

Lenore Malen

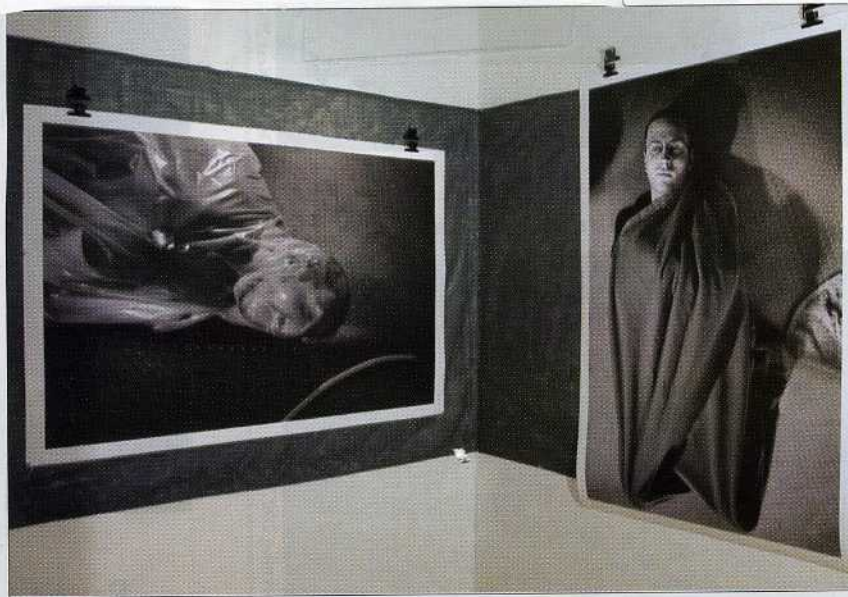
CUE Art Foundation

Franz Anton Mesmer began advancing his ideas about the restorative power of hypnotism and magnetism in the 18th century, and although he is now widely dismissed as a mystic and a quack healer, he was once so influential that we all know what it means to be "mesmerized." Artist Lenore Malen became interested in his career in 2000, and since then she has begun a multifaceted project to revive his ideas, under the banner of the New Society for Universal Harmony. The show, organized by curator and art historian Pepe Karmel, focused on the videos, photographs, and documentation that Malen produced to lend substance to a reenactment of Mesmer's work.

Central to the exhibition was the latest addition to the project, *Be Not Afraid* (2007), a two-channel video that shows one of Mesmer's magnetic healing rituals being restaged in the shadow of the World's Fair site in Flushing, Queens. The figures seem incongruous, chanting and singing and swaying against the modern backdrop, yet the setting underlines the inherent argument of this project: that utopian aspirations link Mesmer to modern times.

Other exhibits and documents made this re-creation seem eerily real: there were pictures of the alleged home of the New Society in Athol Springs, New York, as well as reproductions of Mesmer's drawings and copies of his books. Ironically, the cracks in the illusion lie in the quality of the presentation: the large photographs of haunting reenactments are so well staged and finely reproduced that one was too well reminded that these are art objects, not merely the artifacts of a cult.

—Morgan Falconer



Lenore Malen, *What Happened*, 2000–7, archival ink-jet print, 44" x 65" (left), and *Yes, Once I Was an Astronaut*, 2000–7, archival ink-jet print, 65" x 44". CUE Art Foundation.

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