

EN

# **Eleanor Antin**

A Retrospective



**MUDAM**

The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg



mudam.com

**MUDAM**

# Eleanor Antin

## A Retrospective

26.09.2025 — 08.02.2026

### Curators

Bettina Steinbrügge,  
assisted by Clémentine Proby and Julie Kohn

### Production team

Paula Fernandes, Jordan Gerber, Richard Goedert,  
Matthias Heitbrink, Clara Kremer, Tawfik Matine El Din,  
Irfann Montanavelli, Pedro Serrano, Lou-Andréa Sultan

### Exhibition architecture

Diogo Passarinho Studio

### Media partner

Le Monde

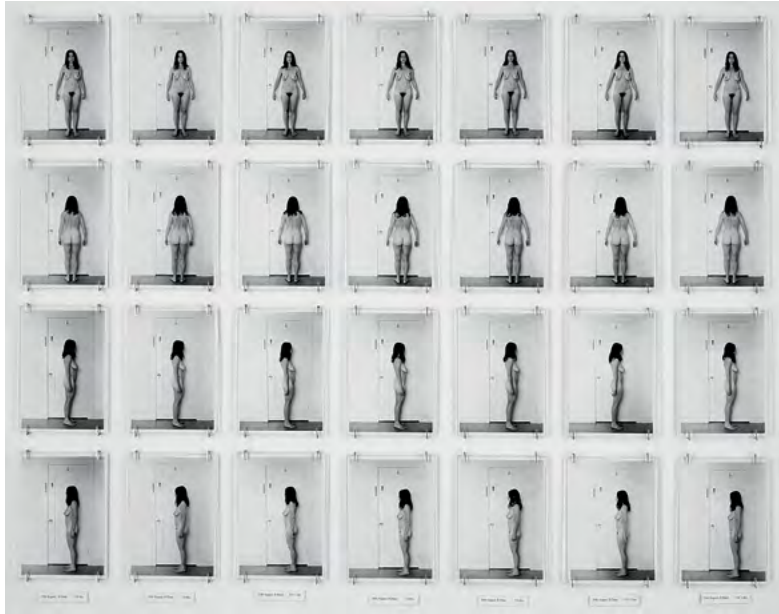
---

The exhibition is organised by Mudam Luxembourg –  
Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean in collaboration  
with Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein and MOCAK  
The Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków.

'Impersonating the past,  
Antin personalizes the issues  
and dilemmas of the present.

Her work is probably,  
more than we yet realize,  
a portrait of our time.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kim Levin in the catalogue for Eleanor Antin's exhibition of *The Angel of Mercy*, held at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art in California in 1977.



## The exhibition

In this 1977 observation, critic Kim Levin suggests that artworks, much like the self, are constantly evolving and, therefore, resist categorisation. In this light, artist Eleanor Antin (1935, New York) approaches art as something inherently fluid, mirroring her own multifaceted identities, which began to manifest during the late 1960s. For more than fifty years, Antin has been a distinctive voice in American contemporary art, bridging feminism and conceptual art, as well as performance and new media. Since a young age, Antin experienced her sense of self as something external – anticipating a brief acting career and the way in which she would later conceive personas and narratives in her work. Her refusal to settle in straightforward formats or meanings keeps her idiom strikingly contemporary today, when questions of power and identity representation have gained renewed urgency.

Antin, who rose to prominence during the 1970s peak of Conceptual Art and the second wave of feminism, wittily represented these two movements with works such as *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972). For decades, she has explored the shifting boundaries between identity and history through a practice spanning photography, film, text, sculpture, installation and live action. Defined by a critical, performative spirit, her work invites viewers to reconsider the given societal roles and historical narratives that inform our sense of the individual and collective self.



Antin's practice is marked by both conceptual depth and material diversity, inviting multiple points of access; historical, political, autobiographical and ironic readings become possible, often simultaneously. Her fusion of genres and thematic cross-referencing has informed her surprising, provocative takes, which expand across a wide range of formats. This transgression of traditional categories renders her practice complex and open. In the present era, defined by polarisation, it is precisely this ambiguous multiplicity that makes such a position so compelling. Rather than asserting binaries, these perspectives coexist in deliberate ambivalence, underscoring the ways Antin embraces fiction and performative staging.



