a minimal expense. As a nonprofit organization, TURF is funded by grants and donations, and is supported by board members and volunteers. Besides the opportunities for artists, these roving exhibitions increase exposure for real estate professionals and developers without expensive advertising on their part.

Curator Erin Donnelly favors the temporary and site-specific projects because these locations are "not simply neutral containers for art" but rather, "an opportunity to explore a unique building, neighborhood, or even the act of transformation" that has left the spot temporarily available.

Artists who work with TURF are encouraged to use the setting itself as inspiration. TURF artist Franziska Lamprecht, in her exhibition *Kunstputze*, utilized a space being renovated from a residence to a school. Lamprecht's installation resembled an unkempt apartment constantly shifting its appearance. The performative part of the installation involved

Bringing the art to the audience isn't a new idea, but TURF accomplishes this goal in a more direct and personal fashion than museums and galleries. According to Donnelly, "the more people who can be involved in the art conversation, the better." Along with the exhibitions, TURF schedules supplementary lectures, film screenings, performances, and panel discussions, which also connect artists and audiences. Because these exhibits are more available and are in less intimidating environments, Donnelly says a new opportunity arises "for the audience to break out of traditional roles of recipients of culture, and instead, [become] participants."

Baltimore has begun exploring similar programs, with both Mayor O'Malley and Kirby Fowler, president of the Downtown Partnership, championing the creative reuse of empty spaces. TURF can serve as a good model. By developing empty spaces, by offering artists residencies, studios, and galleries, and simultaneously reinvigorating corporate offices, neglected storefronts and neighborhoods, arts advocacy groups can work with the city to change the way spaces in transition are viewed and utilized, creating a window of opportunity for artists, developers, and city-dwellers.

—Cara Ober is a painter, curator, and writer living in Baltimore.