



Please Be Seated, Nicole Cohen

Please Be Seated

Nicole Cohen
American, 2007
Video installation

Questions for Teaching

Look at the image of the white chair, below right, which is a modern replica/reinterpretation of the 18th-century desk chair on the left. Compare and contrast the two chairs. What are some details that are similar; what are some details that look different? How does the color white of the modern chair make you feel? If you had to choose which one to buy for your room, which one would you choose?

The white chair was made by video artist Nicole Cohen for a special gallery at the Getty Museum called *Please Be Seated*. Read the description of the exhibition below. Imagine you are sitting in Nicole Cohen's white chair and seeing your image in the video monitor, which is very much like a surveillance camera's monitor. What do you expect to see on the screen?

How would you feel about seeing yourself in the camera in a fancy 18th-century setting?



Desk Chair, attributed to Étienne Meunier, c.1735



Modern reinterpretation of Meunier's desk chair, by Nicole Cohen

***Please Be Seated*, Nicole Cohen**

Background Information

Please Be Seated is a video **installation** by contemporary artist Nicole Cohen that allows you to interact with the Getty Museum's 18th-century French chairs.

The installation blends footage from decorative arts galleries in the Getty Museum and three French museums with live video captured by a surveillance camera. As you sit in reproductions of the original chairs, you become part of the installation, virtually entering historic recreations of 18th-century French spaces. With this installation Cohen compresses time and space to create a metaphorical game of musical chairs.

About the Artist

Nicole Cohen (born 1970, Falmouth, Massachusetts)

Nicole Cohen's work is positioned at the crossroads of contemporary reality, personal fantasy, and culturally constructed space. Although trained in painting and drawing, Cohen most frequently uses video as her **medium**, playing upon its intrinsic capacities to manipulate time, distort scale and environment, and overlay imagery. Consistently interested in engaging her audience and challenging notions of lifestyle, domesticity, celebrity, and social behavior, Cohen also uses the surveillance camera to involve her viewers in their own voyeurism. Surveillance cameras first appeared in video art installations in the late 1960s. At a time when television dominated American culture, artists sought to change audiences from passive to active participants. In the last four decades, video art has evolved to encompass new technologies that allow for a more seamless inclusion of and reliance on the viewer for the outcome of the work, and Cohen's projects serve as some of the best examples.

Nicole Cohen received her bachelor of arts degree from Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, and her master of fine arts degree from the University of Southern California. Her work has been exhibited at the Williams College Museum of Art (Williamstown, Massachusetts), the Fabric Workshop and Museum (Philadelphia), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the New York Public Library. It has also been shown internationally in Berlin; Bergen, Norway; Paris; Harajaku, Osaka, Kobe, and Tokyo; and Shanghai.

