

Imagine being on a moving train, peering out at the urban landscape as it whooshes past your window. Much of what you see is a dizzying blur — colors and shapes that pass too quickly to be identified with certainty. But every now and then, the train slows just enough for you to make out clear images of buildings, faces, moving figures. It's that kind of energy that is at the heart of "The Life and Times of Brooklyn Rucker: A Trilogy," a new performance work by singer/songwriter/actress Bronwyn Rucker at the Amos Eno Gallery.

Each part of the trilogy is a separate performance — an entity complete in itself. February 8 marked the first installment in this odyssey of Brooklyn Rucker, a fictional maven of the artistic avant garde, a heroine searching for herself over the years from the egocentric 70s right up to the homogenized, recycled 90s.

Brooklyn Rucker/Bronwyn Rucker, decked out in black leather jacket, shades and a camouflage military cap, comes out rapping and teetering, poised to launch into a dance that never quite materializes, at least not on the performance floor. This dance happens in your mind. With tough Brooklyn accent, she intones things like, "I'm an artist. I don't care what my W2 says. Net worth is not self worth." More teetering, with hips asway, arms balancing like on a tightrope. "I'm a conceptual artist. That is, I try to get away with just thinking."

Dump the shades, jacket and hat. Now she's Barbara from Pittsburgh in 1974, scraping together 200 bucks to move to New York. Lands an apartment with some very strange friends. Adventures ensue. Lovers, girlfriends, getting into the actors union, fights, attacks, temporary jobs, retail jobs, no jobs. Apartments in Jersey. Moved 17 times in three years. Finally, thankfully, exhaustedly, she gets her own place in Brooklyn.

Rucker is a frenetic storyteller so caught up with the speed and urgency of her story that she breaks into song — a barrage of verbosity that seeks temporary respite in sweet melodies. Musical mantras that plummet her back into autobiographical improvisation. It's all quite endearing, though not without need for some fine tuning. With the flip of her army cap, she could be Brooklyn Rucker again — the character who comes out with both barrels smoking — commenting on her own past, her/our vulnerability.

The Villager

A long-time collaborator with Rucker is composer/musician Rick Russo. Here, Russo's electronic musical treatments are both persistent and flavored with just the right amount of controlled abandon. With the ever-present sound of a programmed rhythm track, the tinny sound of his Yamaha keyboard lends a home-grown quality to the proceedings that serves as a perfect foil for Rucker's intensity.

In Part II, on March 1, entitled "My Life as a Junk Bond," and Part III on April 12, "The Persona or The Madonna Complex," we'll see just how Brooklyn Rucker weathers her foray into the world of art in the 90s. If nothing else, it's a world that has embraced performance art with renewed intensity.

Daniel Ferris, the director at Amos Eno Gallery, is nothing if not enthused about the response to the "Performance Arm" programs at the gallery, of which this is one. "It's a perfect marriage," he says, referring to the dances, readings and experimental performances that have drawn hundreds of people to the gallery over the last year. "It's a perfect space for the performers, and it brings a new audience to the visual artists who show here." New audiences along with new messages, I'm sure.

Somehow I'm reminded of Brooklyn Rucker's closing rap on February 8. "We bombed Bhagdad, we bombed Bhagdad," she intoned. But she left us with a hopeful note. "I'm a random particle looking for my Einstein. Art will no longer be a tool to call attention to our misery. Art will be energy. Art will be life. Art will be like we talk to each other. We are at the vanguard of understanding."

AMOS ENO GALLERY: "The Life and Times of Brooklyn Rucker" continues Mar. 1 with Part II, "My Life as a Junk Bond." 594 Broadway, near Houston. 224-5342.