

Carlo Cesta
David Gatten
Eve Heller
Siew-wai Kok
Allen C. Topolski
Alfonso Volo



BEYOND/IN WESTERN NEW YORK 2005
visual and media arts at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center



Ἀρχαῖα Ἄρτα

Α. Ζωοδότῃς	Β. Ἰωάννης	Γ. Πέτρος
Δ. Παύλος	Ε. Ἰωάννης	Στ. Ἰωάννης
Ζ. Πέτρος	Η. Ἰωάννης	Θ. Ἰωάννης
Ι. Ἰωάννης	Κ. Ἰωάννης	Λ. Ἰωάννης
Μ. Ἰωάννης	Ν. Ἰωάννης	Ξ. Ἰωάννης
Ο. Ἰωάννης	Π. Ἰωάννης	Ρ. Ἰωάννης
Σ. Ἰωάννης	Τ. Ἰωάννης	Θ. Ἰωάννης
Ω. Ἰωάννης	Α. Ἰωάννης	Β. Ἰωάννης

Ὁ. Gloria. Κ. Ἰωάννης. Ψ. Ἰωάννης.

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visual art

CARLO CESTA, ALLEN C. TOPOLSKI
ALFONSO VOLO

Four Guys Walk Into A Casino...

Several months ago, describing our impending Beyond/In Western New York exhibition of Carlo Cesta, Allen C. Topolski, and Alfonso Volo, I said:

Somehow we all ended up around the same table, in a dark smoke-filled room, eyeballing each other to discern intentions, making our bets, and rolling the dice. Does everyone trust the croupier? Are the dice shaved? Has the felt been vacuumed? C'mon seven! Papa needs a new exhibition...

It's all still true. Four days to installation and the dice are tumbling like drunken fools, with a heady mixture of glee, uncertainty, and abandon. The only safe bet is that the final version of the exhibition will converge in an arena of shared sensibilities, despite the sometimes radically distinct points of. There is an undeniable pool of commonality. Or, to remain true to the metaphor, let's say that four gamblers (three artists and one curator) stumble into the same casino, end up at the same table...and, through skill and dumb luck, all win big.

It's more than a little thrilling to bring together three artists whose work, on the one hand, could never

be mistaken for each other and yet can so comfortably inhabit a shared space, with grace and good humor. There are quite a few points of common reference: domesticity, adornment, industry, pathos, found objects, the aroma of a past vaguely remembered, a whiff of the future, and the fragrance of works fully inhabiting the present.

The found object is everywhere in these works and yet no two treatments of the quotidian are the same. Allen Topolski's sculptures are dominated by transformative gestures that are both slight enough to convey some familiarity and altered enough to disable complete recognition. Carlo Cesta uses found objects with a complete bluntness—his garage doors are what they are—and a sly re-use of common materials, such as

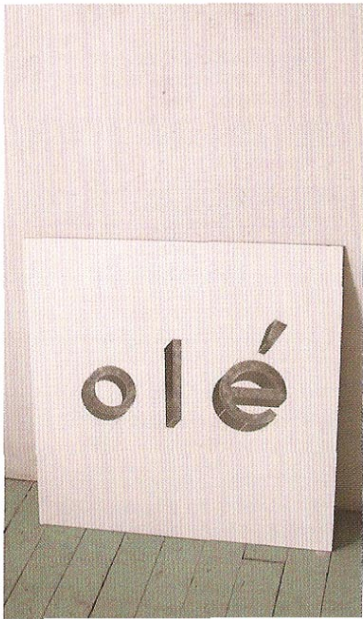


front cover: Alfonso Volo, I Dreamt I Had A Big Brain, 2005, porcelain mouse knick-knack, crocheted yarn, acrylic paint, lead sinker

<< David Gatten, from The Great Art of Knowing, 2004

< Allen C. Topolski, Foley, 2004, found materials, 42"H 16"W 18"D

> Carlo Cesta, Olé, 2005, marker board, muffler tape, 24" x 24"



automotive tape and wrought iron. Al Volo's approach to the found object can be subtle and perverse in the same gesture-knitted big brains and tiny post-op sutures on knick-knack figurines seems quaint and disturbed.

