A giant, scarred wrecking ball is the centerpiece of Janine Antoni's art project, "Fear."

JANINE ANTONI

GONE IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

Why did New York artist Janine Antoni create a head-wrapped wrecking ball? Because she wanted a wrecking ball that would bear the scars of demolition — an empathetic wrecking ball. After the smooth, silver-gray globe was used to bring down an abandoned building in Pittsburgh, it looked as if it had been chewed by a gigantic dog.

You'll find the scarred lead ball, complete with a shank of the steel cable that once steered it toward its target, lying on the floor of the Ninth Ward Village, a Prospect.1 exhibit site on Charbonnet Street in the Lower 9th Ward.

But the odd ball is only a piece of a larger story. Antoni, 44, is one of the country's best-known artists. The Bahamas-born Columbia University professor became famous in the 1990s with a unique blend of performance art that elegantly blended traditional women's roles, female-targeted marketing and feminist politics. She once made a sculpture by gnawing on a 600-pound block of chocolate. She swabbed a floor with hair dye, using her hair as the mop. She cast a self-portrait in soap, then bathed with it. She created a leather shroud, fitted perfectly to her body, that allowed her to symbolically take the place of the departed cow.

TEAR
By Janine Antoni

What: An installation that psychologically melds a wrecking ball and a flinching eye.

Where: The Lower Ninth Ward Village, 1001 Charbonnet St.


See ANTONI, D-12

MORE ARTIST PROFILES AND INFORMATION ABOUT PROSPECT.1, D-12
ANTONI, from D-1

In every case, her works were subtle, sublime and easily understood.

Antoni, a former dancer, usually uses her body as part of the process. Her Prospect.1 project, titled “Tear,” is no exception. Using a head-restraining device, she tightly focused a video camera on one of her eyeballs, carefully capturing each blink. She then synchronized the blinking video with the sounds of the wrecking ball blasting through brick and mortar.

Visitors to Antoni’s exhibit will be wrapped in the concussive sounds of the demolition as they behold the scarred wrecking ball and the blinking eye, projected on an 11-foot screen. She hopes the animate and inanimate objects achieve a certain psychological resonance.

She’d like us to spell out the title of her work — t-e-a-r — rather than pronounce it, because the word has two meanings.

“It could be a tear from your eye, or tear, as in tear down,” she said.

It’s safe to say that the concept will have a powerful pull on New Orleanians who’ve witnessed so much demolition since the disastrous 2005 flood. But Antoni hopes that the piece will have a secondary implication.

“On a rudimentary level what the ball is doing is destructive,” she said, “but it’s also removing something for something new to come.”