

Spontaneous Formations

In a city that positions itself as the center of the art world, the subway is the best experiential palette that any artist could possibly have. It is not the underground's visual mystique that surmounts to this, but rather the acceptance of knowing that for a fragment of time, you are inevitably one with those who surround you. Forever in real-time, we assume positions, strategies, and every once in a while, alliances in order to make this routine effective, practical and direct. Through submission to a multiplexed fusion of cultures and lifestyles, we become fluent in body language and experts in swerving near predicaments that contest with our necessity to be somewhere.



As the saying illustrates, when the doors open- *we hit the ground running*. We dissipate into our even corners and try to forget the experience, until it is relived later that day and then again and again. It must be a peculiar thing to witness from an aerial perspective... why we choose to live in close confinement but at the same time value separation. In an election year, we are also reminded that polarity is a choice and position that we stake to claim- left, right, and usually never in the middle. As pedestrians, and apart from all distinctions, there are often wry, reverse ripple-effect moments where we align and synch without grandiose declarations.



Laura Napier

Laura Napier's solo exhibition, ***Spontaneous Formations***, bears witness to these nuanced social behaviors, which simultaneously extend from her own artistic patterns and interests. Since 2003, the artist has focused on photographing and filming visually perceptible patterns of pedestrian behavior, such as the spontaneous formation of lines, circles, and clusters in New York City. As Napier states, "*using non-verbal behavioral cues, people repeatedly organize into regular forms, demonstrating emergence theory. These structures also reveal the latent power of the public's collective intelligence.*"

The resulting work analytically deconstructs the implied corral that cities, sites, and architecture subconsciously enforce on pedestrians through sniper-perspectives and artistic stakeouts. Crowds and congregation are often seen as apparent forms in political rallies, protests, sporting events, rock concerts, and religious services but as the artist humorously captures, these unstaged huddles also emerge in the everyday. Strangers become collective participants influenced by the grid and verticality of urban infrastructure.

An unassuming desk greets viewers with a stack of limited edition, giveaway brochures, *Take Me There* (2008), that map out specific locations (and ideal times) to observe ad hoc crowd formations in New York City. This installation greeter and ejector assume the role of a self-guided tour, leading the viewer to nearby sites where personal space is often inhibited by public forces. Inside, a large-scale video projection, *Intersection* (2006), channels a scattered, downbeat procession of pedestrians and transit vehicles stripped from their urban infrastructure and architecture. Ghostly characters wander with aimless purpose through a field of velvet black and create a disorienting impression that centralizes the exhibition's realized movements as an artistic sociological study.

On a nearby wall, a cluster of unframed photographs from the series *Crowd Formation / Street Architecture* (2003–present) are arranged amidst an assortment of newspaper clippings that the artist has collected over the years. This arrangement presents an introspective moment of inquiry and research. Hung casually like notes or images that are often found on the walls of many artists' studios, the images themselves depict various geometric crowd formations that are subconsciously structured through architectural, institutional, and sociopolitical contexts. The unstaged nature of Napier's work further highlights the various phases of human structuring. At times, single subjects prominently stand out from these urban swarms as if longing to find a future link.

During the course of the exhibition, the artist plans to alter and augment elements from the initial installation from week to week. These growths will refract the view, gaze, and action from the gallery to its immediate East Village surroundings through a lens of critical observance. The added facet of localized, social patterns further blurs the gap between exhibition display and relational interactivity. Similarly, the amalgamation of a finished exhibition product with new work created on-site reframes the exhibition's parameters to generate two openings, two departure points, and parallel thresholds for viewers to navigate through.

- *José Ruiz* (New York, 2008)

Laura Napier has been finding and photographing momentary crowd formations in New York City, Los Angeles, and most recently, in Lima, Peru. She was selected for a 2008 Swing Space residency by LMCC and is part of the AIM28 program at the Bronx Museum. She completed her MFA at Bard College in 2007.

José Ruiz is a New York City-based curator who eschews conventional and established curatorial premises in order to concentrate on the hybridization of context and discourse that surrounds conceptual, sociopolitical and interdisciplinary emerging artists. In 2000, he co-founded Decatur Blue, a gallery in Washington, DC at which he curated more than 30 exhibitions and performances. His interests in alternative spaces and grassroots organizations led him to the Bronx River Art Center (BRAC) in 2006 for which he serves as Gallery Director & Curator. Ruiz's upcoming projects will spawn across organizations and create curatorial collaborations with Museo de Arte de El Salvador, Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning, Wave Hill, Asian American Arts Center and Lehman College Art Gallery.