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*in New York City*

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### 7.20.09 — [The Investigation](#)

Topics: [Invisible-Exports](#), [Jana Leo](#)

I cannot write about Jana Leo without giving the lie to her experience—and, just as important, to yours. Oh, sure, people say that all the time about critics. I am not, however, talking about an [art beyond words](#). Her show is all about words, document after document of them, with herself as their “archivist” and gatekeeper. Rather, I am in the position of giving spoilers to a crime story. To make matters worse, the artist is still in search of an ending, and that, too, is part of the work.

## **NEW: Summer Updates**

*Postcards tour eerie cities,  
the High Line flies low,  
Brooklyn lives, blockbusters  
pay the bills . . . and more*

therapist's report, and even a Euro-pop song she composed about it all. One may ask to examine any of it, one piece and only one piece at a time.

Eight years ago, Leo was raped at gunpoint in her West Harlem apartment. Then came a hospital examination, an arrest, a guilty plea, and a successful suit against her landlord. A photographer with a PhD in philosophy, she began almost instinctively to document the events. She has since obsessively collected the evidence, so obsessively that she displays correspondence with her lawyer requesting it. It includes boxes and boxes of papers, but also audio or video of the police investigation, the landlord's testimony, a

It is a grueling experience—starting with signing a waiver, displaying photo ID, and standing for a photograph like a crime victim or suspect. It has to be, when one is reading about this crime or staring at photographs of a bruised vagina. It has to be, too, when one must choose between lingering over someone else's suffering or turning away from it, all under her eyes. It has to be grueling for her, too, and the performance ran at [Invisible-Exports](#) for just a week, through July 3. All that is very much to the point. The work is about the indifference or complicity of others when it comes to rape, the demeaning scrutiny that follows, and the tendency to turn away.

It is also about the need to work through things, to share them with others, and to reclaim ownership, much as for [Sophie Calle](#) or [Chantal Akerman](#). It invites analogies to art as therapy or, conversely, art as cold, clinical dissection of human lives. The records end with *her* account of the events and of rape in society, with New York as its “mecca.” This leads to still another point—the difficulty of making sense of this or any experience. Without her summing up, one might never figure out how the police caught the rapist or why Leo sued the landlord. As I say, I have already given her tale the lie, by trying to make sense of it.

So, in a sense, has the artist. On the one hand, she points to the fragmentation of perception and the need to create narratives in order to understand. She shows the subjectivity of her needs and her point of view, as in the number of photographs of her with her boyfriend. I am not a criminologist, but I doubt that statistics make New York the mecca of rape. On the other hand, the work seems to insist on its truth—her truth. She has the evidence to prove it.

The contradictions enter into the performance. One needs to request any one document, but one can first see them all in reproduction in a single bound volume. It would take too long otherwise, and besides one would have no idea what to request. The viewer's multiple roles may not make as much sense as I wanted, too. I could feel tensions and divided loyalties, without being quite sure what they were. Still, one does not often have so much to sort out—or so frank an invitation to do so.

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