

# No Dumping Allowed

Performance artist Kathryn Cornelius keeps things clean in her latest series of works.

By **JEFFRY CUDLIN**  
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There are many inherent dangers to being a performance artist. You're not likely to make much money selling your ephemeral gestures. You might open yourself to incomprehension or ridicule. And, if you follow the example of Kathryn Cornelius, you might have to handle some human feces.

"This may be a thoroughly gentrified area," Cornelius says of the 14th Street NW corridor, where she held "Art Services (Waste)," her latest series of performances. "[B]ut there are definitely different classes of trash here. The worst was a full diaper. A very full diaper. Baby poop! I also found fingernails over by the PNC bank, and some discarded bones. They weren't ribs or wings—I don't know what they were."

For "Art Services (Waste)," Cornelius, 28, tried her hand at pro bono waste management. Between Tuesday, July 10, and Saturday, July 14, Cornelius visited eight art galleries along 14th Street, washing windows, scrubbing floors, and emptying trash cans—as well as picking up trash on the sidewalk outside. In so doing, she metaphorically acted out the gentrified area's "cleanup," which is often attributed to the influx of artists and arts venues.

"This piece is about how these galleries...help a city become what it is in terms of its real estate," Cornelius explains. "It's something not just to embrace but to poke at a little bit and say, 'OK, at what cost has all of this been developed? What are the consequences?'"

Cornelius' one-woman cleanup campaign was part of "SiteProjects DC," an ongoing series of public art events curated by Welmoed Laanstra for the Washington Project for the Arts\Corcoran. For her project, Cornelius donned a black hat and a bright orange jumpsuit, both emblazoned with the logo of her imaginary corporation, Art Services. She also wore a ridiculous complement of safety gear: a dust mask, safety goggles, kneepads, and bright blue rubber gloves.

On the street, the transformation seemed to make her invisible—or at least to inspire rude behavior.

"[Y]ou can be wearing a bright orange jumpsuit, and someone just bumps right into you," Cornelius says. "[Y]ou're there doing something for the benefit of that individual who lives in the condo that's right over there, and they just knock on through you."

By contrast, gallerygoers watched her with rapt attention. "The folks inside the gallery read my actions using their knowledge of performance, conceptual art, and art in general...[they were] quiet, serious, relatively quick to get out of the way as I was cleaning near them," Cornelius says. "No one in their right mind would give such serious attention to the act of someone cleaning anywhere else."

Instead of asking the galleries for permission to tidy up, Cornelius used the sorts of aggressive marketing techniques she encounters all the time for her day job at a local nonprofit.

"I sent out faxes. The first one was just an advertisement saying, hey, 50% off waste services! Great! And then the next one was: OK, we really want to be there, so—you're a winner! And then they would get the courtesy call: 'Good afternoon. This is a representative....' It's not a recording; it's me talking [like a recording]: 'A workman will visit your gallery on Thursday...July...11...two...thousand...and...seven....'"

Despite the bizarre approach, Cornelius says, all of the galleries let her in, and most of them quickly figured out the score—save one: Gallery Plan B, whose director, David Kalamar, didn't recognize Cornelius. "I was actually a little embarrassed because I've met her before," Kalamar says. "Not with all of [the gear] she was



The Chipper Picker-Upper: Cornelius was happy to clean galleries. (Darrow Montgomery)

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wearing—I had to be told later who she was.”

“They were having some sort of event, and [the director] just wasn’t having it,” says Cornelius. “I said, ‘Oh, I’ll just clean your windows, then.’ But he sent me packing.”

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