# 100 BOOTS ARCHIVES: PARTIAL LIST

KEITH ARNATT	JUDY HOFFBERG	STEVE WEIL
CAROL BERGE	DOUGLAS HUEBLER	ANN WILLIAMS
DAVID BOURDON	RAY JOHNSON	ANN WOOSTER
JOE BRAINARD	RUTH KRAUSS	BILL ZAVATSKY
MICHAEL BROWNSTEIN	JOAN LEVINE	John Baldessari
DR. BRUTE	LES LEVINE	Judy Fiskin
BRIAN BUCZAK	SOL LEWITT	Gilbert + George
RICHARD C.	JACKSON MACLOW	Horacio Zabalza
LAURENCE CAMPBELL	ANN MCCOY	Jay Jacobs
FLETCHER COPP	JOHN BERNARD MYERS	Daniel Buren
ROBERT CREELEY	COLIN NAYLOR	
ROBERT CUMMING	NEW YORK CORRES-PONGE DANCE SCHOOL OF VANCOUVER	
LOWELL DARLING	EMILY OHRWALL	Diane Wakariki
FRED DUPEE	PAULINE OLIVEROS	David Ignatow
LARRY EIGNER	BEN PATTERSON	Mona da Vinci
KENWARD ELMSLIE	MARCEL PEANUT	
TED ENSLIN	PINEAU	Amos Vogel
ANGELA FLOWERS	JEAN-MARC POINSOT	Jan van der Mar
PETER FRANK	CLARK POLAK	Robert Filliou
KEN FRIEDMAN	PAUL RICHARD*	Jane Wayne
CAROL & JACK GELBER	ED SANDERS	(etc.)
GENERAL IDEA	ARAM SAROYAN	
MIKE GOLDBERG	CAROLEE SCHNEEMAN	
MARION GOODMAN	PAT TAVENNER	
ROBERT GROSVENER	Jane TENNEY	
AL HANSON	STEVEN VON HUENE	
ELIZABETH HARDWICK	ROBERT WADE	





The exhibition is structured around a series of chapters, each highlighting a distinct aspect of Antin's practice:

The exhibition begins in the Grand Hall with **Road Movie**. Her iconic project *100 Boots* (1971–73) leads the way – an absurd yet poignant procession – guiding us down to the museum's Foyer. There, **Classification** deploys a group of early works in which Antin examines the female body and behaviour through systems of taxonomy. The artist's self-portrait with a red cloak (2017) in the guise of Superwoman leaves a particularly lasting impression – a symbol of self-fashioned power and irony.

As we land in **Pose**, we encounter an immersive installation whose entrance resembles a vintage cinema façade. *The Loves of a Ballerina* (1986) leads into a black cube filled with depictions of her most glamorous, feminine self, The Ballerina. Her command of the pose combined with an incapacity to perform in motion appears as a comic, yet critical commentary on classic beauty ideals. The character later evolved into Eleanora Antinova – a Black ballerina who travelled from the US to Paris to perform with Diaghilev's Ballets russes. Antinova's attempt to perform in a predominantly white, archaic institution reveals an inability to embrace progress, as she was relegated to stereotypical roles; an exploration of the classic values embedded in traditional artforms.







On the opposite side, **Melodrama** brings together personal memory, historical fiction and silent film aesthetics. Drawing on her own Eastern-European Jewish heritage, Antin stages a wartime narrative in *Vilna Nights* (1993–97). Its three rear-screen video projections represent the ruins of the Jewish ghetto in Vilnius ['Vilna' in Yiddish], remembering the 'ghosts' of its vanished inhabitants. Themes of suffering, care and resistance unfold in *The Angel of Mercy* series (1977) through the figure of the nurse Eleanor Nightingale. The character is inspired by Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing during the Crimean War.

Returning upstairs we find **Admiration**, a space dedicated to women who influenced Antin's art and life. Whether well-known or forgotten, Rochelle Owens, Hannah Weiner, Amy Goldin and others were not acknowledged sufficiently in Antin's view. The belongings of these women alongside index cards pay an intimate and personal homage that coexists with *Domestic Peace* (1971–72); a poignant interlude devoted to another pivotal female figure in Antin's life, her mother.





Yvonne Rainer

Rochelle said Yvonne was plump and bosomy in the old days. She and Al used to scream and throw things at each other like Anna Magnani. She came from a family of Italian anarchists. Carlo Tresca was a relative. Another uncle attended a Bund rally in Yorkville and got so angry he had a heart attack and died.



Finally, in the adjacent gallery, the realm of **Power** sets up Antin's early work *The King of Solana Beach* (1972) in stark contrast to her *Historical Takes* (2001–08) – a more recent series informed by timeless notions of opulence and decay. The first represents Antin's male persona, enacting justice and authority. The latter merges the aesthetics of ancient Rome with the ones of the Golden Age of Hollywood. Both works mirror our contemporary condition, as they synthesise the absurd, disastrous and political dimensions of art and life – core themes of Antin's *œuvre*.

