

NOMAD

A HOME ON WHEEL FOR THE ART OF LIVING

By **Rosanna Albertini**

And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony; to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.

Victor Shklovsky, 1917

Dominique Moody was at her forty fourth move, from Fairfax and Pico to Saint Elmo Drive, a narrow street that cuts La Brea one block from Venice Boulevard – were La Brea a river, instead of a large street, it would be a stream pouring dryness and dust. She came to Los Angeles in 1996 following her art exhibited at the Watts Towers Art Center. There was no plan or decision to stay. But it happened. She had made a house of cards, dream after dream, asking the public to write or draw their dreams on the cards. That way she could connect to the heart beat of the new place, and make a temporary, collective body out of it. As many other times, Dominique Moody let the place reshape her perception, filtering thoughts and memories. She says, “Things go through me, they don’t belong to me.” Conversely, there is no single place where she belongs. Different accents carved a neutral English in her tongue. The earth is her floor.

If you walk on Venice Boulevard toward La Brea for miles, with no other humans around unless you cross homeless people with their traffic of cans and bottle, you end up counting cracks on the sidewalk and trying to distinguish the plastic grass from the real blades; your sandals hit broken glass around the monumental, brown monsters pretending to be benches near the bus stops so dirty nobody dares to sit. Regardless, clouds and light and trees provide a sense of beauty, a desert beauty not kind to humans. Saint Elmo’s Village, where Dominique Moody was nested for a while, is an unexpected oasis protected by

cactus spines. Art and life are so strongly intermingled in her room, exquisitely simple, that it's impossible to conceive at them separately. And, despite the tragic tangle of stories hung in her family tree, or to the branches of her own life, one only breathes peaceful waves around this artist. Time where she belongs seems to come before and after History: as if primitive nomadic habits from the time before history was written, added to her family's military nomadness on the 40 feet long *New Moon* trailer, had woven in her the soul of a bird. Storytelling is her singing.

NOMAD is the work of a woman who carries love, inside, for the idea of a home that will always be around her like a shell. She will leave art behind her as she travels, marking the fact she has passed by. Her 20' by 8' shell on wheels will be an open laboratory for old and new friends she might encounter: art and life in motion, receiving and giving back the feeling that every single life is a stroke of disparate moments dissolved and dispersed, dismissed and disparaged most of the time. It is from our civilized life in pieces, an old rug showing loose thread, on the fringe of a moral precipice, that the artist, intentionally, takes a distance, salvaging from the trash forgotten treasures. Feelings, friendship and collaboration are the glue to recombine fragments of objects or ideas and give them a new life, for those who can love them. Dominique Moody's art becomes the pulsing core of collective dreams; they might flow into language, images, and music, all speaking "The Art of Living." So she calls it.

NOMAD is one of the dreams Dominique Moody wants to squeeze out of her head to install her own life into: no address, no steady residence, geography is already a frame. But really, there is a stronger, a larger cloud of darkness she pushes away: it is the normally accepted belief that humans are trapped by circumstances, as if they were no different from ants or bees, obedient to the same rules, generation after generation. Although, even about insects we don't really know, we don't speak their language.

Because of her magnetic strength Dominique's projects are easily nurtured by spontaneous, joyful collaboration. At the needed moment, for the

time being. The portion of NOMAD on display has been entirely hand built with salvaged materials, through the living time and work of volunteers. People who just feel it right. They join their dreams to hers. Not so much because a little house is being built, the whole process is re-appropriation of knowledge, the know-how which is lost when we buy components that are new.

Dominique Moody will not be alone on the road: not only she does not drive, she is legally blind. It does not mean she cannot see at all, she has only lost central vision, intensity of colors, and three-dimensional perception. But flat things in movement, for her, become visual volumes. A pair of jeans might walk in the street completely disembodied, someone could be without head, or a telephone book hit by the wind can look to her, from the window, like a homeless woman bending her hunched back toward the ground.

I know she at first sees a black hole instead of my face when I sit in front of her, and I regularly forget it. So natural are her reactions to my voice that I can't believe she doesn't see me like a full moon. It takes time: a detail over the top, a glimpse of the nose -- she slightly shifts her head -- then she focuses on my mouth. At the end of the conversation Dominique's brain will put my face together. And she laughs at all of that, simply telling me that yes, her pace of life is slower, she had to evolve along with her loss of frontal sight, but sometimes magic, and comic stories come out of the hat. The same happens when she reads, seeing the first two letters and the last of each word; the rest is guessing. Collage, with all the unexpected visual discoveries entailed by the process, is a journey through her hands.

Perhaps Dominique Moody can still perfectly see only when she sees her dreams. Is that the way they become her shell? And NOMAD the shell of a life so marvelously adapted to disowning what does not count that I bow to her and to her art. I hope to be contagious.

Exhibition of *Nomad*, by Dominique Moody, at the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, 2009.