

Press Release

## **SENGA NENGUDI**

### **WET NIGHT EARLY DAWN SCAT-CHANT PILGRIM'S SONG**

*September 5 – November 9, 1996 Opening Reception: Saturday, September 7, 6 - 8 pm*

Thomas Erben is very honored to present SENGA NENGUDI's installation as the inaugural exhibition of his new public space at 476 Broome Street.

**SENGA NENGUDI** enjoys a reputation as a legendary figure, part of the most provocative group of African American avant-garde artists who began working in the 70's (which included David Hammons, Adrian Piper and others).

This is the artist's first New York solo show since her last exhibition in 1982 at the now historical Just Above Midtown Gallery (JAM), which represented the artist from 1976–82.

Formative for her art were simultaneous exposures in the mid to late 60's at the Watts Towers Art Center and the Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, CA, site for an explosive experimentation with and mix of art forms of the then mainstream avant-garde (i.e. Kaprow, Oldenburg, Rauschenberg...) Equally experimental, the African-American artistic community in Watts, furthered by the 1965 Watts Riots, pushed beyond traditional Western art forms and articulated a new visual language (i.e. Purifory, Outterbridge...).

In 1966, a year-long foreign studies program at Waseda University, Tokyo, allowed the artist to follow her attraction to Eastern cultures and search for Japanese avant-garde activities such as the Gutai Group.

Moving to New York in 1971, her influences and interests centered around the Weusi Gallery and the Studio Museum in Harlem, the "Uptown Art" scene. Her friendship with the artist Charles Abramson and their discussions of African philosophies and other highly abstracted concepts were particularly empowering.

Back in Los Angeles in 1974, her camaraderie with David Hammons grew closer and the artists exchanged studios during their bicoastal activities on through the early '80s. It was also Hammons who introduced her to Linda Goode-Bryant, resulting in the "R.S.V.P." exhibition in 1977 at JAM of her now famed panty hose sculptures.

Starting in 1978 and throughout the '80s, the artist emphasized performances/ collaborative art forms and, with a move to Colorado Springs late in 1989, freed up time for a reevaluation of her relation to art and the process of art making.

**SENGA NENGUDI**'s works are conceptual-material manifestations.

Formally well crafted with a seemingly mere insignificance of mostly found, discarded

materials... as, for example, all sorts of paper, hosiery, styrofoam pepples, pigment, lint... they create charged spaces with room for multiple potential readings.

Combining materials/objects with economy and specificity, she uses their histories and symbolic values as a springboard for their very transformation.

African and Eastern philosophies as well as "ways of doing" are of strong influence. A symbiosis of different art forms ... sculpture, dance, performance, poetry, sound ... a human presence (humanity) is needed to activate the work.

Thomas Erben Gallery began to represent **SENGA NENGUDI** in summer of '95 and found, immediately tremendous interest in her work. The installation "OA (Through Here)" is currently included in "Nowhere" at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark, as part of "Incandescent", curated by Laura Cottingham. **SENGA NENGUDI's** work has been included in major survey shows of contemporary African American art.