



A manifestation of Lindman's Sauna Project from 1999.

MEIRLE UKELES AND PIA LINDMAN

by NATALIE LOVELESS

A visit to the Whitney web page leaves no doubt as to the political wash that colours this year's discourse, the director's opening statement tells us that the Biennial "takes its cue from the cultural climate of post-9/11 America." (Not to mention that a click on [their website](#) tells us that the "whitneybiennial2004 believes...together we can beat Bush.")

And so, it is not surprising that many of this year's artists are concerned with interrogating social and political formations. If I were to add two artists to this roster it would be **Meirle Ukeles** and **Pia Lindman**.

Both living and working in New York, these artists not only make politics their game, but do so through projects that highlight the liminality and abjection that is central to formations of private and public space.

Though this is evident in Ukeles' ongoing analyses of the politics of garbage and cultural labor (she has been artist in residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation since 1977), I am thinking 'intergenerationally' back to her early 'maintenance art' pieces, in which, on her hands and knees, she would wash the sidewalks in and around Museum spaces ([example](#)).

In the case of Pia Lindman, I am thinking of her *Public Sauna* series, in which the Biennial audience would have to literally get undressed to produce the piece. These projects disrupt routine relationships to museum space and insist on a practice which, to quote John Christ, "brings audience members into social situations where their interactions become the content of the work." If this year's discourse "takes its cue from the cultural climate of post-9/11 America" the content of these works would offer an active re-examination of the terms of vulnerability, fear, and defense that have been the privileged rhetorical tropes of post-9/11 American identity.

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