



### Born

1935, New York, NY

### Education

BFA, City College of New York

### Lives and Works

San Diego, CA

### Artist Biography

An influential performer, filmmaker, and **installation** artist, Antin delves into history — whether of ancient Rome, the Crimean War, the salons of nineteenth-century Europe, or her own Jewish heritage and Yiddish culture — as a way to explore the present. Antin is a cultural chameleon, masquerading in theatrical or stage roles to expose her many selves. Her most famous fictional **persona** is that of Eleanora Antinova, the tragically overlooked black ballerina of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Appearing as Antinova and other characters in scripted and non-scripted **performances**, Antin has continually blurred the distinction between her identity and that of her characters. In the process, she has created a rich body of work including numerous films, photographs, **installations**, **performances**, and drawings, as well as a fictitious memoir.

### Art:21 Theme

humor

### Online Lesson Library Topics

**abstraction** & realism, individuals & collectives, labor & craftsmanship, war & conflict

### Media and Materials

photography, film, **performance**, puppets, drawing

### Influences

19th-Century Salon Painting, Greek and Roman history and statuary, Yiddish culture and heritage, paper dolls and puppets

### Key Words and Ideas

role-playing, **performance**, **site-specific**, conceptual art, **fluxus**, pop art, feminism, colonialism, nationalism

### Additional Images on the Web

[www.feldmangallery.com/pages/artists/rffa/artant01.html](http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/artists/rffa/artant01.html)

[www.eai.org/eai/artist.jsp?artistID=354](http://www.eai.org/eai/artist.jsp?artistID=354)

# Eleanor Antin

## DISCUSSION

### Before Viewing

Who makes history? How? Is there such a thing as a fictional history? What are the differences and similarities between stories, myths, and history?

Role-play is an essential part of childhood. Ask your students to remember some of the roles they adopted when they were younger and some of their childhood interests, for example collecting, drawing, singing, dancing, or acting. Do they still have these interests? In what ways have they changed or stayed the same, and how have they been influential?

What personal experiences can produce laughter and tears together?

### After Viewing

In this segment, Antin creates the photographs from *The Last Days of Pompeii* by directing a cast of technicians and actors. At one point she even calls herself a “dictator.” Observe Antin’s method of directing or “dictating.” How is her method unique compared to other artists in this series? [www.pbs.org/art21/education/labor/lesson1.html](http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/labor/lesson1.html)

Antin uses the term “pictorial narrative” to describe her work. What is a pictorial narrative, how does it relate to Antin’s work, and what are other examples of pictorial narratives in visual art or other media?

This segment offers the viewer a deeper look at Antin’s motives for creating *The Last Days of Pompeii* photographs. She compares the fall of Rome to current conditions in the United States. What are the current conditions in the United States to which she refers? What does Antin mean by making the comparison? Will these photographs still convey the same meaning when conditions change?

Antin talks about her interest in going back in history to witness particular events or figures. If you had the ability to go back in time, when, where and whom would you visit?



Detail from *Before the Revolution*, 1979. Installation at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Left: *Karsavina*, masonite figure on wheeled base, 54 x 30 inches; Right: *Nijinsky*, masonite figure on wheeled base, 58 x 15 inches. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

## ACTIVITIES

Create an alter-ego for yourself and bring it to life in a cartoon or comic-book narrative, or in the performance of a theatrical or filmed script.

[www.pbs.org/art21/education/individuals/lesson3.html](http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/individuals/lesson3.html)

Go to a museum or look through an art-history book. Study the art and culture of a civilization or people who lived at least 100 years ago. Research the parallels between that time and culture and our own. Create an artwork in the style of that culture that highlights the parallels.

Ask students to select a character or figure from history and reinvent themselves by merging aspects of their own identities with historical research about these characters. Ask students to write a chapter from their memoirs using their new voices.

[www.pbs.org/art21/education/abstraction/lesson1.html](http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/abstraction/lesson1.html)



*The Angel of Mercy*, 1977. *Eleanor Antin, Myself 1854 (Carte de Visite)* from *The Nightingale Family Album*. One of 25 tinted gelatin-silver prints, mounted on hand-made paper with text, 18 x 13 inches each. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



*The Golden Death*, from *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 2001. Chromogenic print, 58% x 46% inches. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

“I’ve always felt that narrative is as much of a human need as breathing. We’re constantly—even if it’s a one-sentence story—explaining ourselves and communicating in terms of putting material together that in some way has aspects of a story. And narrative is how we transform and change into different selves, into new places in our lives, and move back and forth.”