

Joanna Malinowska, "Time of Guerrilla Metaphysics"

★★★★★

Canada, through Jan 24 (see Lower East Side)



Installation view

The first thing that springs to mind when faced with the giant *boli*, or West African spiritual talisman, that Polish artist Joanna Malinowska has constructed for her second show at Canada, is that given its super size, it's a good thing the gallery is on the ground floor. But in appropriating this fetish, the anthropologically minded Malinowska has also replaced the original sacrificial materials used by the Bamana people of Mali (for whom this juju is a model of cosmological order) with her own unique blend of ingredients: plaster, hay, water from the Bering Strait, "scraps of Spinoza's ethics"—and, she claims, the sweater

of Bolivian president Evo Morales.

Along with the *boli* sculpture, Malinowska has re-created such venerable artworks as Malevich's *Black Square* from 1915 and the accoutrements from a 1974 performance in which Joseph Beuys caged himself in a New York gallery with a live coyote, using little more than a felt blanket and a cane to keep the animal at bay. Here, the cane mechanically taps on a black wooden box, which itself is a replica of a percussion instrument designed by Galina Ustvolskaya, the Russian avant-garde composer known as "the lady of the hammer."

Malinowska mixes art history and folkloric elements with abandon, though not always successfully: A video of elderly men twirling halfheartedly in imitation of the solar system at Brooklyn's McCarren Park is simply tedious. Still, as her title suggests, Malinowska is something of a guerilla metaphysician, and more often than not, the connections she proposes among disparate elements make for a winsome show.

—Nana Asfour