

## NEWS & COMMENTARY



### Culture

## Video Artist Eve Sussman Masters Tricky Art of Fund Raising

(The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of Bloomberg.)

By Carol Kino

June 10 (Bloomberg) -- Video artist Eve Sussman became an overnight sensation in the art world after the showing of her lush video "89 Seconds at Alcazar" at the Whitney Biennial 2004. In the video, Sussman imagined and dramatized the moments leading up to the fabled scene in Velazquez's 1656 painting "Las Meninas."

The painting depicts the Spanish Infanta posing with her handmaids and the artist at court. The "mini-costume drama," as Sussman has called it, was produced in an edition of 10 with two artist's proofs; not long after the Biennial opened, the run had completely sold out. Sussman's New York gallery, Roebling Hall, now has a waiting list for her work.

But even that success didn't assure easy fund raising for her latest project, "Raptus," now being shot at seven locations in Germany and Greece, including a Roman amphitheater near the Acropolis and Berlin's Tempelhof airport.

"We thought \$250,000 would do it, but now the budget is nearly \$500,000," Sussman said before leaving for Europe. She spoke from her industrial loft in the rapidly gentrifying Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, where she lives and works.

#### Favorite Rant

She and her husband, the artist Simon Lee, renovated the rented loft from raw space themselves. (They expect to lose their place when the lease expires in 2008). Now 44, she's tough, wiry and intense -- and just as likely to launch into a rant about the many ways in which artists are being squeezed out of New York as about her own creative ambitions.

"Raptus" is a half-hour epic inspired by Jacques-Louis David's 1794-99 painting "Intervention of the Sabine Women." The project is a costly undertaking, thanks to its far-flung locations, its international cast and crew, its elaborate crowd scenes, an aesthetic inspired by the fashion-plate look of 1960s movies, and the sort of technological sophistication that's increasingly expected of video art production.

The classic way to pay for such large-scale projects is to presell a few editions before production starts, or to sell stills and video loops culled from additional footage, according to Christian Viveros-Faune, the co-owner of Roebling Hall. So far, he's done both, raising a total of about \$200,000 from three presales and five sales of rehearsal photographs.

#### Gallery's Help

"We might have to presell one more video," he said soon after Sussman had discovered she needed to raise more

money, "but I would rather not, because I think the work will increase in value after its debut, the same way it did with '89 Seconds.'" Roebing Hall has also agreed to forego the typical 50 percent dealer's cut on advance sales, Viveros-Faune said.

Sussman said she also has received two substantial European grants to help fund the project. The Hauptstadtkulturfond, a German government agency, has chipped in 70,000 euros (\$86,000); 20,000 euros will come from the J.F. Costopoulos Foundation, a Greek nonprofit charitable institution.

In addition, she has rallied in-kind support from corporations. Panavision Inc. will provide an \$800,000 camera package; a German microphone company, Microtech-gefell, will donate state-of-the-art microphones; and Jeff Blauvelt, the owner of HD Cinema, a New York and California-based film equipment rental house, is donating editing equipment and will consult on-set.

#### Suited for Destruction

Meanwhile, the London clothing company Merc has donated 12 men's suits that get torn apart during a battle scene. (Sussman, who'd originally requested 30 suits, had to reorganize her original shooting schedule to capitalize on Merc's eventual donation.)

"Companies sponsor me because they think it's exciting, they want to see their name in lights, and they're a little bored by the lowest common denominator," said Sussman. "Very rarely do they do it for the tax write-off."

Just two weeks before shooting was scheduled to begin, Viveros-Faune said, he secured a promise of the final \$100,000 Sussman needed from a private collector. Instead of a copy of the video, the buyer will likely receive a substantial amount of "Raptus"-related material in exchange. The precise details remain to be negotiated.

"This collector really believes in the project and wants to make sure it goes forward," Viveros-Faune said.

Sussman, previously an installation artist who often used video footage in her work, made the leap into large-scale filmic projects in 2003, when she suddenly found herself with an extra \$20,000, from a New York State Council of the Arts grant and her fee for making a promotional fashion video. She figured she could put anything additional on credit.

"I didn't really cost it out," Sussman said, "because I knew that if I did I wouldn't have enough." And she was right: Before shooting began, she already had maxed out three charge cards with \$25,000 in expenses.

#### Private Collector

For "89 Seconds," a private collector fronted Sussman \$3,000 in exchange for the first copy of the piece. Blauvelt, the owner of HD Cinema, agreed to loan Sussman the equipment to shoot and edit the piece, and consulted on-set throughout the shoot. His sole payment: a "director of photography" credit and one of Sussman's two artists' proofs.

Soon after the shoot, "89 Seconds" was chosen for the Whitney exhibition, based on raw footage alone. At about that time, Sussman also hooked up with Roebing Hall and the gallery began trying to presell the piece, based on a rough cut, at international art fairs.

By the time the finished work was unveiled at the Biennial, its price had climbed to \$45,000. The next day, says Roebing Hall co-owner Viveros-Faune, the gallery raised it to \$65,000; but by then almost half the edition had already been promised to collectors and museums at considerably lower prices. (Typically, an edition's price escalates as supplies dwindle and demand grows. The buyer of a finished piece receives a presentation box containing a master videotape and a digital video disc of the work.)

#### Scaling Up

This time around, Sussman's ambitions and budget have scaled up, and so have her funding options. Not only does she have a gallery's support to help raise money, but she also has that hard-won thing: creative credibility.

"You don't question the organic creative process, you question what needs to be done to make it happen," she said. "At this point, I feel we've proved ourselves."

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--Editors: Schatz, West.

Story illustration: For more information about Roebing Hall, see the gallery's Web site at <http://www.roebinghall.com>. For more cultural news from Bloomberg, see {MUSE <GO>}. To contact the editor responsible for this story: Robin Schatz in New York at (1)(212) 362 9681 or [rschatz@bloomberg.net](mailto:rschatz@bloomberg.net).

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