

Renée Green

Secret

10 Apr–16 May 2026

55 Walker

Bortolami is pleased to present Renée Green’s historical multimedia installation *Secret* at 55 Walker.

In 1993, Green was invited to participate in “Project Unité,” a pioneering group exhibition featuring artists and architects organized by Yves Aupetitallot in Le Corbusier’s *Projet Unité* in Firminy, France, with the intention of “going beyond the confines of art and culture.” As her contribution, Green chose to inhabit an apartment in Le Corbusier’s semi-abandoned structure. The materials she produced and recorded during her stay were later translated into the first iteration of *Secret*, exhibited in James Meyer’s 1993 landmark group exhibition “What Happened to the Institutional Critique?” at American Fine Arts Co. in Soho, NY. Following the artist’s unique recursive methodology, the work was later expanded upon in 2006 and 2010.

Taking its title from a volume of Le Corbusier’s private drawing studies of female nudes, *Secret* simultaneously references Green’s own “secret” occupancy of a semi-deserted apartment in the architect’s iconic housing block. Through a formal assembly of black-and-white photographs, a sculptural three-channel video device, and two multilingual soundtracks narrating Green’s observations, the artist investigates this “modern ruin” via the dual lenses of the document and lived memory as an active participant in a group exhibition and as a distanced observer enmeshed in both private and social sites. By juxtaposing her own diaristic observations with the socio-political realities of the building’s permanent residents—many of whom were immigrants—and of an early 1990s international art exhibition, *Secret* engages with the frictions of inhabitancy and travel, utopia and reality in a significant architectural site.

A pivotal work in Green’s oeuvre, *Secret* has been exhibited internationally, most recently as part of Green’s survey exhibition *Inevitable Distances* at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021) and Migros Museum, Zurich (2022), and it returns now to New York City, the city wherein Green’s *Secret* was first presented in the US.

The exhibition also includes a new two-dimensional artwork, produced specially for this iteration of *Secret* at 55 Walker.

Renée Green (b. 1959 in Cleveland, OH, lives in Somerville, MA, and New York, NY) is an artist, writer, and filmmaker known for her highly layered and formally complex multimedia installations in which ideas, perception, and experience are examined from myriad perspectives. Via films, essays and writings, installations, digital media, architecture, sound-related works, film series, and events, her work engages with investigations into circuits of relation and exchange over time, the gaps and shifts in what survives in public and private memories as well as what has been imagined and invented.

Green's exhibitions, videos and films have been seen throughout the world in museums and art institutions. In the last decade, her work has been featured in solo or group exhibitions at Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), California; moCa Cleveland; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; KW Institute for Contemporary Art and daadgalerie, Berlin; Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard University, Massachusetts; MAK Center for Art + Architecture at the Schindler House, West Hollywood; the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the New Museum, all in New York.

Her major survey exhibition, *The Equator Has Moved*, is currently on view at Dia Beacon, accompanied by a publication released for the occasion.

Since the late 1980s, Renée Green has brought archival and documentary methods into material relation with found forms of language to produce generative encounters that operate within the slippages between public history and personal memory. It is within this broader practice—concerned with the conditions under which experience is framed, narrated, and made legible—that *Secret* takes shape. Initiated in 1993, Green’s multivalent *Secret* offers a critical rejoinder to the conditions of artistic labor and the codification of curatorial practice at a moment when the category of “contemporary art” itself was consolidating around transnational circuits of exchange. This was the historically-specific period in which the growing prominence of international group exhibitions, residencies, and biennials expanded artistic mobility beyond the collection-centered paradigms of the museum. Within these emerging “global” frameworks of the early 1990s, such curatorial modalities often positioned artists within prefigured exhibition structures that subsumed their work into overarching narratives, frequently at odds with the lived conditions on the very grounds in which they alighted.

Secret unfolds as a measured response to *Project Unité*, a signal group exhibition organized by curator Yves Aupetitallot and staged within Le Corbusier’s Unité d’habitation in Firminy, France—a structure designed in the mid-1950s yet only completed in 1967, already marked by a temporal lag within modernism’s aspirations toward collective life. *Project Unité*’s premise, which invited artists and architects to produce work in situ in individual apartments, effectively reanimated the building’s founding ambition: to choreograph social relations through architectural form. Yet by the early 1990s, this modernist fantasy of a coherent, self-regulating social order had already fractured, giving way to a more complex reality shaped by migration and the afterlives of colonial histories—conditions made visible in the apartments themselves, which bore the uneven marks of occupation, neglect, and ongoing repair.

