



7000 Year Old Woman. Performance #2, end of event. Photo by Su Friedrich

Performance #2: A Street Event

A description by Su Friedrich who assisted in the performance of the event

Betsy's magic circle:

The 7000 year old woman's Sacred Grove.

My temporary refuge, my stage.

Private activities becoming public, intimate gestures between Betsy and me being questioned, observed, encouraged or debased by the fluctuating crowd. Westchester ladies, street tough boys, perplexed and absorbed girls, Soho thinkers and smirkers, women friends, Catholic grandmothers—a strange (re)union, our temporary bond being this massive cryptic 7000-year-old woman.

Intimate gestures: tying the bags on Betsy's chalk white body layer by layer, led along by whispered directions from her but gaining my own momentum as I absorb the colors and textures, the soft, firm, heavy bags laid out on the ground in front of her like offerings, like children's clothes, like flowers, these useless but nevertheless significant treasures.

Our theatre, our ritual of preparation reminded me of the decoration rituals shared by young girls, by my friends and me: brushing Veronica's long blonde hair, helping my sister into her dress before the party, quiet conversations on our common "secrets" of what is pretty or strong or burdensome about ourselves; sharing nervous anticipation, mutual support for the eventual, inevitable journey outside our female circle; feeling positive about ourselves, feeling protected, so as to be strong outside, on the stage.

I lost some of that inner tension and private interaction when I had to assume my more familiar public role of photographer as she continued the piece. Through the lens I observed the crowd, the same people who had just been watching me and therefore somehow had power over me. There was the enchanted young girl whose concentration and comfort was shattered when an egg landed nearby and soiled her dress; the greedy, arrogant boys who had no qualms about entering the space to take as many bags as possible (to be used down the street later in a fight); and the many 20-30-40 year old men and women whose interests ranged from trying to guess her gender ("no woman has a jawline like that") to staring transfixed and delighted at the apparition of a woman, white faced and laden with sixty pounds of rose- and jonquil-colored bags making a substantial, private, controlled but romantic/theatrical space for herself.

My immediate attraction to her visually is the direct reference (unconscious: Betsy has never seen them) to the beautiful "warrior vests" of certain African nations: cloth jackets heavily laden with magic tokens of leather, wood and stone, used essentially as "arrow proof" vests in war.

Hugeness, protection, ponderous weight, gentle colors, sensuous textures, tenuous construction and so temporary as the bags were slashed open, letting the colors pour out and cover the ground, leaving a soft pink trail, a circular trail of footsteps and discarded bags.

Betsy Damon is a performer, sculptor and mother who recently moved to New York City. Over the last five years she has been a visiting artist and lecturer at many universities, involved in feminist art programs, and founded a Feminist Studio in Ithaca, New York.

Su Friedrich is a freelance photographer who is interested in doing projects which explore fantasy and deception.

they're always curious

they're always curious about what you eat as if you were some strange breed still unclassified by darwin & whether you cook every night & wouldn't it be easier for you to buy frozen dinners but i am quick to point out that my intravenous tubing has been taken out and they back up saying *i* could never just cook for one person but i tell them it's the same exactly the same as for two except half

but more they're curious about what you do when the urge is on & if you use a coke bottle or some psychedelic dildo or electric vibrator or just the good old finger or whole hand & do you mannippulllaattte yourself into a clit orgasm or just kind of keep digging away at yourself & if you mind it & when you have affairs doesn't it hurt when it's over & it certainly must be lonely to go back to the old finger

& they always cluck over the amount of space you require & certainly the extra bedroom seems unnecessary & i try to explain that i like to move around & that i get antsy when i have the urge so that it's nice to have an extra place to go when you're lonely & after all it seems small compensation for using the good old finger & they're surprised because they never thought of it that way & it does seem reasonable come to think of it

& they kind of probe about your future & if you have a will or why you bother to accumulate all that stuff or what you plan to do with your old age & aren't you scared about being put away somewhere or found on your bathroom floor dead after your downstairs neighbor has smelled you out but then of course you don't have the worry of who goes first though of course you know couples live longer for they have something to live for & i try to explain i live for myself even when in love but it's a hard concept to explain when you feel lonely

Irena Klepfisz is an editor of Conditions. A collection of her poetry, Periods of Stress, is available from Out and Out Books.