Ornamentation-industrial and domestic-is also a common language between these artists. Cesta's practice has long been concerned with the hybridization of decorative elements against the concise structures and forms of modernism, a process that reveals a personal and iconoclastic language. If Cesta does not deny the potential shallowness of the decorative frill, he is equally cognizant that serious commitment to these surface adornments creates some new, heftier thing. His Decorated Shed lays a graffiti tag flourish (acrylic caulking covered by aluminum automotive tape) atop an otherwise unmarked garage door. He collapses suburban banality with an elaborate decorative flavor and just a dose of street cred. It is a preposterous object, but works its clumsy elegance to great effect, a loopy and unsymmetrical design laid against the solid foundation of the ever-dependable grid.

Volo's sense of ornamentation is no less absurd. He and Cesta are both disrupting a traditional sense of ornament to bring something else to the surface. Volo may produce a wall plaque—a common adornment—though he may add multiple eyes. Or a goatee. Or a single brow. Within the plaque, he may gently paint the cracks in his object into "gilded flaws." His

crocheted caps for the "big brain" series of figurines are knitted with the delicate care of babies' booties and yet they usually trail off with a thread that eventually leads to a lead sinker. So, is a big brain a good thing or is there always something weighing it down?

Topolski's formal disruption is toward the objects of mid-20th century appliance design and his conceptual disruption toward the operation of memory. The fact that Topolski's sculptures seem entirely familiar—though their "source object" is typically difficult to discern—is an apt physical metaphor for the unreliable mechanisms of recollection. As with Cesta and Volo, Topolski's artistic gestures are often subtle and concise, just enough to keep things suitably ambiguous. He does not alter original colors and is prone to leave residues of dirt and rust as they are found on the object. When he does add a new element—video or sound—he uses this as a means to further obfuscation. A speaker may emit the sound of the original appliance, but it typically sounds like merely the vague rumblings of a memory not quite remembered. Topolski uses titles to continue to cloud the clarity of meaning, either by using a name from the original appliance—Centralia or Foley—or concocting intentionally unhelpful titles like *Once Familiar*, *Almost Forgotten*, and *Part of an Old Future*.

There is humor in Topolski's titles, a humor reflected throughout the titles of Cesta and Volo as well. Cesta's gargantuan teardrop hanging from a partial gate form is one of a few objects in a series the artist calls *Mellow Drama*. It is, on the one hand, as cool and serene as Cesta's other works, a combination of industrial materials in an elegant arrangement.



Alfonso Volo, *Vestigial Fur With Ascending Fake Eyes*, 2005, found wood plaque, fake eyes, fake fur, graphite, acrylic paint, fake fur

> Eve Heller, from *Behind This Soft Eclipse*, 2004



media arts

DAVID GATTEN, EVE HELLER
SIEW-WAI KOK

Experiments in Process, Speed,
and Calm

At the same time, its grotesque size and complete blackness are darkly funny details—it is an entirely overwrought gesture growing out of a structure of wrought iron. Volo, similarly, uses titles to humorously (and poignantly) augment already curious works: *I Dreamt I Had A Big Brain*; *Vestigial Fur (With Incised Eclipse and Gilded Flaws)*; *Parched, yet, Luminous*; and the ludicrously funny and pathetic: "Doctor, I just can't stand the Limelight anymore."

So, why does it work? Allen Topolski reconfigures objects of the past, not to talk about the past but how we try to remember it. Carlo Cesta applies an old-world elegance to works that look as though they are waiting for the future to catch up with them. And Alfonso Volo uses objects steeped in sentiment and nostalgia as deceptively simple mechanisms through which to construct complex psychological vignettes. All three are manipulating references from another time into works that convincingly inhabit the present moment. Formally, Topolski and Cesta share an industrial touch; Cesta and Volo share an ornamental flavor; and Volo and Topolski share a domestic ambience.

Four guys walk into a casino...there's no punch line to the set-up. The air conditioning feels right. The drinks are cold. The pit bosses think a scam is in the offing, but can't discern it. Cocktail waitresses blow the dice for luck.

Everyone leaves the table a winner.

