

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire **Performance Synopsis**

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O'Grady posted this brief synopsis of the performance and its background on the *WACK!* exhibit's excellent website. Significantly, she also posted 13 largely unknown photos-with-captions documenting the performance, which historically had been victim to two iconic images. Lacking a full context, they had become empty signifiers.

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire first won her title in 1955. After 25 years of maintaining a lady-like silence, in 1980 she began invading art openings to give people a piece of her mind.

She wore a gown and cape made of 180 pairs of white gloves, 360 gloves in all. Here is a brief version of MBN's "backstory," taken from the signage for the Wadsworth Atheneum installation of the performance:

On the Silver Jubilee of her coronation in Cayenne, the capital of Guyane, MLE BOURGEOISE NOIRE (Internationale), who could still fit into her coronation gown and cape of 360 white gloves, celebrated by invading the New York art world. During her anniversary *tournée*, she attended several openings unannounced: while all eyes were on her, she smiled, distributed four dozen white chrysanthemums and removed her cape. With the whip-that-made-plantations-move, she applied 100 lashes to her bare back, then shouted out an occasional poem.

The first time MBN invaded an art opening was at Just Above Midtown/Downtown, the black avant-garde gallery, in June 1980. JAM had just inaugurated a new space in Tribeca. The invasion was her response to the tame, well-behaved abstract art that had recently appeared in the "Afro American Abstraction" show at PS 1, an exhibit to which JAM had contributed a majority of

artists.

The "occasional poem" she shouted at the JAM opening was:

THAT'S ENOUGH!
No more boot-licking...
No more ass-kissing...
No more buttering-up...
No more pos...turing
of super-ass..imilates...
BLACK ART MUST TAKE MORE RISKS!!!

Her next invasion was of the New Museum, at the opening of the "Persona" show in September 1981. The exhibit included nine artists using personas in their work. Mlle Bourgeoise Noire called it "The Nine White Personae Show." When invited to give the outreach lectures to schoolkids for the show, she'd replied, "Let's talk after the opening."

The poem shouted on the occasion of the New Museum's Persona opening was:

WAIT
wait in your alternate/alternate spaces
spitted on fish hooks of hope
be polite wait to be discovered
be proud be independent
tongues cauterized at
openings no one attends
stay in your place
after all, art is
only for art's sake
THAT'S ENOUGH don't you know
sleeping beauty needs
more than a kiss to awake
now is the time for an INVASION!

After the opening, she was dis-invited from giving the outreach lectures to schoolkids.