

Aleksandra Mir

■ From A to Z

Glida Williams

■ **Art/Activism** – Aleksandra Mir works at the crossroads between such 60s legacies as performance, Conceptual Art and political action, resulting in an art/activism that always involves the artist in the first person, is always tinged with the tragicomic, and is always the result of the artist's extreme lateral thinking. In some ways Mir's work doesn't require any visuals; a description is pretty much sufficient to grasp the artwork, leaving its execution to our mind's eye, approximating to Lawrence Weiner's seminal 1968 statement, 'the work need not be built'. The following lexicon provides a sampling of the artist's proposals and thoughts, effective encapsulations of both the artworks themselves and the artist's reconfiguring of the values and aesthetics of the decade of her birth, the 60s.

■ **Feminism** – In *New Rock Feminism*, 1996, Mir went to the Roskilde pop festival in Denmark to campaign for more female bands (and more toilets while you're at it). About a thousand signatures were collected.

The real achievements of feminism, some 25 years on, were also put into question in *Pick Up (Oh Baby)*, 1996, in which recorded male whistles were broadcast in the central square of Copenhagen. The work is documented in photographs of young women crossing the square, slyly looking over their shoulders, trying in vain to identify the man who whistled at them.

■ **Grandmother** – For her 35th birthday on September 11, 2002, Mir decided to reclaim that tragic anniversary for herself by publishing *Happy Birthday!*, an alternative

version of the *Daily News* ('New York's hometown newspaper'), with material commissioned for the occasion from dozens of contributors – friends, colleagues, generic well-wishers. In the editorial page Mir wrote a dedication to her paternal grandmother, Chana Klamburg (1913-2001): 'She couldn't really stand us grandkids and I only loved her for her bitter twisted humour. When ... watching Princess Di's funeral on TV a few years ago, her only, simply brilliant comment had been: "The wedding was better".'


■ **Life** – Born 1967, in Lubin, Poland, Mir has lived in New York since 1989. However, she spent 17 years growing up in Sweden, an experience forming the basis of her work *Life is Sweet in Sweden*, 1995. Here the artist established a visitor's bureau in Gothenburg, Sweden, furnished with Asian wickerwork (which Swedes have long adopted as their own), artificial plants, muzak and other such comforts. The office, open to anyone, was populated by welcoming hostesses: anybody willing to don the sexy blue and yellow uniform available on the rack – yours to borrow and be instantly recruited as a local tour guide, whether you had any connection with Sweden or not.

■ **Moon landing** – On August 28, 1999 (30 years after the first moon landing), Mir staged *First Woman on the Moon* at Wijk aan Zee, the Netherlands. With the help of earth-moving machinery, the media and a youthful audience, part of the beach was transformed into a lunar landscape. Towards the end of the video documenting the event we see Mir – in a white space-age tunic, among naked children playing in the sand – planting an American flag at sunset; moments later the lunar landscape is demolished by bulldozers. One small step for Mir, one giant step for the subversion of male-centred history: its perpetual colonising; its obsession with the phallus (how else to decipher the erect flag pole); its craving for technology, for permanence, for supremacy. Plus, a great excuse for a beach party.



Aleksandra Mir
First Woman on the
Moon 1999

Aleksandra Mir
Cinema for the Unemployed – Hollywood Disaster Movies (1970-1977)
 1999

Curators: Atle Gerhardsen, Daniel Birnbaum, Lars Bang Larsen Film program and editorial advisor: Onome Ekeh Poster and guide design: Valerie Wagner Project by: Aleksandra Mir				
FREE				
	9-11am	11am-1pm	1pm-3pm	3pm-5pm
MON	The Towering Inferno	Volcano	Hurricane	Meteor
TUES	Airport '70	Airport '79: The Concorde	When Time Ran Out	The Poseidon Adventure
WED	The Day After	Avalanche	Independence Day	Daylight
THUR	Twister	Meteor	Volcano	Earthquake
FRI	The Poseidon Adventure	Daylight	Airport '79: The Concorde	Independence Day

