



Performance art comes to AUB

Wednesday February 17, 2010

Toward the end of the fall 2009-10 semester, passers-by on campus witnessed a girl in front of West Hall dressed in white, destroying with her mouth a cage made of black ties; water-filled balloons slamming into a man covered in dirt in the roots of a banyan tree; a student on the Green Oval so heavily weighted with books tied to his body he could no longer walk.

Performance art had come to AUB.

The students involved were doing their final presentations in the Fine Arts and Art History course Acting and Directing 284, offered in the fall semester by Visiting Whittlesey Assistant Professor Cornelia Krafft—with a focus on performance art.

Students registering for Krafft's course knew little about the course content and next to nothing about performance art. After the first semester drop and add period, only eight students remained, but these students persisted, and in December and January acted out the first performance series on campus called "Irritations I/II."

Krafft explained in the syllabus she has prepared for FAAH 286, Performance Art, to be offered in the spring semester, that performance art explores a fundamental element in art making, the body and its relationship to time and space, by approaching "performance from a non-theatrical stance," while taking its point of departure from the lived experience.

The final "Irritations" presentations appeared spontaneously on campus on three days in the middle of December and again in late January, when students performed, through use of body and space, their reactions/interpretations to the Roumieh prison play, *12 Angry Men*, and to the Kafka novel *The Trial*.

Each of these works, Krafft explained, involve moving from guilt to innocence, depicted, for example, in washing away the dirt with water balloons and escaping the prison of the ties.

The presentations illustrated the differences between performance art and traditional theater. The time and place were only briefly made known in advance in e-mails to AUB faculty and through "teasers" of chalk and paper appearing on the ground the day of the events, held on the Main Gate steps, beside West Hall, and on the Green Oval. The "audience" (students and others hurrying across campus) happened on the action. No seats were reserved and no curtain rose.

One spectator, Bassil Bou Zeki, exclaimed, "This is AUB! This is how it is supposed to be! . . . AUB is about this diversity, and [about] exposing its students to things that we rarely find elsewhere."