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Barbara Pollack

*Model UN*

May 21 - June 25, 2006

Opening Reception: Sunday, May 21, 2006

From May 21 - June 25, 2006 PARTICIPANT INC presents *Model UN*, an exhibition of new photographs and videos by Barbara Pollack. Like much of Pollack's work, *Model UN* is a collaboration with her son, Max Berger, now 18-years-old, with whom she has been making work since he was a small child. *Model UN* takes as its subject the annual international conference of Model UN, a program in which high school students from around the world convene and test their skills as diplomats. *Model UN* examines the impossibility of utopian models of internationalism within the very structure that embodies this belief system: the United Nations headquarters in New York City. In 2004, Pollack was granted permission to photograph in this historic and highly security-conscious site. The resulting images of teenagers filling the General Assembly or voting on propositions in the Security Council provide a portrait, at once poignant and humorous, that reflects a current moment in which world peace and international cooperation seem not only unlikely, but potentially futile pursuits. Also on view is *War Dance*, a video in which Max and his friends, amidst their simulation of a mosh pit, enact an unfortunately familiar tableau of images from Abu Ghraib. Together, *Model UN* and *War Dance* can be seen as the culmination of an intensive, long-term collaboration that portends its logical resolution with the onset of Max's adulthood and increased agency as a collaborator. A video made by Max alone will also be on view, *Everything In Its Place*, which envisions the world that might have been had the Columbine massacre never occurred.

Throughout Pollack's extensive body of work with Max, the somewhat problematic parental appropriation of child as subject has functioned both as method and implicit meaning in her photography, video, and installation. The development of this collaboration, or what Carlo McCormick, in his catalogue essay, calls "a shifting artist/subject relationship," began with the 1999 exhibition, *The Family of Men*, at Thread Waxing Space. Modeled after Edward Steichen's now iconic 1955 MoMA exhibit, *The Family of Man*, Pollack's version replaced the sweeping statements and monumental gestures of modern humanist curatorial premises of the 1950s with a contemporary art practice that is resolutely deconstructive and anti-heroic--that is, with photographs of her husband and son from his birth until age 8. As the artist has noted regarding *The Family of Men*: "The subject of this installation is not the family, or even this family, but the obvious intrusive imposition of the camera on the family. This installation is intended to create a sense of alienation and disorientation, just as much as Steichen intended to create a sense of resolution and unity." Not surprisingly, images of the UN's halls of peace and justice were "the very photographs that Steichen used as the sentimental conclusion to the *Family of Man* exhibition." (McCormick) *Model UN* stems from this earlier project that examined the limitations of terms such as "universalism" and "internationalism" as heralded by Steichen, and traces a cautionary trajectory regarding the current manifestation of such optimistic concepts, epitomized by terms such as "globalism."

This project also culminates a ten-year artist/curator relationship between PARTICIPANT INC director, Lia Gangitano (formerly curator of Thread Waxing Space) and Barbara Pollack, more recently punctuated by events co-authored by Pollack and Max Berger, including Max's fifteenth and sixteenth birthday

parties. Staged at PARTICIPANT INC, these events formed the basis of works such as *War Dance*.

Barbara Pollack lives and works in New York. She has had solo exhibitions including *War Dance*, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (2005); *The Max Files*, Center for Visual Arts and Culture, University of Connecticut, Stamford and Storrs (2004); *Hall Mark*, TRANS>area, New York (2003); *Dance Party*, Esso Gallery, New York (2001); *The Family of Men*, Thread Waxing Space, New York, Meyerson Gallery, University of Pennsylvania, and Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University (1999); and *Strangers and Other People*, Holly Solomon Gallery, New York (1999). She has participated in group exhibitions including DiverseWorks, Houston, TX; Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York; PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; and the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT.

Max Berger is graduating from Brooklyn Tech High School and will be attending USC-Cinema and Television Department in the fall.

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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 95 Rivington Street, between Ludlow and Orchard Streets on the Lower East Side.  
Gallery Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, noon-7pm.  
[www.participantinc.org](http://www.participantinc.org)