

# THE DENVER POST

## Artist shows woman's predate ritual in a most public way

"Are you ready to go out yet?"

By Kyle MacMillan

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*New York artist R. Luke Dubois created a 62-minute video documenting Amaris' performance. It is being screened at Colorado College's I.D.E.A. space as part of an exhibition that includes sets and costumes from the event. (Heather Oelklaus)*

It happens every day in bedrooms across America: women primping for a night on the town.

But embedded in that commonplace ritual is an elaborate, ever-changing set of assumptions accumulated over centuries about how women should look, dress and act. In July 2007, Colorado Springs artist Lian Amaris, then 26, set out to explore those societal norms from the inside out by acting out the dressing rite in slow motion and in the most exposed way possible.

The unusualness and audacity of the event drew the attention of the New York Times, New York Post, Reuters and Allure magazine, and was documented by multifaceted New York artist R. Luke Dubois.

The resulting performance work, "Fashionably Late For the Relationship," took place over 72 hours in a kind of tent-covered stage on a traffic island in Union Square in lower Manhattan.

"One of the lines from 'Evita' is that she did it all by 26, and that was my big fear: At 26, I hit the front page of the New York Times and, that was going to be it," Amaris said.

Dubois' 62-minute video is on view in an installation at the I.D.E.A. Space at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, where Amaris has served as the Priddy Professor of Performance Studies and Digital Media for three years.

The work is screened continuously on two opposing screens, with costumes, props and supporting materials from the performance on view in an adjacent gallery.

The video has been featured in the 2008 San Jose Biennial, "Global Festival of Art on the Edge," and at a range of other events, including January's "24-Hour Program on the Concept of Time" at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Other artists have explored similar territory: Cindy Sherman confronts gender stereotypes in her role-playing self-portraits, and Marina Abramovic lived for 12 days in 2002 on three platforms inside the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. But Amaris' poignant, thought-provoking performance carved out new artistic territory and made a

Lian Amaris, who teaches at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, spent 72 hours on a traffic island in New York City in July 2007 as part of a performance work titled "Fashionably Late for the Relationship." (Photo courtesy of R. Luke Dubois)

By taking a typically private event and making it so public in "Fashionably Late," the ordinary suddenly became out of the ordinary and previously cached gender stereotypes, erotic fantasies and voyeuristic urges were exposed.

While Amaris never wore anything more revealing than a nightgown, her youthful attractiveness and the fantasy nature of the event could not help but introduce a certain sexual charge into the performance.

The artist has frequently experimented with time and duration in her work, and this performance explored the nature of ritual by stretching out and exaggerating each action — assigning an hour to what would usually take a minute.



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Dubois further toyed with the notion of time by converting Amaris' performance back to the event's normal time span by speeding up the action in time-lapse fashion.

Streetside reactions to Amaris' performance varied widely. While many people ignored it, others watched for extended periods. Still others cast insults or complained that more wasn't happening.

"When people thought I was an actress being filmed by a film director, they didn't really care," she said. "But once it was clear that it was an art piece about gender and voyeurism, people were upset by that. They were angry that I would be there presenting this."

Amaris, who grew up in Amherst, Mass., got her start in conventional theater but became increasingly drawn to alternative forms of performance and new media and their intersection with pop culture and gender.

She holds dual master's degrees from New York University in performance studies and interactive telecommunications. Dubois was one of her professors, and the two conceived the performance work and video in tandem.

After scouting other locations, Amaris and Dubois ultimately settled on Union Square and a traffic island with Grand Central Station visible in the distance.

"We came to that traffic island, and it just clicked immediately," she said. "As soon as we saw it, we knew this we where needed to be. It was this perfect combination of isolation within this very public, relentless space."

Amaris then set about creating a kind of dreamlike fantasy of the ideal woman's pre-date preparations, giving it a feel that was more about nostalgia than historical accuracy.

"Part of the challenge of the piece for me was that I knew I was embodying the impossible standard that girls have to live up to, that I was actually making it real and three-dimensional," Amaris said.

She created a kind of set, complete with a classic settee, screen, dresser and fresh roses and stocked it with five vintage dresses and an array of accompanying props, including a cigarette case.

"Fashionably Late" is the kind of smart, daring, genre-bending work that remains all too rare in Colorado.

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