

Smash that Bluebird of Happiness



Trong G. Nguyen decodes one of Edwina White's clues

For her debut New York solo show at Gigantic Art Space, "Across+Down," Edwina White picked up a copy of the New York Times on January 1, 2005, took a look at the crossword and resolved to answer each clue-in her own way. I talked with her about carrying around a very abstract shopping list...

EW

Trong G. Nguyen: Since you used the first *New York Times* of the year, does your show have anything to do with new year resolutions?

Edwina White: To envisage a body of clues as the titles for 50 and more new works was overwhelming at first. So I settled on New Year's Day, a blind pick and significant date for us all. This would also be a good way to mark the project's timeline. A lot of my New Year's resolutions have been inherently resolved in the course of the project. I went from wondering to wandering to making the deadline with the adrenalin rush of sleepless nights for the final blasts of invention.

TGN: Sometimes crossword puzzles have a theme, Does this one?

EW: I found that there were a series of occupations within the clues but I decided to free up and work on each one individually. The found objects and papers and film works all had their own context - it was more about the interplay of word and image than the consistency in image making. People often asked me if I solved the crossword. I didn't want to. It was my concern to resolve the clues with images, so I cut the puzzle pattern out so I wasn't aware of a word's length. And was duly liberated from the clues.

TGN: Many images in the show have an intimate, sensitive, familiar feeling about them. The papers are worn and yellowed, objects look like they've come from an abandoned house. Can you talk a little more about these details?

EW: A few people have said that the show has a timeless quality. I've used aged papers for a while now in my work. They carry the warmed colors of skin or a wall surface. I found old papers from rejected books, photo paper, and music scores - all already invested with

meaning and memory. I find it easier then to keep my drawings spare and loose. I had the clues with me all the time. My shopping list read: poison bottle for "Poisonous element, prefix," railroad tracks for "Engages in melodrama," a Victorian hair ornament for "Places for combs." And then there was the thrill of the blind find: a child's gas mask, for instance, ideal for "Muzzle packer."

TGN: Any images or items from the White family archives?

EW: Uh... My mother's gall bladder for "Volunteered." Not the gall bladder itself, but an x-ray.

TGN: Your background is in illustration, What were the firsts in this show for you?

EW: This enormous space has allowed me to shift freely from the limitations that are the coordinates of the page. Lea, the director, made me realize it was a complex space to work with, that a solo show is about creating an environment - even an exercise in interior design. I included screen works, a soundscape, poem objects, and drawing-collages, all located by their numerical coordinates stenciled on the wall. It shows almost like a live museum. Figure 1 across through to figure 47 down. It's as if you're trapped in a puzzle. I made my first chess set, my first pinata, my first finished animations, my first direct wall drawing. Animating my drawings with James Dunlap was exciting because my figures adopted movement and became rich with personality. To source and attach sound and adapt movement was a wonderfully satisfying revelation.

TGN: What's inside the pinata?

EW: Aha... that's the question on everybody's lips. The pinata's clue was "The hit of the party." The ingredients are a secret until there's a party. It's my "object to be destroyed." We're gonna smash that bluebird of happiness and celebrate the fact that nothing is really ever too precious. □



top-bottom: Edwina White, *5 Down, Engages in Melodrama*, 2005. Mixed media, 6 x 22 in. / Edwina White. *51 Across, Halloween game of biting fruit dangling on a string*, 2005. Mixed media, 9 1/2 x 13 in.