■ **Ordinary people** – When Mir was in San Francisco in 2001 for an exhibition at the CCAC, she ran into trouble from a would-be stalker. Reporting the event on campus, she met the manager of public safety, Donald Cappy, and got to talking to him about his life: a childhood spent in foster homes, his teen years as a punk, adventures in the Marines, work as a nightclub bouncer, plus love, true love, marriage, fatherhood, heartbreak and divorce. Mir promised that one day she would make a book about his life and eventually produced the 32-page, tabloid-like publication *Living & Loving: The Biography of Donald Cappy*, 2002. Commissioned by London's Cubitt Gallery, it gathers together 28 years' worth of Cappy's meticulously kept texts, photographs and lists, complete with rating systems to help the reader identify highlights (ie, all his 34 girlfriends, each rated from 1, 'The Absolute Best!' to 5, 'Mistake'). Possibly the first in an infinite number of such biographies, *Living and Loving* expresses Mir's opinion that 'everybody's story is equally important ... the little suburban birthday party is as important as Liz Taylor getting married', or more important, perhaps.

■ **Question** – In answer to a question asked by curator Gavin Wade: 'How does/could/would the withdrawal of art affect the world?' Mir replied 'I cannot imagine a world without art, but here are the contents of my fridge: ... one red onion ... five bottles of Corona beer ...'.

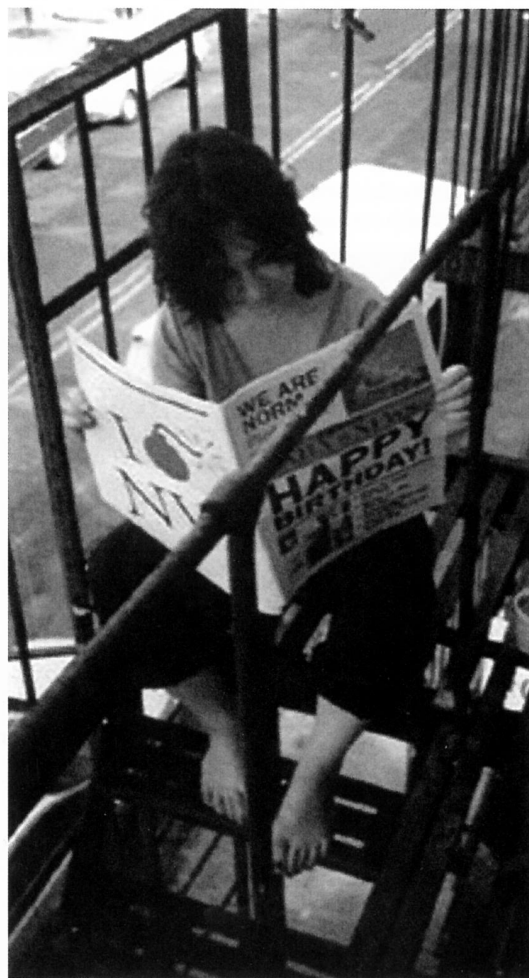
■ **Unemployment** – In *Cinema for the Unemployed – Hollywood Disaster Movies (1970-1997)*, 1999, Mir organised, with a public unemployment service in the town of Moss, Norway, a free, week-long movie presentation of such films as *The Towering Inferno* and *Independence Day* scheduled during so-called working hours, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm for one week. 'After seeing *Titanic* I [said] "things could have been worse". I had been occupied by the thought of how differently unemployment is perceived by people: as a tragedy for some, and as a break from responsibility for others [...] "Unemployment" has at least two possible directions: tragedy, and leisure'. Mir's *Cinema* combines both, to the delight – or detriment? – of the local unemployed.

■ **Website** – Attention aspiring artists: www.aleksandramir.info is the finest, most useful artist's website ever encountered by this critic. Copy its format verbatim; change nothing.

■ **ZZ Top** – Jane Fonda, Günther Grass, Miss Piggy and others, famous and non-, make up the photographic sequence *HELLO*, 2000-ongoing. Existing in different versions for different cities, *HELLO* is a linear progression of hundreds of photographs – personal snapshots,

stills and press clippings – each of which presents a portrait of two people: one of whom appears in the preceding image, the other in the next. The result is a daisy chain of chance meetings and shared occurrences, encounters that, through Mir's painstaking photo-research, create their own logic and genealogy, 'like *Hello* [the magazine] on acid'. ■

Gilda Williams is a writer and commissioning editor for contemporary art at Phaidon Press.



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 reading
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