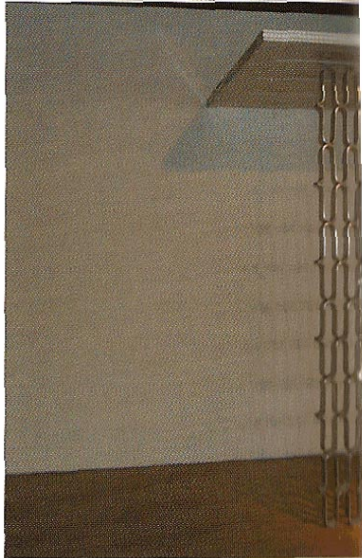
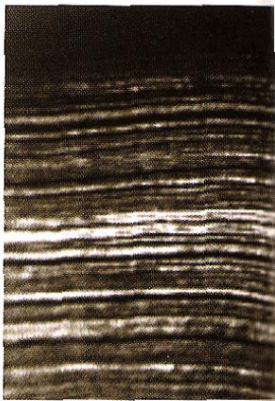
John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

Voices and silence figure prominently throughout the work of David Gatten, Siew-wai Kok, and Eve Heller, the media artists asked by Hallwalls to participate in *Beyond/ In Western New York 2005*. The work of David Gatten and Eve Heller is similar in form and yet distinctive: both are willfully keeping 16mm black and white film in circulation, each uniquely pushing the possibilities of silent film to heights never before explored. Siew-wai, whose performance might seem the antithesis of a silent 16mm projection, is in fact devoted to making work in the same spirit of experimentation. All three artists express a vitality, dedication, and lack of fear that is so painfully obscured in this actively silenced culture of ours.

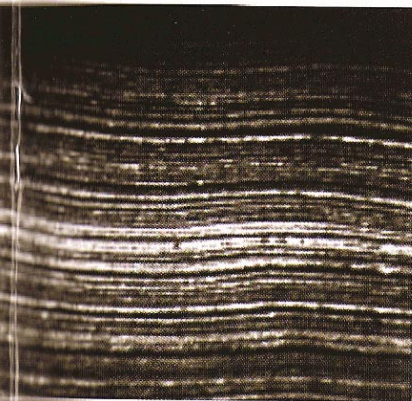
David Gatten's series *Secret History of the Dividing Line: A True Account in Nine Parts* utilizes parts of the Byrd family history of the early 18th Century to develop an homage to the printed word, using the technology of the optical printer and a variety of alternative film processes. He delves deeply into the possibilities of one central theme and comes up with startlingly unique yet related variations. Reminiscent of scrolling library microfiche, the opening of *Secret History of the Dividing Line (2002)* presents a timeline: the history of early

> Carlo Cesta, *Insulated Shed*, 2004/05, commercially-manufactured metal garage door, acrylic caulking, muffler tape, 8'x8'x7'

>> Allen C. Topolski, *Sammy's Basement*



► Evo Heller, from Her Glacial Speed, 2001
David Gatten, from The Enjoyment of Reading (Lost & Found), 2001

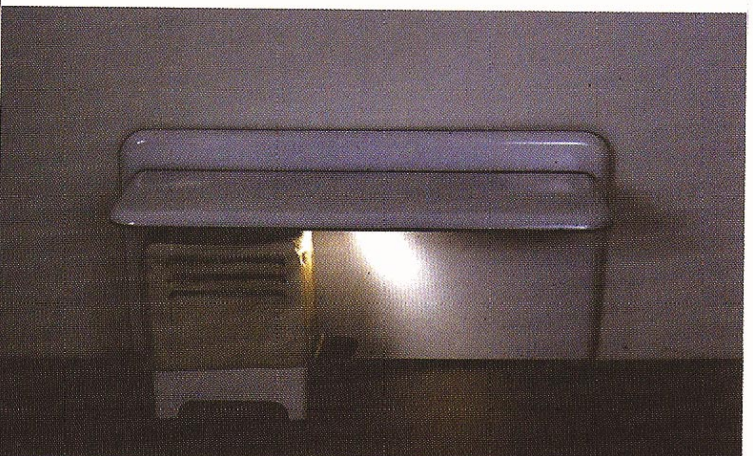
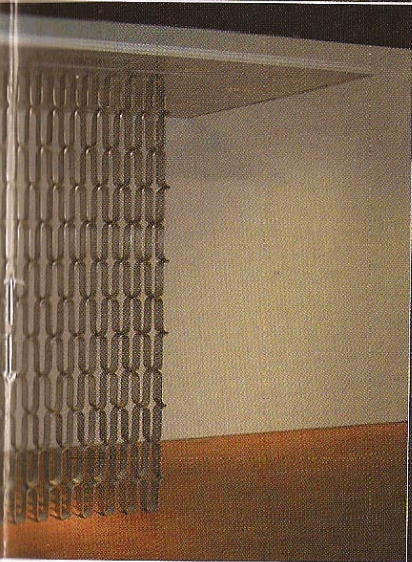
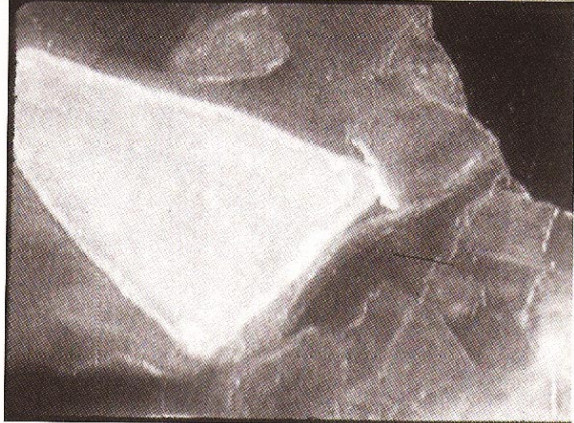