Green does not approach this context as a neutral assignment, but as a set of constraints and speculative possibilities to be navigated across uneven temporalities and positions: artists temporarily in residence, visitors arriving for the opening events, and the building’s inhabitants—many of them recent immigrants—whose presence exceeds the exhibition’s frame. Rather than accepting the project’s terms—its staging of temporary cohabitation as a proxy for collectivity—Green’s actions, articulated across photographic, video, written, and auditory forms, attend to the lived conditions the exhibition produces: the assignment of roles—artist, resident, host, visitor, collaborator, invited guest, interloper, occupant—and the asymmetries that structure these designations. In doing so, she exposes the disjunction between the architectural and curatorial projection of social unity and the differentiated, often incommensurate experiences of those who move through it.

In this sense, Green’s approach resists the stabilizing logic of “site specificity,” an art historical term that presumes a coherent alignment between artwork and location and to which Green’s work has often been associated. Instead, *Secret* operates through lived conditions in which place is not given but produced—through movement, translation, and encounter, and through the differential positioning of bodies within overlapping social, architectural, and historical frameworks.

The materials that comprise *Secret*—seventy-three black-and-white photographs mounted in a linear sequence along the gallery’s perimeter, a three-part video, and layered soundtracks in English and French—refuse to cohere into a unified account. Instead, they register the disjunction between the curatorial projection of collective

inhabitation and the differentiated, often incommensurate conditions through which that inhabitation is lived. Across these elements, the work traces the terms of occupancy, foregrounding the asymmetries of power and access that structure such positions.

The photographic sequence does not function as straight-forward documentation. Presented in shifting orientations, the images neither stabilize nor verify the events they index; they circulate instead as fragments within a dispersed field of reference, withholding narrative closure and refusing the evidentiary authority often attributed to the photographic image. In this way, they register the partial and often unassimilable nature of lived experience rather than consolidating it into a coherent narrative.

This condition extends into the three-part video, where diaristic passages, scripted texts, and observational footage are interwoven across multiple languages. The narrating voice emanating from the videos and the soundtracks does not reconcile these elements into a singular account but marks the intervals between them—between description and speculation, presence and recollection. Language here operates not as a transparent vehicle but as a material condition, one that both binds and separates, exposing the gaps through which experience is articulated and deferred.

The inclusion of what Green refers to as “props”—books, drawings, and textual fragments—underscores the work’s compositional logic. These materials do not function as explanatory anchors but as points of entry into a network of references spanning literature, architecture, and visual culture.

Revisited here in 2026, *Secret* returns to this formative moment as a sustained inquiry into these conditions—one that anticipates, rather than follows, later critiques of curatorial authorship. Rather than affirming the exhibition as a coherent whole, the work registers “scenes from a group show.” What emerges is not a stable account of a celebrated exhibition, but a structure attuned to the provisional, the fugitive, and the iterative, in which artistic subjectivity remains contingent—continually formed and reformed in relation to the shifting demands of exhibitionary authorship, yet never fully contained by them.

This presentation of *Secret* at 55 Walker adds a new element to the installation, a print suturing the different iterations of the work produced across multiple moments that mark how Green’s work has figured against a shifting art historical background—in 1993, when the work was part of James Meyer’s landmark group exhibition *What Happened to the Institutional Critique?* at Colin de Land’s American Fine Arts Co. in Soho; in 2006, after Green revisited the work in Paris for her exhibition *Unité d’Habitation*, and the installation’s subsequent presentation in Green’s monographic exhibitions: *Ongoing Becomings* (Lausanne, 2009), *Endless Dreams and Time-Based Streams* (San Francisco, 2010), *Within Living Memory* at Le Corbusier’s Carpenter Center for Visual Arts (Cambridge, MA, 2018), and *Inevitable Distances* (Berlin, 2021; Zurich, 2022), foregrounding the work’s ongoing transformation. Rather than a fixed artifact, *Secret* operates as a structure that is continually reconfigured in relation to its own contexts and conditions of display.

More than three decades after its initial conception, *Secret* remains acutely resonant. Its attention to mobility, translation, and the politics of occupancy speaks directly to contemporary conditions in which questions of belonging are increasingly contested.

At the same time, its formal strategies—its refusal of closure, its layering of voices, and its insistence on partial knowledge—offer a model for engaging such conditions without flattening them into reductive narratives.

If *Secret* resists resolution, it does so as a means of sustaining inquiry. It asks how one inhabits without claiming, how one moves within structures that precede and exceed individual experience, and how histories are carried, translated, and transformed across time. In doing so, Green articulates a practice grounded not in fixed positions, but in ongoing processes of relation.

— Gloria Sutton

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