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when I wouldn't have. But now I would. It changed my life. I wasn't just writing a novel, I was learning to write. It took a discipline that I wasn't sure I had. In the first year I had no idea if I'd ever finish, and then after a year I said I definitely will finish. When you do it's a great moment. You worry about publication, but it sure is great to finish something."

Everett Aison is also at work on his second novel. He writes longhand at a desk in the reading room, and has been coming to the Society Library for more than 30 years. "I originally heard about it from a young woman I was going out with. Either she was a member or the gallery she worked for had a membership. This was in the 50s. Then when I decided I wanted to write every day, I inquired about it and I started coming."

When not in the library, Aison teaches screenwriting at the School of Visual Arts. He has written a number of screenplays, but he's had trouble getting them produced. Now he's switched to novels, but like Harvey's, Aison's first book, *Artrage*, is still waiting for a publisher.

"There's no question it's a factor in the writing. Sometimes I say my God, what am I doing this for? But if I sit down and ask myself will it sell, I'll never do anything. I am constantly telling myself, whether with the screenplays or the novels, the joy is in the doing."

Writing, of course, is not all joy. For Richard Murphy, one of the pleasures of the Society Library is that there are others suffering with him.

"It's kind of nice here, because you can see all these people tearing their hair out, sitting at their laptops and procrastinating and blowing off their work and checking their e-mail, and you know, it makes you feel you're not totally alone in the world."

Murphy recently quit his job at a human rights group to write a memoir of his life in Pakistan. It's called *Lahore Nights*, and the subject is timely enough that the book has already been sold. Murphy says that it was something he'd always wanted to write, but he also acknowledges that without the publisher's advance he might never have started on it. "I don't think my wife would have stood for it."

I asked Mr. Murphy to give me a taste. He described an episode about his landing a part in a Pakistani tv miniseries. He played the role of an English planter in an epic drama glorifying Kashmiri freedom fighters. The show was performed in Urdu. "I spoke reasonably good Urdu in those days, but my character was meant to speak terrible Urdu. If I said anything that sounded too fluent the director would stop and say, 'No, no. Your Urdu has to suck.' That's the kind of thing the book is about."

LINCOLN MACVEAGH

ART

Son of Thread Waxing Space

LIA GANGITANO became known as one of the most original art curators around during the late 1990s, when she was with the notorious Thread Waxing Space. There you were likely to see a woman in an oversized vat of cotton candy as an exhibition of artifacts from David Cronenberg's films. Thread Waxing's

closing in 2001 left a huge void in New York's avant-garde art scene. Now Gangitano returns with her own space, the nonprofit Participant Inc., at 95 Rivington St., set to open this month. I recently spoke with Lia at her studio apartment on the Lower East Side.

Before you came to Thread Waxing, you were at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art from 1987 to 1997. What was that like? Well, most of the artists from what was to be called the "Boston School" had moved to other places by the time I arrived. But I met Pat Hearn, who was living in New York then, and discovered all the stuff she'd done in Boston, her performances and exhibitions. And then I met other artists from that period, saw how their work had started as a rebellion against tradition and developed into an interlocking diary of these peoples' lives. It was really inspiring.

Any favorites among the exhibits you curated there?

I guess it was my first large-scale project, "Dress Codes," an exhibition about cross-dressing that I co-curated in 1993. I got to know artists like Cathy Opie, Hunter Reynolds and Rafael Sanchez, who remained friends and collaborators. It was the beginning of what you might call a family, one that spanned Boston, New York and L.A. and made me want to continue curating.

Any bad experiences?

The thing is, I grew up at the ICA. What was great about it at the time was that it was this enclave of experimentation in an otherwise very conservative place. Initially, I'd thought the whole city was like that, until I started working on exhibitions and reading reviews. Then I realized that Boston was in fact quite hostile to contemporary art. Some of the most harshly criticized exhibitions at the ICA back then are now considered canonical examples of postmodernism. But people in Boston really hated them.

What expectations did you bring with you to Thread Waxing when you became its curator?

I knew the ICA was moving in a direction that I didn't want to go in myself. I wanted to work at a place that was more alternative, less hierarchically structured—and in New York. It's funny, but I applied for the position at Thread Waxing as a practice run; actually getting the job seemed like a complete longshot. And when I really did get it, I didn't know what to expect. Then, shortly after I came to New York, MOMA agreed to work with Thread Waxing for an exhibition on [avant-garde filmmaker] Luther Price, and I saw how truly different this city is. To have an established institution collaborate on such a project would never have happened in Boston, even though it's Luther's hometown. It felt for the first time like the work I cared about had real support and a serious audience.

Are there any mistakes you made at the ICA and Thread Waxing that you want to avoid repeating?

Like I said, I've got this strange family that's developed, and we all help each other with our crazy projects. You've got to really trust the people you work with to let your ambitions take shape. Making mistakes is part of the process. I just hope to make new and different ones in the future.

What are some of the shows you've planned?

I wanted to open with a project that was somehow about Participant itself, its space, so [Philadelphia-based artist] Virgil Marti has produced a site-specific work for the inaugural show. I'd thought he would just

wallpaper the place, but he's gone much further and produced an installation that incorporates cast-resin chandeliers and printed mylar wall panels into a kind of hall-of-mirrors, a riff on notions of taste and esthetics. After that there's going to be this single-channel video installation by Lovett/Codagnone, which is basically a video designed to elongate a still from Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* into a real-time movie. The artists use themselves as actors, holding their positions for 50 minutes, with a soundtrack excerpted from that old Dirk Bogarde film *The Servant*. It's a study in shifting power dynamics. Later, this winter, I'm looking forward to Laura Parnes's installation *Hollywood Inferno* (*Episode One*).

Is there any type of art that you hate and would never exhibit?

In the past I've shown things that I at first hated, because I just couldn't dismiss them. Their meaning far outweighed my esthetic aversion to them. That said, I would never show something that I felt ambivalent about.

Raising the funds to open a gallery must be incredibly difficult in the current economic climate. How have you managed to do this?

The resources generally came from individuals and foundations that support contemporary art. But I'm not out of the woods yet. There's a lot that's contingent on my getting the space up and running. Not many are willing to support you until you've proven you can do something. But I think people really want this to happen, that it's necessary.

Opening an art gallery on the Lower East Side might be said to be just as gentrifying as all the yuppie boutiques and restaurants that are uprooting the neighborhood and destroying established businesses. How would you respond to this?

Artists have always lived in the Lower East Side. I think the perception that art is a harbinger of gentrification is a highly simplistic one. This is a diverse neighborhood and home to lots of things, old and new. Most of the old businesses I saw when I moved here are still around. I don't see the total takeover that I see happening in, say, the meatpacking district. There's a long-standing history of alternative art spaces in this area. I'm not some sort of art pioneer.

How does Participant plan to distinguish itself from other galleries and museums?

I know that the responsive, flexible nature of Thread Waxing is sorely missed, though I'm not trying to duplicate it, since Participant has been created in a different context, on a smaller scale and with fewer resources. But Thread Waxing's spirit of experimentation, in which artists were given the opportunity to realize projects not driven by commercial aims, will be at its core. Existing nonprofits have grown and matured into institutions, and there's always room for other approaches. As for museums, some use terms like "cutting edge" as marketing tools for selling tickets. I don't think an institution's involvement with emerging artists or risk-taking should be about sales. It's about making the work understood.

HENRY FLESH

The Bushies tell us they just plain *know* Saddam is an imminent threat...

Michelangelo Signorile, "The Gist," p. 22