

WHO WE BE

THE COLORIZATION OF AMERICA

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Barbara Kruger's installation was uptown in Harlem, not far from where James Luna had put on a loincloth and lay down in a sandbox with random Indian rez "artifacts." Pat Ward Williams's reappropriated lynching photos were downtown at the New Museum near Cindy Sherman's photo of herself in a red bathrobe. Yong Soon Min's self-portraits, out of which the words "assimilated alien" or "objectified other" had been cut, were shown with Mary Kelly's photo of a dyke's leather jacket over the word "Menacé" at MoCHA.

Gran Fury's posters on the AIDS crisis filled the subway stations and lines. Alfredo Jaar's corrective animation piece—which included the words "This Is Not America's Flag" superimposed on an image of the U.S. flag and concluded with an image of the Western Hemisphere over the word America—took over a Times Square signboard.

Staffers quickly realized they would have to address a host of peculiar micro-encounters. Buses were organized to bring showgoers uptown, dropping off bewildered blue-hairs, blue-suits, and blue-bloods in pre-gentrified Harlem. David Wojnarowicz won over audiences of color with his passionate condemnation of politicians' silence on the AIDS crisis.

The Decade Show made the case that "parallel cultures" and "parallel aesthetics" actually described the shape of the new art world. Reflecting later on the show, Michael Brenson wrote, "One problem with the word 'quality' is that it suggests something finite at a time when the artistic possibilities and the ways of looking at art seem infinite. This decade is not devoid of aesthetic standards but exploding with them."²⁷

THE MONSTER RISES

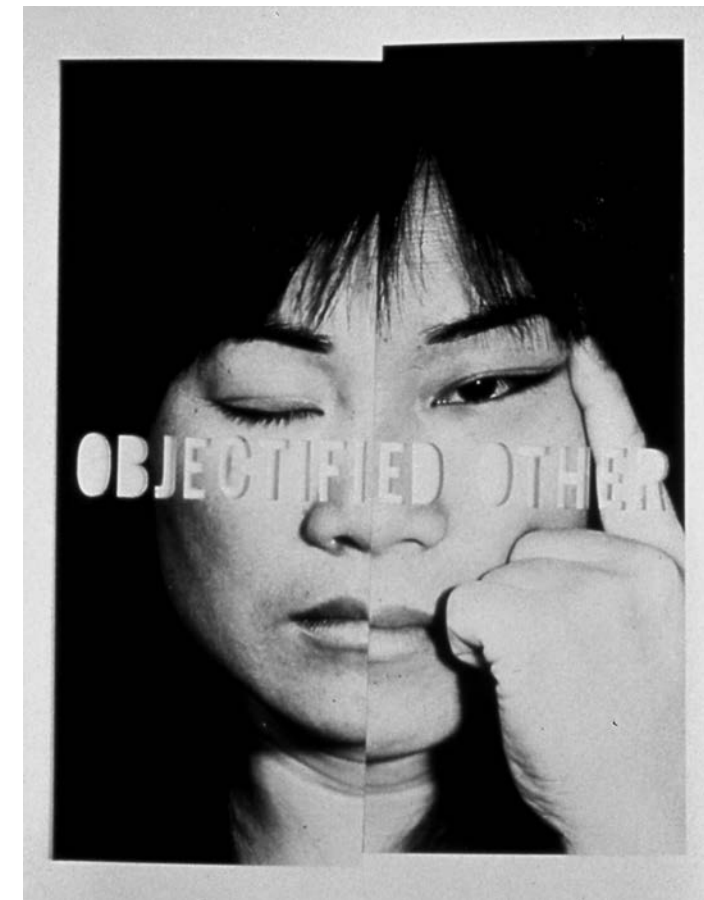
After *The Decade Show*, New York artists Ken Chu, Bing Lee, and Margo Machida began talking about what it might take to open an Asian American contemporary arts museum. These discussions did not result in a museum, but did evolve into the creation of a new Asian American artist network.

If the art collectives of the previous decade had been beset by debates over ideology and politics, this new network would give artists a chance to hit the reset button. Chang wrote, "[I]t was formed not as an outgrowth of Basement's political agendas, but rather as a reaction to its own perceived need for a community of artists, critics and arts administrators to come together to focus on issues pertaining specifically to the art world."²⁸

For veterans of the community arts world who had their eye on breaking down the doors to the art world, a network like this was strategic for artists. Yong Soon Min, who worked at the Asian American Arts Alliance while trying to advance her work at the same time, said, "There was hardly ever any presence or visibility of Asian Americans in [art-world] exhibitions. And also then, it became evident that maybe Asian Americans might

get educational programs, but never in the galleries proper."

For a young artist like Byron Kim, the network offered something different. "Yong Soon Min, she would tell you that it was about activism, and you know, I would be lying if I told you that I thought it was about that from my point of view," he said. "For me it was purely a social thing."



Make Me by Yong Soon Min. 1989. Photograph and printed text on paper. Six panels, overall 96 × 120 in.

He could share his ideas, eat great cheap lunches on Tuesdays, and hang out with great artists like Martin Wong. "That guy could eat," Kim said. "He was this skinny guy." Since artists always showed up late, the group would move to the next cheap spot and eat again. "We'd have the three-lunch lunch," he said. To him the network was about feeding starving artists.