

From art to activism: Writer Lucy R. Lippard

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Writer, activist, and culture critic Lucy R. Lippard penned a number of influential volumes on the subjects of art and culture, not to mention a multitude of essays as a contributing writer and editor, long before settling permanently in New Mexico in the mid-1990s. Lippard, a recipient of the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts as a Major

Contributor to the Arts, has a formidable résumé. She has written on the topics of feminism, multiculturalism, the Vietnam War, German-born sculptor Eva Hesse, and the connections between contemporary art and prehistory, as well as art in the service of social change, minimalism, and conceptual art. With nine honorary doctorates to her name, Lippard is among the foremost critics of our time. She went from working in the library at New York's Museum of Modern Art in the late 1950s to curating MoMA exhibitions within the space of a few years; she would go on to curate dozens more at venues across the country and become a contributing editor to *Art in America*.

Her more than 20 books are as broad and wide-ranging in their overall scope as the subjects each one covers. Among them are groundbreaking works such as *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, on the subject of conceptual art, which is arranged as an annotated chronology. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* is a multifaceted exploration of the importance of place that weaves together political, social, and cultural themes. She began writing *Lure of the Local* before moving to the village of Galisteo, but it was completed with a renewed intention after her arrival. Its theme of engagement with one's surroundings is something she takes to heart. "Having written that book, I figured I better practice what I preach," she said. A tireless advocate for Galisteo and its residents, she has served on its planning commission and the water board; she also volunteers for the fire department auxiliary. "The main thing I do is this monthly community newsletter," Lippard said of *El Puente de Galisteo*, for which she's served as editor for 21 years.

Lippard has donated artwork from her private collection to the New Mexico Museum of Art, but she stresses that she's not a collector. "All that stuff I gave was given to me by artist friends." One such friend, Harmony Hammond, had something to do with how she ended up in Galisteo. Lippard first visited the state in 1972, sleeping out one December at Chaco Canyon and attending local pueblo dances. New Mexico worked its way under her skin. "I was already a sucker for it, but I knew I couldn't make a living writing about art here. So I hung in until I could make a living from a distance." Hammond had purchased property in Galisteo, still a village of less than 300 people in Santa Fe County. "I started staying with Harmony when I was out here, and suddenly the land across the creek was open, and I never looked at anything else. My mother died and left me enough money to buy the land, so that was it."

Lippard's community involvement and activism hasn't stopped her from writing, and she's in the process of finishing a book on the history of Galisteo from 1814 to the present. "Nobody will ever do another tome on a 265-people village," she said with a characteristically self-deprecating sense of humor. "So all my mistakes will probably go

down in posterity. I'm looking forward to getting this done and getting out into the streets a little bit more. Having been an activist all my life, this is a time when a million more activists are needed."

Despite her numerous successes and notoriety in the art world, Lippard maintains a modest lifestyle and possesses an approachable, unassuming personality that is as refreshing as it is honest. "People come up to me and say, 'How can I be a cultural critic like you?' I say, 'You keep your standard of living very low — and then you can do whatever you want.'"