

# Fear fuels art

By STEPHANIE LYN GROSS

New York art critic Lucy Lippard spoke last Friday on contemporary art in America and how fear fuels the images that are being made today.

Speaking in the auditorium of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Lippard stated, "I could have called this lecture Bad News but I've called it Imagine Being Here Now."

Lippard has done surveys on activists and other artists from all over the world. She writes for *The Village Voice*, and has recently published a new book *Overlays* which compares archeological sculpture to present-day works.

After studying such diverse styles as Dada, Pop, Surrealism, Landscape art, Minimalism, Lippard is now focusing her research on the works of minority groups, including Latin American and female artists.

In her lecture Lippard observed that images of fear in contemporary art "manifests itself in many different ways and comes from many different places that pervades all cultures and classes."

Lippard used slides to illustrate the fear phenomena many of which were examples of street or graffiti art. Lippard explains how this art form, born in the 1970s, was characterized by dissident and political groups.

According to Lippard, there has been a joining of all groups to "form a cross-cultural and cross-class alliance." She said that avant-garde artists have begun to work directly in the streets, following the graffitiists and community activists. This brought downtown artists and art audiences to the ghettos of the South Bronx. Lippard attributes this relationship to "widespread and deep-seated social fear."

In explaining this social fear, Lippard made a parallel with the art of the 1930s to the art of today. She said the revival of the 1930s culture is because of "today's and yesterday's political conservatism, depressions, fear of economic disaster, growing racism, and again, fear of war." She points out that in both decades there has been an effort to blur boundaries between the high and low culture.

The tone of the art works in Lippard's slide show could be labeled ironic or angry, cynical, political or a-political but in all of them, said Lippard, "there is a fear—not just of the cataclysm, but fear of each other, fear of hoping, fear of sincerity."

From the street-graffiti art, there were phrases like, "Kill for Jobs" and "Arts What Sell\$." The terror of war and nuclear holocaust was evident in various types of images. One painting contained four blocks from left to right. Each block



PHOTO: JOE KISPAL-KOVATS

A work of art from the slide-show given by Lucy Lippard held at OISE last week.

contained portraits of men in different military uniforms. Under each block were the letters B-O-M-B.

Two photographs, the first of a young Latin American boy carrying a rifle with the caption "They're selling war—the price is your life," and one of a black man shooting a military machine gun with a similar

caption "The right to die—Unequality for your country," mock the United States war propaganda and military involvement.

Lippard quotes an artist who recently wrote of contemporary art, "It's like someone screaming in a corner wanting your attention." According to Lippard, progressive

images of alarm are meant to wake us up. To those who are already awake, she asks, "How do we best understand and make art from understanding the nature of the alienation we all suffer from—and the fear that renders a people inactive, unable to organize and plan for the future?"

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