

NOTES FROM THE ARTIST



Renée Green, *Space Poem #1*, 2007. Double-sided Poly 600 banners with printed text and images, Twenty-seven parts, each 42 × 32 inches (106.7 × 81.3 cm). Installation view. *Wordplay*, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2024-25. Acquired through the generosity of the Acquisitions Circle and Anonymous Art Acquisition Fund. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Mel Taing.

Renée Green

Space Poem #1

From the series *Space Poems*, 2007–20

Double-sided Poly 600 banners with printed text and designs

Artist Renée Green shares background and context on the banners that make up *Space Poem #1*.

Row one

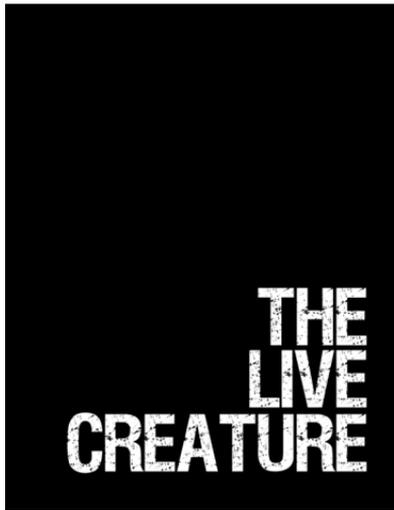


Green has used Free Agent Media (FAM) as a dream company for her projects since 1994. As the art historian Gloria Sutton writes: FAM, a “dream company,” is “a means of addressing the distribution of contemporary art within a marketplace demonstrating Green’s deep understanding of art’s complex relationship to the culture industry and complicates the tendency to read art as distinct from the broader media ecology it circulates within, complicating the tendency to see “the museum,” “the academy,” or “the market” as the only designated institutions for the production and reception of art.”

The phrase “small unit” recurs in the FAM banners to indicate the relationship of an individual component as part of a whole. In these banners, Green explores the sense of interrelationship between how they retain meaning individually and as a whole — a challenge when each component points the viewer elsewhere based on references, names, keywords, codes, diagrams, and phrases.

“Small units” also references Green’s way of working with a recurring, and small, ensemble of collaborators, allowing a flexibility and independence that other, more corporate, models of art production do not allow.

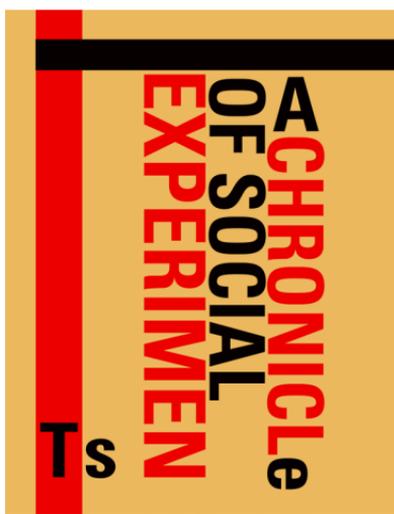
Row two



The text on this banner references the early-twentieth-century intellectual John Dewey (1859–1952) whose important book *Art as Experience* (1934) opens with a chapter titled “The Live Creature.” Dewey connects art to everyday activities and events, and criticizes other theories which glorify and spiritualize art and confine it to rarified realms.

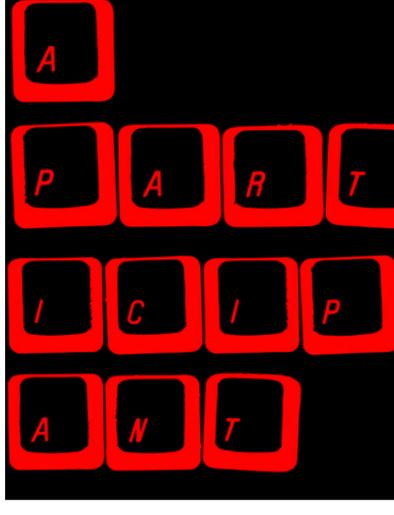


Ever attentive to books and their typography, Green uses two distinct fonts in this banner to stack the letters to spell “epiphanies”—the top three lines in a Gothic-style font associated with older Christian texts, and the final “s” in a more modern serif font, creating a typographical and cognitive disjuncture akin to the meaning of the word depicted.