This exhibition approaches Antin's five-decade journey from multiple perspectives, highlighting her wit and sensitivity, as well as the enduring resonance of her practice then and now.









The following are excerpts from an interview with Eleanor Antin conducted by curator and author Howard N. Fox, for the catalogue published for the 1999 retrospective *Eleanor Antin* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

### And I became Eleanor Barrett

**FOX:** Eleanor, before you were a visual artist you had professional aspirations to be an actress. What made you decide to become a visual artist?

**ANTIN:** Actually, I think they were always related. From the beginning, even before I wanted to be an actress, I knew I was an artist. Maybe I was eight years old, but I knew it. Like in school – I made pictures, I wrote little poems. We were studying astronomy, and I had to make a report on the constellation Cassiopeia. Instead I wrote a poem about her, so I could write about Greek mythology and make up stories and not have to spend too much time on science and light-years and all that stuff! I never obeyed the rules too much, but it was a progressive school, so they pretty much left me on my own, making pictures, writing stories, acting.

**FOX:** And you had a stage name.

**ANTIN:** Eleanor Barrett, like Elizabeth Barrett. My kid sister, Marcia, who also wanted to be an actor, changed her name first. She was about fourteen and had her first part-time job in a hospital, and she got her Social Security card under the name Lee Barrett. So we figured we had to be the same, the Barrett Sisters, and I became Eleanor Barrett.

### An exciting time it was!

**FOX:** There wasn't too much conceptual art until about 1966. Were you seeing incipient forms of it or thinking about conceptual strategies in the early 1960s?

**ANTIN:** As far as art was concerned, I was all into pop, even though I loved abstract expressionism – still do – and I was also very attracted to poetry. I was just eating everything up, going out of my mind with pleasure. There was an incredible renaissance going on in New York. In literature I still liked the Beats, but there was so much new going on. I mean Diane Wakoski, Paul Blackburn, Jackson Mac Low, Jerry [Rothenberg] and David [Antin], Rochelle Owens, Armand Schwerner,

Ted Berrigan, Ted Enslin, who used to drop in from Maine, John Ashbery had returned from France. And then there was the Judson Dance Theater. We used to go to everything at Judson – everyone was there, from Yvonne Rainer to Carolee Schneemann. All these artists and critics, too. We were close with Nico and Lalia Calas; and Allan and Sylvia D'Arcangelo, they were very close friends. And Les and Kathy Levine. Bob Morris and Yvonne Rainer. I think we originally met Bob through Diane Wakoski when they were living together. And we got friendly with other minimalists as well. I think David made those initial connections because he was starting to write art criticism for *Torn Hess*, the editor of *Artnews*, a very charming guy. I loved doing my paintings. I loved writing. I was being published in some of those mimeograph magazines we were all reading. I was doing public readings also. Not that much though: I hadn't found my voice yet. But I was hanging around downtown. I can't tell you what an exciting time it was!

### 'Narrative' – the dirty word

**FOX:** So far, all of the pieces that you were doing imply a narrative. They require the viewer to make some kind of connection that isn't an aesthetic response to formalistically conceived objects but an imaginative response to a selection of found or store bought objects that have cultural meanings. Viewers have to fill in details about these objects and conjecture about the people they represent. That's not storytelling, but it is a narrative activity that does require a kind of willingness to make-believe from the viewer. This is very opposite to the formal qualities – also the immediacy and literalism – of minimalist art, where you walk into the room and experience that grey object asserting its presence. You don't have to imagine anything, it's sheer confrontation. But responding to your art calls upon a different habit of mind.

**ANTIN:** People are used to thinking about these things now. This is probably the influence of feminism opening art up to autobiography, story, everyday life. But in those days, who was going to invent a story? They didn't know how to do that yet – not in an art context. Remember, 'narrative', was still a dirty word – to academic feminists, it was anathema – and these works were minimal, spare in appearance. They presented the viewer with an implacable surface that didn't give an inch. This was very much a function of the newness of the objects. They were tacky, fragile. Curiously, when these works are shown today, they've acquired the patina of nostalgia. They aren't new anymore. Life has travelled through them. They're still cool and minimal, but with a difference.

### Connection with the past

**FOX:** For you, history would seem to be less of a yoke or a prescription than a medium that you can deal with. You're looking at history, not as a prescriptive litany – or, to continue the metaphor, as a fixed address properly situated among all the others – but as something that you can take from and borrow from and remake.

**ANTIN:** Right. But I don't make it all up. I enjoy doing the research. I'm always looking to find the few moments that have a poetic resonance for me, when my character's personal experience erupts through the years to meet me. [...] Through a fortunate accident I found this delicious little memoir, an old book that must have been published in the 1820s. [...] It was the personal memoir, translated into English, of the wife of Marie Antoinette's jailer.