THE TAPES

EDITED BY LOUISE FISHMAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BETSY CROWELL

*"Women have often felt insane when cleaving to the truth of our experience. Our future depends on the sanity of each of us, and we have a profound stake, beyond the personal, in the project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other."**

Adrienne Rich

The Tapes are the edited comments of ten lesbian visual artists who met as a group in New York City during the winter of 1977. Even though many of us had had prior experience in feminist and lesbian groups, none of us had ever before sat down to talk about our lesbianism and our art. For each of us, this new group experience was profoundly moving. Discovering after our first meeting that the experiences of the "older" lesbian artists (age 30-45 years) seemed vastly different than those of the younger artists, we found it necessary to separate into two smaller groups. *The Tapes* represent, with the exception of the "Coming Out" section, the thinking of the older group. At some time we hope the younger group, which continued to meet, will produce a similar statement.

With our goal being to share our experiences as lesbian artists, we found ourselves discussing a myriad of issues, the highlights of which are presented here. A number of surprising facts emerged. Only two of us had identified as lesbians for more than four years. As would be expected, the experience of being a lesbian in the fifties and sixties had a strong impact on our politics and attitudes. The majority of the group had not experienced the quality of oppression, repression, rage, and despair that only the fifties could inspire. Four out of six of us in the older group are mothers and the subject of motherhood became one of the most profound and painful issues to emerge. That the institution of motherhood for these women artists was a greater source of oppression than that of being identified as a lesbian and that their motherhood functioned initially as a survival mechanism were both striking revelations. A less surprising discussion included the complexity of relationships with our mothers, sources of great difficulty as well as inspiration. The section which mentions established women artists is short because of the probability of being taken to court for divulging some of our personal knowledge or sharing some well-worn secrets about those mighty ladies. The sections on anger, energy, and work should be further amplified by other lesbian artists. This is the area of *The Tapes* which I find most important to me as a painter—the information which was kept a mystery to most of us—probably to maintain certain myths about

the process of making art. Although only fragments are presented here, at least it is a beginning for the sharing of "secrets."

It was difficult for us to focus on the energizing effects of our lesbianism on our work. Obviously, this is the area which needs the most thought. Some of us sense that we have special powers and great potential to make the best art. Why is that? Coming out gave most of us a great deal of energy for our work. But what is it about being a lesbian that really affects our work directly and makes it different from other work, if it is different? What does lesbian art look like? This subject was only touched upon during our discussions. The fact that there is only a handful of us scattered here and there and even less who are exhibiting our work or who have a degree of visibility as artists and as lesbians seems to indicate the powerful male machinery and the myths which control an artist even in her studio. The anguish of working that is evidenced in this article is some indication of how much guilt we carry around with us for having done it at all. As a community, we seem to be in a comparable place to that of the feminist art community five years ago, yet with the double jeopardy of coming out as lesbians as well as artists. Our need for community is overwhelming and yet, as *The Tapes* reveal, we have ambivalence even about that. Forming a community is almost impossible when ninety percent of its potential members choose to remain in the closet. I see *The Tapes* as a nudge toward a common ground for lesbian artists. At the very least, it will provide information about how some of us live and work and what we are thinking about—examples of the fact of our existence.

Louise Fishman

COMING OUT

"My mother found me in bed with a woman when I was sixteen. I was scared to death. She walked over to me and said, 'You are swine' and slapped me as hard as she could. I raced out of the house and I was out in the night. . . . My mother never looked for me. . . . I disgusted myself, and yet, this relationship was my only happiness. With all the politics, that rejection is never diminished."

"I am thirty-eight. I came out as a lesbian twenty-one years ago, in 1956. I came out publicly about five years ago, at a Women's Ad Hoc Committee meeting. There was no comment from anyone there. It was as if I'd sneezed. When I came out I also made an important commitment to being an artist. The two seemed to go