



## **Q & A: ARLEEN SCHLOSS**

August 15, 2007

### **Manager of A-Space, Chronicler of Chaos**

By Becca Tucker

I did not arrive at 330 Broome St. expecting to interview Arleen Schloss. In fact, I'd never heard of her. I'd come to talk to Ray Kelly, known as Cowboy Ray, a sculptor and the founder of a collective of Lower East Side artists.

But Ray, the super of the building, was busy fixing leaky pipes and didn't feel much like talking this weekday morning.

"You ever heard of A-Space?" he asked in his Texas drawl.

He brought me upstairs to the storied performance space and introduced me to a fellow artist who could only be described as his foil. If Cowboy Ray were an action figure low on batteries, Arleen Schloss, the manager of A-Space, would be a wind-up doll with an infinitely long string.

#### **Tell me about the formation of A-Space.**

I was giving performance art workshops in the late 1970s, and they started getting so popular that I started collaborating with many people taking my classes, and also neighborhood people, and it turned my place into a huge performance space. Many, many bands played here: Sonic Youth, Alan Suicide, Jean-Michel Basquiat. There was no place to play except the Mud Club, and that was so expensive that musicians kept coming over. So I developed it basically into a lab/workshop.

**Do you still play music?**

I still play. But what I've been doing is mostly working on archivery. And I'm a sound poet, and I recite the alphabet. I got kind of well known doing that, and I performed all over Europe. And I performed at MoMa, because they started getting interested when things were starting in the late '70s.

**What do you mean, you perform the alphabet?**

I used to teach little kids that didn't speak English. That got me involved with playing with things and working with children that didn't speak a word of English. You'd do things like "Ahhh!" [sings] and show a picture of an A. So it got me into performance art. [Gives a recitation of the alphabet backwards and forwards that is somewhere between song and tongue-twister.]

**Where does the "A" in A-Space come from? Is it from your name, or the fact that you perform the alphabet?**

I'll show you in the hallway, because I wrote a very brilliant statement a long time ago: "Art is action, Object is artifact." That's what it's all about ... But what did you ask me?

**Just about the "A"...**

Right. Well to me, this is a major statement. My space came out of the fact that I wasn't into being told what to do, I just did what I chose. And that, according to many factions of society, was anarchy, even though I was never hurting anyone or anything like that ...

**So the "A" is for "anarchy"?**

Right. I was anarchistic, because if you're a serious artist, you have to be anarchistic. I was giving performance art workshops on the subways of New York because I was angry about so much crime getting so much publicity. We were singing, I was teaching sound poetics and movement and dance. And that was anarchistic, because they kept telling me to get off, that I couldn't do it. But I did it.

**There are half a dozen people crashing in this space right now. How did they find out about you?**

Well, things develop. Since I did most of my performances in Europe, friends would keep coming to visit, and since so many people were crashing here, when things started getting extraordinarily expensive in the late '80s, I said, "If you want to crash here, you gotta pay something." So my place started getting fashionable. And I'm always giving reduced rates and people are always helping me out because I'm working on so many projects, and the archivery entails audiotapes, videotapes, film, all kinds of media.

**During this archiving process, you've spent a lot of time looking back at your whirlwind of a life. Any regrets?**

I feel I had a great time, and I did everything I wanted to do, and I feel I helped the community, and I wouldn't make a change in the world. It was all great, and I'm lucky to be going over all this material, to be able to give to a library, so people could learn and see, you know, a whole bunch of material from a different time.

**Do you worry that if you don't get this done, a segment of cultural history will fade into oblivion?**

No way. Uh uh! I rock! I work my butt off to realize my dreams, and that's what I do. So that's the way I go. And I love life, I love this thing called life, even though it's a lot of craziness, but I move in the positive way everywhere. Just making beautiful things happen, to me that's a joy—that people are just being able to show their works and meet other people and connect. There's a touch of that happening now, but not close to the way it was.