American settlers and the explorer Byrd, the "dividing line" between Virginia and North Carolina, and flashes of other historic events. A slow crawl of quoted text is interrupted with abrupt

fades and other visual interruptions to lessen the audience's comfort in reading and to heighten the effect of words and letters as abstract forms rather than as vehicles and servants of information. In one particularly striking segment, David draws our attention to the beauty of the film splice. Interruptions made with a physical cut of plastic, the forms are exaggerated stills of residual glue. Meditative landscapes, these

splices heighten the concept of the "dividing line" both thematically (the content of the film) and structurally (the film material itself). Cuts are usually the secrets of films, painstakingly made to be invisible and usually problematic when noticed; here they are useful characters.

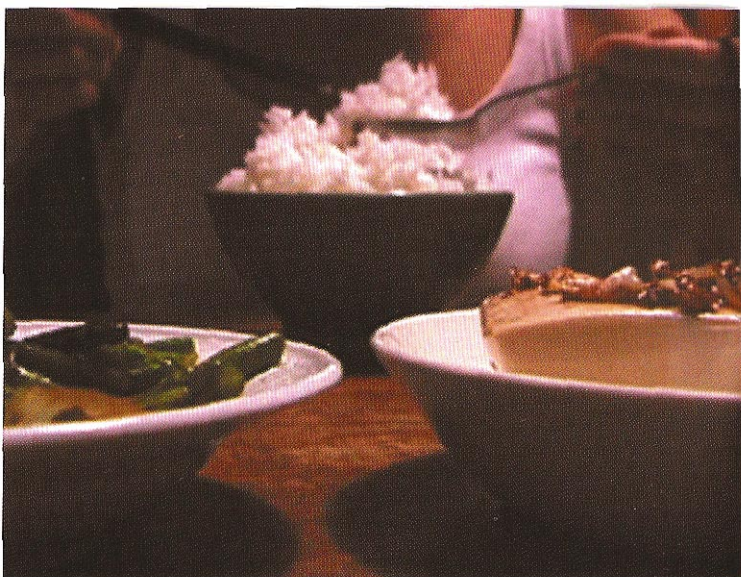
Reading is a solitary activity, one that David converts into a communal meditation on the art and complicated



history of printing. Our individual, silent readings of the text before us become our private, internal soundtracks; the once innovative technology of 16mm silent film now the great-grandparent of the latest trend in digital filmmaking.

Eve Heller's black and white films invoke an otherworldly atmosphere where the viewer is invited to grasp the profound in the everyday. Predominantly silent and for the most part in slow motion, they are disorienting and comforting at once: dream states where the subconscious is given free reign. Two of her most recent works, *Her Glacial Speed* (2001) and *Behind This Soft Eclipse* (2004) are now elegies to lost loved ones, but as a whole her works are all reverent. This is not to say that they are ponderous or bleak by any means: *Last Lost*, for instance (which was a part of *Hallwalls 2003/2004* traveling film and video program *Hinterlands and Border Minds*) refigures found footage of "a chimpanzee's high adventures at Coney Island." It is the only sound film of Eve's being screened at *Hallwalls*, and uses a minimal collage of noises from an old-fashioned carnival.