From her I learned that Marie Antoinette had had her period on the day of her execution. She didn't precisely say that, this was after all published in the early 1800s, but she said the queen was bleeding. [...] suddenly through the centuries, you've got a two hundred years' separation, and suddenly there's a connection with this woman who is going to her death, worried about bleeding onto her skirts, because that is one of the embarrassing moments for all women. Is she worrying about when she'll have to get down from the cart and walk up the steps of the platform to the guillotine? Does she feel blood running down her legs? Does she smile ironically, anticipating the black humor of gushing from both ends at the same time? It's very hard to be a great, wronged, and dignified queen when you're forced to wear your vulnerability as a woman like a badge. I would've bet my life that this predicament was some component of her final experience of dying. Suddenly, I felt the years wash away, and I was connected.

### Can you really win?

**FOX:** Are you a moralist?

**ANTIN:** [pensively]: I guess I must be. I used to think, 'If only they'd listen to me, I would set it all right.' That's why I was a king. I told you, I may be ironical, I may be funny, but I'm not kidding. In the early part of my career I was talking about the simpler politics of injustice [...] But can you really win? Have you ever seen a revolution that didn't swallow itself? Isn't defeat built into the world, as basic as carbon? Aren't we all doomed? We go out in the morning, and we're going to be defeated at night. If we have really bad luck, we'll be defeated by noon.



You said I was a comedic artist' but the comedy in my art is more like the story they tell about the poet Max Jacob – or maybe it was Robert Desnos, I don't remember, I've heard it about both – who was in the concentration camp, waiting his turn to go into the ovens. He went up and down the long line of people waiting with him, and he leaned over their hands and read their futures from their palms... That's one of my favorite stories. [crying] I'm sorry.

### **Who are the insiders?**

I didn't choose the positioning, but I've always felt like an outsider. In a sense I'm an exile, as a Jew. [...] As a woman, I'm an outsider. When I go to the movies, I empathize with the male hero. The woman is usually a wife, a mother, a whore, or a loser. We take part in American culture by coming in from the outside, by making the most delicate adjustments. And the indecisively man artist – the perfect outsider! So I don't see anything wrong with being an exile. I don't think it's a bad condition. I'm used to it. I've lived that way all my life, and I guess I'm attracted to other exiles. I mean, who are the insiders?

### **Way, way up**

It's so absurd, ballet, isn't it? I mean, it's ridiculous. It's nonsense. Sure, it's pretty, but big deal. So's ice-skating. But we went to the Ballets Russes performances all the time [...] We often didn't have money for food, and this was before credit cards, so my mother would cash a bum check on Friday afternoon, and she'd stock up the refrigerator. Later we'd go to the ballet and sit way up in the balcony. On Sunday afternoons we'd go to Carnegie Hall and sit way, way up in the boonies. After those concerts I loved the long, crowded, slow crawl down the endless stairs, looking at the photos of the dead artists, usually with foreign names. Then we'd take the noisy, smelly train back to the Bronx, and I'm sure my mother felt as alone and alienated from the everyday world as I did. We were both in the wrong place. Maybe that was when I became an exile.



# The artist

American artist Eleanor Antin (1935) is a key figure emerging from the Conceptual art movements of the 1970s and she remains a leading feminist figure today. Her ground-breaking practice spans five decades and has covered themes surrounding identity, gender, autobiography, class and social structures. Antin's multi-disciplinary approach includes installation, painting, drawing, writing, photography, performance and most notably film and video.

Over the last fifty years Antin has performed and exhibited her work internationally. She has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including *Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin's 'Selves'*, ICA, Boston, MA (2014); *Eleanor Antin: Historical Takes*, San Diego Art Museum, San Diego, CA (2008); *Eleanor Antin: Real Time Streaming*, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK and Mead Gallery, Warwick, UK (2001); *Eleanor Antin*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (1999); and *Eleanor Antin: Selections from the Angel of Mercy*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (1997). In 1975, her seminal exhibition *100 Boots* debuted at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Most recently, Antin's work has been featured in notable institutional group exhibitions such as *Chrysalis: The Butterfly Dream* exhibition, Centre D'art Contemporain, Geneva (2023); *Mapping an Art World*, MOCA, Los Angeles (2023) and The Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2023). As a performance artist, she has appeared in venues all around the world, including the 37th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Italy (2005) and The Sydney Opera House, Australia (2002). Her work is included in public collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Jewish Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, amongst others.

