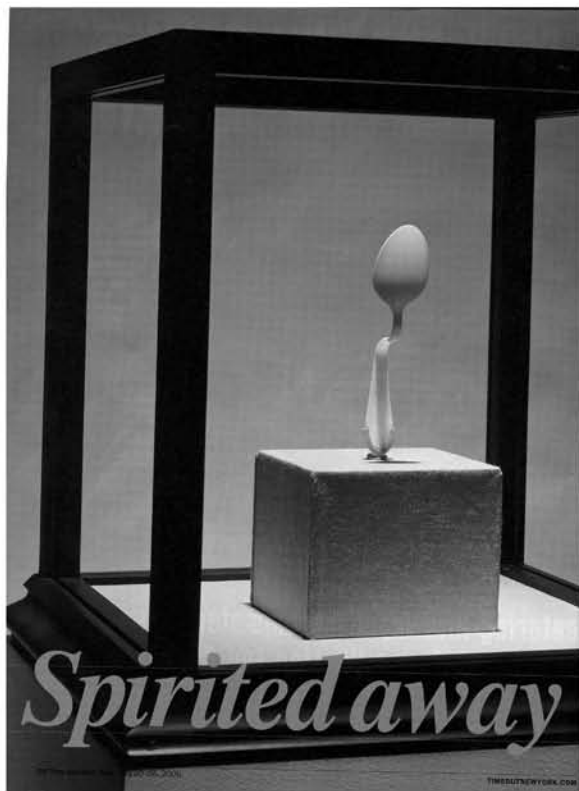


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Creative Time's newest art spectacle takes a journey into the paranormal. By **Barbara Pollack**

Art casts a spell—just ask anyone who has stood before a Rothko painting. But few art lovers would claim that such a work possesses psychic abilities. “Strange Powers,” the summer show of the nonprofit public-art group Creative Time, makes precisely that case—that art has all sorts of powers, even paranormal ones.

“Everybody believes that art can be a spiritual vehicle,” says Laura Hoptman, one of the exhibition’s two curators. The works in this show go well beyond metaphor, offering to conjure spirits, stir energies, even heal the audience. It’s all a bit more otherworldly than art world-y. “These works are not just describing or documenting phenomena, they are the phenomena,” says Hoptman, who, serious credentials notwithstanding (she curated the 2004 Carnegie International and will soon become a curator at the New Museum), admits to being a believer. Creative Time’s Peter Eleey, who cocurated “Strange Powers,” is a bit more skeptical. As he puts it, “I tend to need verification.” Eleey played Scully to Hoptman’s Agent Mulder, questioning and testing works from an impressive roster of international artists, all of whom believe their creations can raise something more than auction prices.

An abandoned floor of an old theater building on East 4th Street turned out to be the perfect site for such an experiment. “I can’t say we weren’t delighted when the psychic who came to clear the space found lots of layers of energies indicating that this once was a brothel,” Hoptman says. Tribeca photographer Miranda Lichtenstein enlisted local psychic Sondra Shay to do the “clearing,” which the artist shot; one of these images appears in the show. But even the most down-to-earth observer might have premonitions in this decrepit, evocative space. An alcove in the bare-brick wall—where Sophie Calle’s film about her collaboration with a fortune-teller will be projected—exposes a sliver of an air shaft between the floor and the adjoining building. “You can feel the breeze,

but don’t lean too close,” Eleey cautions.

Such a spine-tingling reaction is exactly what the curators hope many of these works will inspire. Step inside the installation *The Ghost of James Lee Byars*, a pitch-black room Byars built in 1969 to house his spirit, and see whether you sense some encounter with the American avatar artist, who died in 1997 in Cairo. Christian Cummings holds a séance to rouse the souls of dead artists—Barnett Newman has reportedly appeared—then completes these spirits’ drawings as communicated via a Ouija board. (Cummings will give performances through Sunday 23; his actions will be projected onto a screen.) “Even if the effect seems doubtfully sincere, we think it is a fair assessment if the artist is himself sincere in his motivations,” Eleey explains.

If you’re in search of some spiritual cleansing, step in front of Euan Macdonald’s life-size video projection of his former landlady, a self-professed healer. “He’s not documenting her performing a healing on a particular subject,” Hoptman says. “He filmed her so that she can heal the viewer.” Eleey, who still seems unconvinced, acknowledges that Macdonald will reach a much larger audience when the work is aired on NBC’s jumbo Astrovision screen in Times Square as part of Creative Time’s ongoing program the 59th Minute (for more on that project, see creativetime.org).

In spite of their differences, the curators will produce a work of their own, in response to Turner Prize winner Douglas Gordon’s submission, a one-sentence letter of instruction: *Do something evil*. At press time, Hoptman and Eleey were searching for someone to cast a spell on a can of black paint so they could apply the curse as a mark on the exhibition wall. If you’re feeling especially impervious to hexes, go have a look.

“Strange Powers” runs through September 17 at 64 East 4th Street between Bowery and Second Avenue, second floor.