Footage used in both *Behind This Soft Eclipse* (2004) and *Glint* (2005) was shot at the independent imaging retreat run by Philip Hoffman in Mt. Forest, Ontario, Canada. The repetition of beautiful underwater images shot in hi contrast film highlights the gravity of iconic images within individual histories—not only do patterns of behavior repeat throughout lives, but so do images and symbols. Stalks of plants and delicate sprays of petals; the surface of the water with foam, underneath a branch from a blossoming tree; fish and close ups of a wizened old dog. These are all private moments reflected in universally cognizant images, reassuring in their simplicity and grace. Where the slow moving form of a swimmer and the breaking surface of the



pond meet in a hem of bubbles, a metaphor of interior and exterior worlds appears. Eve's body of work is replete with such poetic arcs.

Breathe was conceived by Buffalo-based Siew-wai Kok with guest musicians and collaborators Patrick Cain, Jax Deluca, Paul Kozlowski, and video artist Koji Tambata. With *Breathe*, the emphasis is placed on the collaboration of video and visual artists, musicians, and performers. Siew-wai, who focuses on "developing an integrated approach of art making that creates poetry out of everyday life," uses movement and her voice to explore connections with her colleagues, and draw out of her self the material from which the performance is based. An organic and living entity, *Breathe* underscores the power of contemplation and action.

I would like to thank all the participating artists, Carl Lee, Howard Kopp, Craig Reynolds, Michael Clement, and Morgan Smith for their tireless help in making these events possible.

Joanna Raczynska
Media Arts Program Director





**Carlo Cesta
Allen C. Topolski
Alfonso Volo**

**exhibition on view:
April 16 to May 31, 2005
at 700 Main Street**

< Alfonso Volo, "Doctor, I just can't stand the
Limelight anymore," 2005, porcelain mouse knick-
knacks, acrylic paint

David Gatten

screening

Saturday, May 7 at 7 pm
at Market Arcade Film & Arts
Center

Siew-wai Kok

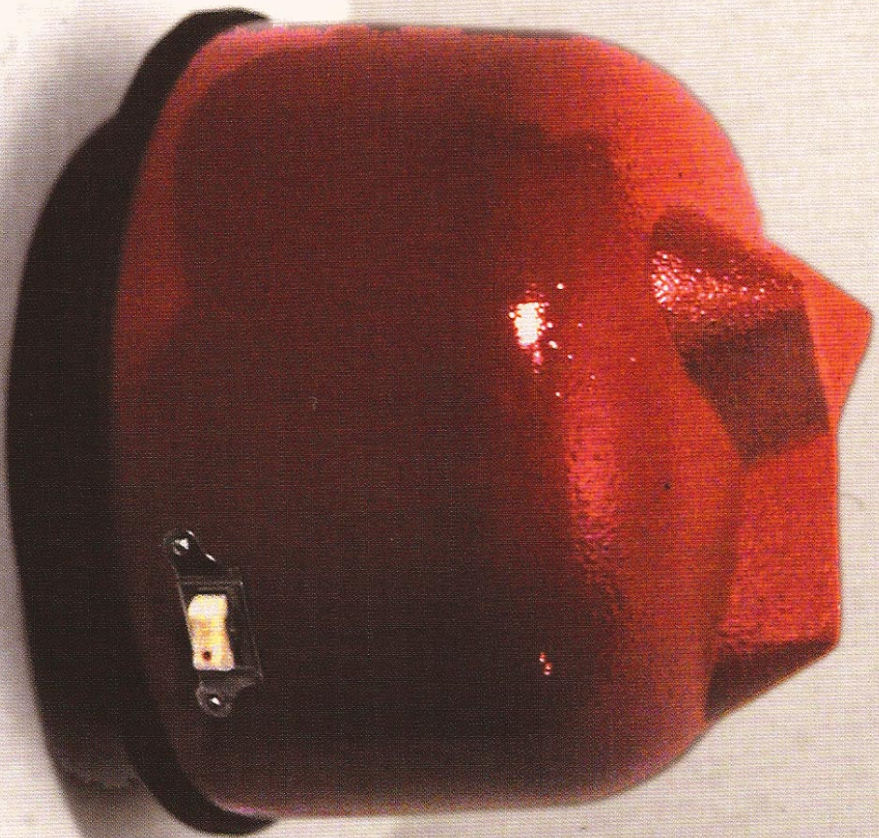
screening & performance
Saturday, May 14 at 8 pm
at Soundlab, 110 Pearl Street