In 2019 she revisited and recreated one of her most important early works, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, for the exhibition *Time's Arrow* at LACMA and the Art Institute of Chicago.



# Credits

## Cover

Eleanor Antin, *Love of a Ballerina*, 1973  
Courtesy of the artist

## Images

Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, 1972  
Courtesy of the artist, The Art Institute of Chicago, Feldman Gallery, New York, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *Carving: 45 Years Later*, 2017  
Courtesy of the artist, The Art Institute of Chicago, Feldman Gallery, New York, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations*, 1972  
Courtesy of the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots List*, 1970  
from *Eleanor Antin papers*, 1953–2010  
Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles  
© J. Paul Getty Trust

Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots*, 1971–73  
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *The Two Eleanors*, 1973 (detail)  
Courtesy of the artist

Eleanor Antin, *Nurse Eleanor*, *R.N.*, 1976  
Courtesy of the artist

Eleanor Antin, *I'm a fortunate age*  
from *The King's Meditations no. 12*, 1974–75  
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

## Interview

*A Dialogue with Eleanor Antin*,  
from the catalogue *Eleanor Antin*  
edited by Howard N. Fox  
with an essay by Lisa E. Bloom,  
LACMA/Fellows of Contemporary Art, 1999  
© 1999 Museum Associates/Los Angeles County  
Museum of Art and the Fellows of Contemporary Art

Eleanor Antin, *Blood of a Poet Box*, 1965–68  
Courtesy of the artist

Eleanor Antin, *Yvonne Rainer*, 1970  
Courtesy of the artist

Eleanor Antin, *The King of Solana Beach*, 1974–75  
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *Portrait of a King*, 1972  
Courtesy of the artist

Eleanor Antin, *The Artist's Studio*  
from *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 2002  
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *Representational Painting*, 1971  
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots*, 1971–73  
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Portrait of Eleanor Antin  
Courtesy of the artist

Eleanor Antin, *Blood of a Poet Box*, 1965–68  
Courtesy of the artist

# Mudam Team

Gabriela Acha, Sandra Biwer, David Celli,  
Alice Champion, Ana Wiscour Conter, Anaël Daoud,  
Camille d'Huart, Tawfik Matine El Din, Zuzana Fabianova,  
Marie-Noëlle Farcy, Paula Fernandes, Imane Fettouh,  
Clara Froumenty, Christophe Gallois, Jordan Gerber,  
Richard Goedert, Nittaya Heilbronn, Matthias Heitbrink,  
Christine Henry, Olivier Hoffmann, Caroline Honorien,  
Julie Jephos, Germain Kerschen, Yousra Khalis,  
Julie Kohn, Clara Kremer, Léon Kruijswijk, Laurence Le Gal,  
Vanessa Lecomte, Nathalie Lesure, Carine Lilliu,  
Ioanna Madenoglu, Frédéric Maraud, Laura Mescolini,  
António Pedro Mendes, Mélanie Meyer, Carlos Monteiro,  
Barbara Neiseler, Florence Ostende, Markus Pilgram,  
Boris Reiland, Susana Rodrigues, Alexandre Sequeira,  
Pedro Serrano, Élodie Simonian, Lourindo Soares,  
Bettina Steinbrügge, Alexine Taddei, Vere Van Gool,  
Steve Veloso, Adèle Wester, Nicole Wittmann



## Acknowledgements

Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean thanks the Ministry of Culture, all the donors and sponsors and particularly

The Leir Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Norbert Becker-Dennewald, Cargolux, Luxembourg High Security Hub, Allen & Overy, Banque Degroof Petercam, Clearstream, JTI

as well as

Uniqlo, Arendt & Medernach, Baloise Holding SA, Banque de Luxembourg, PwC Luxembourg, The Loo & Lou Foundation, Atoz, Bank Pictet & Cie (Europe) AG, succursale de Luxembourg, Bank of America, CA Indosuez Wealth (Europe), Elvinger Hoss, Société Générale, Soludec, Spuerkeess, Bonn & Schmitt, Dussmann Services, Indigo Park Services, Les Amis des Musées d'Art et d'Histoire Luxembourg and American Friends of Mudam.

## Special acknowledgements to

Diane Rosenstein, Andrew Kreps Gallery, Richard Saltoun Gallery, Marco Nocella, Blaise Antin and Joe Keenan

## Public programme

Find Mudam's full programme of events, workshops, lectures and more on [mudam.com](https://mudam.com)



## Newsletter

Subscribe to our newsletter and get monthly updates on Mudam's highlights



## Social media

Follow our social media accounts and share your experience using these hashtags @mudamlux #mudamlux #openmuseum #eleanorantin