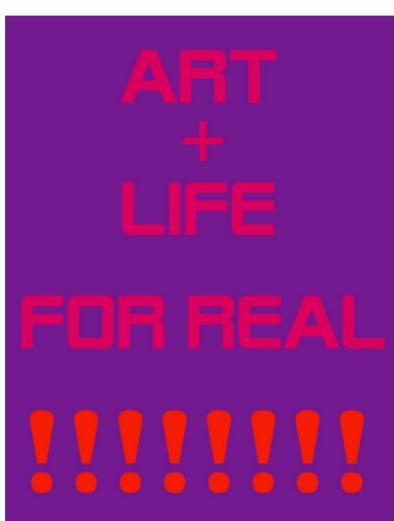


The design of this banner references the Soviet avant-garde and the work of El Lissitzky (1890–1941), a well-known Russian artist who worked in a geometric, early form of abstract art. Lissitzky also used language in his work and produced numerous works of propaganda for the Soviet Union in the early 20th century.

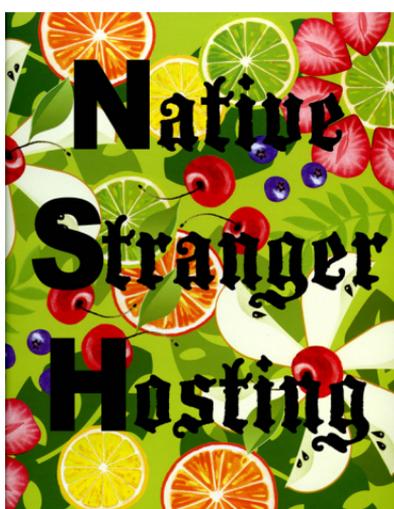
Row three



This artwork was produced for Green's 2007 exhibition at Participant Inc., an alternative art venue in the Lower East Side in New York. "A Participant" references the exhibition site while pointing to Green's involvement in New York's art scene since the early 1980s. In addition, in her pedagogical role as an educator, Green designates attendants to her seminars as "participants," not students, highlighting the dialectic relationships among all participants.



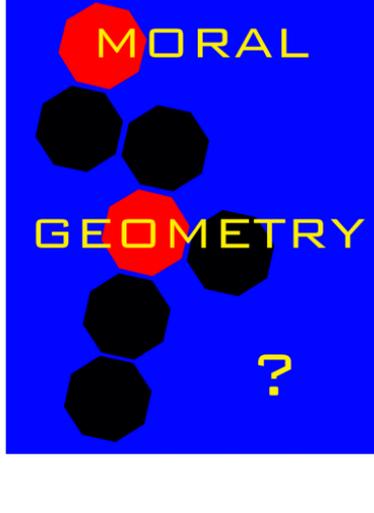
"Comienza el wow!" ("Let the Wow Begin!") was a phrase pulled from a conversation Green had about her work and what was perceived as a lack of visual stimulation in it; with a degree of irony, Green conveys her awareness of the ways in which contemporary society has created a spectacle of visual appeal, a trend that has increased exponentially since the advent of smart phones and explosion of imagery. The first iPhone was released to the world in June 2007, a few months after *Space Poem #1* was produced.



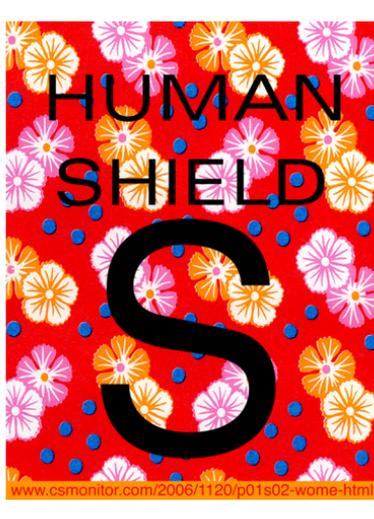
In this banner, Green points to what can be thought of as a paradoxical historical process of reversal: indigenous inhabitants become strangers in their own lands while continuing to host those who came to occupy and inhabit their lands at a later date.

The work is also a friendship tribute to the artist Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds.

Row five



"Huge Holes" refers to Green's ongoing concern with complexity and historical nuance, with what she designates as lost narratives in history and memory.



The URL on this banner leads to a *Christian Science Monitor* article titled "Palestinian Human Shields Give Israel Pause" (2006). The article covers one instance of Palestinian human shield protests that prevented Israeli airstrikes in the fall of 2006.

As defined by Merriam-Webster, a human shield is a person whose body is used as a protection from harm by someone else.

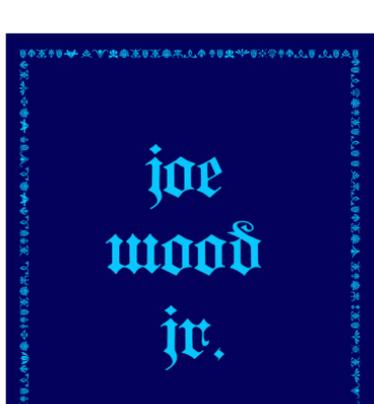
The concept of human shields as a resistance measure was created by Mahatma Gandhi as a weapon of resistance.