Eve Heller

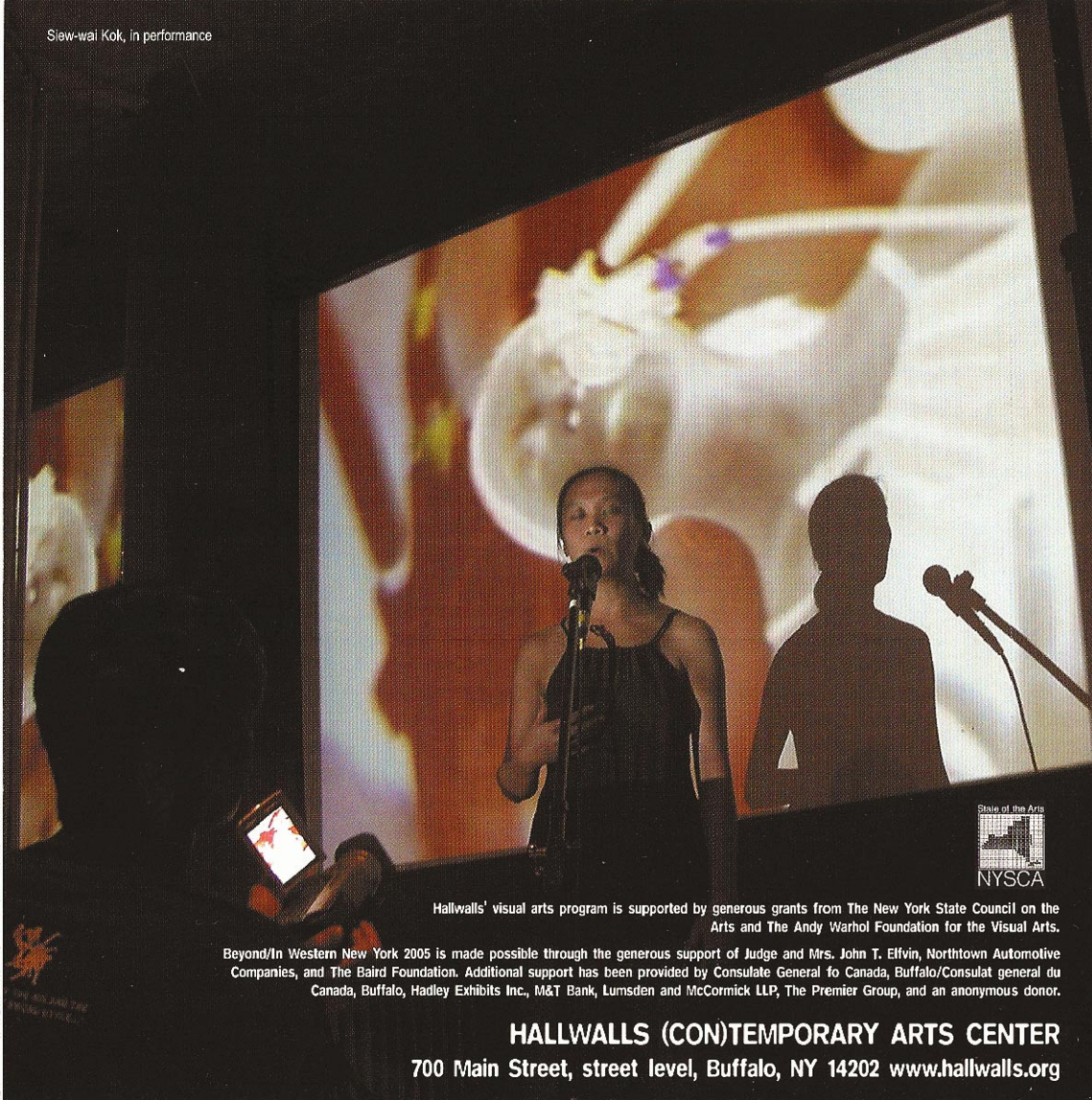
Saturday, June 4 at 8 pm
at 700 Main Street

> Eve Heller, from Her Glacial Speed, 2001





Slew-wai Kok, in performance



Hallwalls' visual arts program is supported by generous grants from The New York State Council on the Arts and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

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HALLWALLS (CON)TEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

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