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[Kathryn Cornelius](#)

Washington, D.C.

by Isabel Manalo

It was a brisk April morning as I made my way to Kathryn's home studio. I was happy to know that we were relatively close to one another in NW DC and was able to visit her studio on foot. Twenty minutes later I was at her door. I stood on her front porch and pushed the doorbell. No answer. After a couple more pushes with no answer, I leaned over the railing to ask the elderly woman sitting on the porch next door if this is where a woman with dark brown hair lives. She shook her head and said she had no idea.

I thought I had the wrong house or even the wrong street, but just as I was about to make one last call, the door swung open and Kathryn calmly greeted me and led me through her cozy house into her bright kitchen. The aroma of French pressed coffee filled the kitchen and was a welcome sight after the chilly morning walk. Coffees in hand, we chit chatted about the house, the neighborhood and neighbors. The stories all seemed familiar and parallel in a neighborhood that is slowly being gentrified. After sharing more similar experiences, she led me down to her studio space.

My first reaction was how organized and spacious her basement studio is for a relatively small square footage. Two walls are lined with equipment and bookshelves while another wall is anchored by a large desk where all her computer equipment is. "This is where I spend the majority of my time" she said pointing to the desk. This makes sense as Cornelius' work, in addition to performance, is primarily video based. Her work is driven by ideas and methodological concepts from various philosophers and writers including Foucault and Bourdieu.

"My practice is largely project-based, situated in research and my interdisciplinary background, informed by methodologies from Bourdieuan sociology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, social network theory, and Human Computer Interaction & Design." Quoted from her artist statement.

Her work has commented on various socio-political issues including the critique of the art fair and the posh parties that revolve around the art fair. A related performance took place at the one time DC Art Fair of 2007 at the Washington Convention Center. Cornelius' piece entitled "Recognition" was not just a critique on the art fair, but a critique on performance itself. "I exaggerated the entertainment value of performance art by staging a Hollywood-style affair and challenged the concept of liveness in technology and performance."

She's certainly interested in issues of power and persona — between the viewer and the performer, the entertainer and the entertained, the subject and the other. Although the content of her work has shifted to being more personal, her approach and interest still seems couched in creating an experience for the viewer where it puts them in a position of power— or at least in a position to question it: the power and position to create ones own narrative.

Her process of mapping out the framework for each video work is akin to the storyboard in filmmaking. Drawn by hand, she visually pieces together a sequence of little rectangles to represent time. They reminded me of music notes on a staff or drawings by Louise Bourgeois. After showing me around the

space, she reached for her “granny sweater” for a bit of authenticity. “This is what I always wear when I’m working”. She snapped on her headphones and went to work.

Kathryn currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors at the Arlington Arts Center and is represented by [Curator’s Office](#) here in D.C. Her new show “The Feeling of What Happens” is up through June 17.

Kathryn Cornelius Images

