Multicultural good intentions aside, some things never change. Under the fleecy cover of humanism, the Other is still “exotic,” the colonizer is never us, and the privileged lines of access to sensitive subjects, languages, and images are as segregated as any greasy lunch counter melting under the summer sun in Forsyth County, Georgia ever was. Though we can see beyond territorial lines, they nonetheless remain steadfastly drawn, and the problem of representing “multi-culti” interests and salvaging the artist’s/curator’s role from that of the colonizer/conqueror can be approached only on the home front. The political is the personal, and it must be articulated with respect to one’s own race, gender, and experience. At the same time, it is imperative to outsmart the vulgar regulatory forces that nominate token female voices, token persons of color, and token gays. It’s still a savage world.

In “World Tour: Souvenir,” an exhibition that includes three site-specific installations originally made for other situations, Renee Green adopts the point of view of a traveler who records her personal encounters with each environment, and self-consciously questions her role as an artist (an outsider) invited to make a “show us who we are” portrait of one or another community. Informed by extensive historical research and sensitive to thinly disguised racisms and other atrocities, Green goes for the jugular, but poetically.

In Bequest, 1991, Green initiates a meditation on the Puritan ideology of “whiteness” and “blackness” (the meta-narrative of which is alienation and displacement) by focusing on the Worcester Art Museum, an institution founded to memorialize the Salisbury patriarchy. She intersperses portraits of three generations of Salisbury fathers and their memorabilia with clapboard walls and a gangplank stenciled with sentences from writings by Edgar Allen Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and W. E. B. DuBois. Entering the installation, we literally walk through the frame of art (a large gold-leaf picture frame) onto the rickety walkway, flanked by the clapboard panels, display cases, and lecterns. Access to a secret “see-through” room constructed of two-by-fours and thin muslin, housing a flashing caution light, is thwarted by a door bolted a dozen times with Master brand locks.

In another museological installation, Mise en scène, 1991, Green autopsies the history of Clisson, one of three locations that formed the Triangular Slave Trade in France in the 18th century. Simulating a decorative-arts display, the piece includes fabric printed with bucolic scenes, spliced with reproductions of an engraving depicting the examination of newly arrived Africans. The walls are white, chamber music plays softly, and two tiny topiaries flank a table offering visitors the chance to browse through photographs of contemporary Clisson, with its gardens, beautiful architecture, and museums. Green’s tourist photographs record the blackamoors that stand outside doors; the stuffed wild animals and tribal artifacts in the local natural history museum; rows of exotic cacti specimens crammed into hothouses; and a restaurant named L’Esclave (The slave). Three coffinlike file boxes contain classifications of names and dates that narrate the history of enslavement and the silent absorption of African into French culture, while three galvanized metal washtubs contain rotating images of sailing ships, presumably mapping the routes of the French slave trade.

Idyll Pursuits, 1991, which originated in Caracas, Venezuela, and is the third installation component of “World Tour: Souvenirs,” takes as its point of departure Frank Redcliffe—A Story of Travel and Adventure in the Forests of Venezuela. The piece conflates the colonizing attitudes of this 19th-century “book for boys” with the itineraries and production of artists such as the Hudson River
School painters Frederic Church, and Thomas Cole, whose travels to the Andes Green relates to her own journey to make art in Caracas. Tapping into apparently disparate discourses, she constantly shifts gears between past history and contemporary experience, between the voice of authority and the subjugant. As a woman of color, Green is well qualified to speak for several "others," but refuses to do so. Placing herself at the center of her narrative histories as a simultaneous actor, director, and audience, she makes no claims for the salutary effects of her work other than to satisfy her own desire for engagement in her physical and social environment—to know where she is, and who she is when she is there.

—Jan Avgikos