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ARTISTS CURATE

BACK AT YOU / Cady Noland / an extract

from Cady Noland's daring portfolio of "difficult" artists, in which O'Grady was included

from the preface by Daniel Birnbaum, with quotes by Cady Noland. . . .

"THEY ARE CONFRONTATIONAL, TOUGH," says [Cady Noland](#) about the artists she brings together here. "WHUT CHOO LOOKIN AT, MOFO?" asks Adrian Piper's alter ego in *Self Portrait as a Nice White Lady*, 1995. It's a question of who's welcome, who's allowed in and who's not. It's a question of "hosts" and "guests." The viewer may not be the only one who feels uneasy—the artists themselves take considerable risks. Chris Burden's early performances, for example, posed obvious dangers to the artist—aesthetic, physical, and moral. Willing to break a "fourth wall"—in Burden's case, his own skin—these artists are also keen "to get the last word," Noland says. Burden's collages consist of reviews of his work bearing the artist's marginalia. He's shooting back—even, as Noland puts it, at the risk of "shooting himself in the foot."

. . . . Like Burden and Piper, Lorraine O'Grady operates at the edges of performance art, "defining its tense and bitter borders." Breaking the fourth wall rids us of all sense of fiction. In the course of O'Grady's disruptions—crashing an opening, for instance—she would spit out poems about art and race. "This work reclaims dignity at the cost of making the artist so difficult as to court the possibility even the probability, that she'll be ignored altogether," Noland observes. "The irony is that dignity can be reclaimed through such non-decorous means."

—Daniel Birnbaum

and the portfolio page of O'Grady's work with images from the few circulating as early (or as late) as 2002. The full 14-piece photo-installation of Mlle Bourgeoise Noire — with images not only of O'Grady shouting or beating herself with a whip, but also smiling, giving away flowers, sharing amused moments with friends and onlookers — would not be widely seen until the WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution exhibit in 2007, and more fully available when O'Grady put up her website in 2008. . . .

"Crashing a museum opening in a dress made of hundreds of white gloves, O'Grady went up against 'polite society.' It's as if by multiplying the ladylike accessory, she'd gain entrée to the white white world of the white cube. Burning bridges? It's questionable whether there were any bridges to burn."—CN



LORRAINE O'GRADY

Clockwise from top left: *Miscegenated Family Album 4, SISTERS III, 1980-88*, black-and-white photographs (diptych), 28 x 39". *Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire, Shooting Her Poem, 1981*, performance still, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. *Miscegenated Family Album 5, SISTERS IV, 1980-88*, black-and-white photographs (diptych), 28 x 39".