The Palestinian-American academic Edward W. Said (1935–2003) was crucial in the development of postcolonial studies and best known for authoring *Orientalism* (1978), which argued that early scholarship and literature by Westerners on the Eastern Islamic world was biased and projected a stereotyped vision of "otherness."

In 1981, Green drew extensively on Said's *Orientalism* in her B.A. thesis at Wesleyan University, "Discourse on Afro-American Art."

This banner is part of a group of banners in this Space Poem designated by Green as "portable memorials."



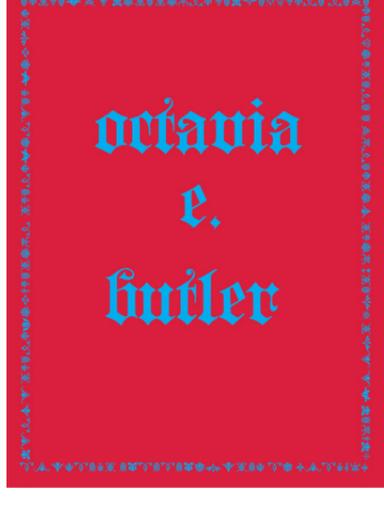
A close friend of Green, Joe Wood Jr. was a writer and contributor to *The Village Voice* and an editor at *The New Press*; in 1992 he edited *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, a book of essays assessing Malcom X's influence in contemporary culture.

Wood has featured in other works by Green. For instance, in her *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992), he was in conversation with the German cultural critic Diedrich Diedrichsen discussing the flow of hip-hop music and its related African culture diasporic throughout the world, as it circulated among New York City, Los Angeles, and Cologne, Germany.

Wood went missing in Mount Rainier National Park in 1999 at the age of 34.

This banner is part of a series of what Green designates as "portable memorials."

Row six



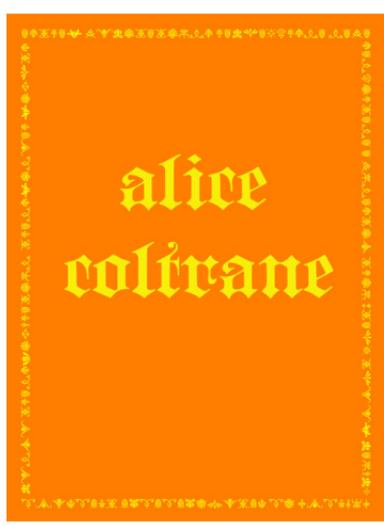
Octavia E. Butler (1947–2006) was a prolific and celebrated author whose pioneering work in science fiction integrated sharp social criticism on race, sex, gender, culture, and power. Her work has been closely associated with Afrofuturism, an aesthetic and philosophy connecting the African diaspora with science, technology, and fantasy. Among her most well-known works are *Kindred* (1979), and the *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987–89), which narrates “the birth of something new—and foreign.”

This banner is part of a series of what Green designates as “portable memorials.”



Pat Hearn (1955–2000) was an influential art gallerist based in New York who exhibited Green's work in the 1990s, alongside several conceptual and socially oriented artists of Green's generation. A colleague and a friend of Green, Hearn was also known for exhibiting women's artists, as well as for being a founder of the Armory Show, a New York art fair, in 1994.

This banner is part of a series of what Green designates as “portable memorials.”



Alice Coltrane (1931–2007) was an American jazz musician and composer. After the death of her husband, jazz musician John Coltrane, she developed a musical approach influenced by her spirituality and devotion to Hinduism.

Alice Coltrane's music was sampled and remixed by Green in her work *Standardized Octagonal Units for Imagined and Existing Systems* (2002), a series of octagonal units dispersed through a public park in Kassel, Germany, for Documenta 11, the influential art exhibition. Coltrane's music is also featured in Green's film *Elsewhere?*, displayed in one of the units in the park.

This banner is part of a group of banners in this Space Poem designated by Green as “portable memorials.”



“Alleviating Suffering” references general Buddhist ideas of suffering (or *duḥkha* in Sanskrit). The concept of suffering as inherent to existence and reincarnation is the first of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, a religion aiming to alleviate suffering for oneself and, in the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, for others. Mahayana Buddhism aims to alleviate suffering to develop “a spontaneous wish and compassionate mind to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings