



Zoe Beloff

*The Days of the Commune*

July 20 - August 17, 2014

Opening Events, Sunday, July 20

6pm: A brief history of the Paris Commune by Mitchell Abidor followed by a discussion with Zoe Beloff and cast members led by curator/writer Niels van Tomme

7-9pm: Opening reception and performance of songs from the play

Screenings

Sunday, July 27, 7pm

*History Lessons*, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, 1972

Sunday, August 3, 7pm

*The New Babylon*, Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, 1929

Sunday, August 10, 7pm

*Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?* Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht, 1932

From July 20 to August 17, 2014, PARTICIPANT INC is proud to present **Zoe Beloff**, *The Days of the Commune*, an installation based on Beloff's restaging of Bertolt Brecht's eponymous play. In the spring of 2012, Beloff brought together a group of actors, activists, and artists to perform the play in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Thinking about OWS as a radical theater of the people, the group conceptualized the project as a "work in progress," in the sense that all social movements are a work in progress. Rather than stage the play in a theater, *The Days of the Commune* was performed, scene by scene, in public spaces around New York City, from Zuccotti Park to an East Village community garden.

The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first great Occupation in modern history. Written in 1948, Brecht's play both dramatizes its short-lived success, and asks questions about the struggle for workers' freedom against overwhelming odds. In the process of restaging the production over a period of three months, March through May (the months that the Commune actually existed), Beloff located significant parallels between that socialist revolution and the Occupy Wall Street movement (which celebrates its third anniversary on September 17). For example, both stood for living wages, housing and free education for all. The culmination of Beloff's performance, video, and installation project, *The Days of the Commune* is a scripted environment that includes a video documenting the performances, props, costumes, posters, and drawings, as well as weekly screenings.

Interested in Eduard Manet's drawings of "bloody week" - the brutal massacre of revolutionaries that ended the Commune - Beloff used documentary drawing as a way to begin engaging the OWS movement. More than just a protest movement, OWS enacted an egalitarian, alternative economy reflecting a Marxist value system championed by Brecht, whose "epic" theater invites us think about the events on stage in relation to what is happening in our lives. In this spirit, Beloff conceptualized *The Days of the Commune* not as historical reenactment, but a proposal for a commune yet to come. Soliciting amateur and professional actors for the play's fifty speaking parts through the Occupy Performance Guild listserv, postings in downtown theaters, and enlisting her CUNY peers, Beloff assembled a rotating cast of performers. Wearing historical costumes paired with contemporary clothes, the actors' intentionally unrehearsed and ad hoc performances undermined the play's theatrical illusions in ways not dissimilar to Brecht's "distancing" tactics, producing an analogous, desired effect.

At PARTICIPANT, Beloff's *The Days of the Commune* will be presented as a single-channel video, the focal point for an installation of documentary drawings and distinctive cardboard props used in the video. These bathtubs, dead rats, bread loaves, wine bottles, and other objects evoke the function of cardboard as both theatrical prop and protest banner.

Zoe Beloff works with a wide range of media including film, projection, performance, installation, and drawing. She considers herself a medium, an interface between the living and the dead, the real and the imaginary. Each project aims to connect the present to past so that it might illuminate the future in new ways. She is currently working on a new project called the "The IFIF" (Institute for Incipient Film) about Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood and films they might have made. Her work has been featured in international exhibitions and screenings; venues include the Whitney Museum of American Art, Site Santa Fe, the M HKA museum in Antwerp, the Pompidou Center in Paris, and Freud's Dream Museum in St. Petersburg. She has collaborated with the Christine Burgin Gallery on a number of artist projects that include books and prints, and has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, The Foundation for Contemporary Arts, The Radcliffe Institute at Harvard, and the New York Foundation for the Arts.



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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 253 East Houston Street, between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets on the LES, ground floor, wheelchair accessible. Subway: F to Second Avenue, Allen Street exit; or JMZ to Essex/Delancey. [participantinc.org](http://participantinc.org)

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