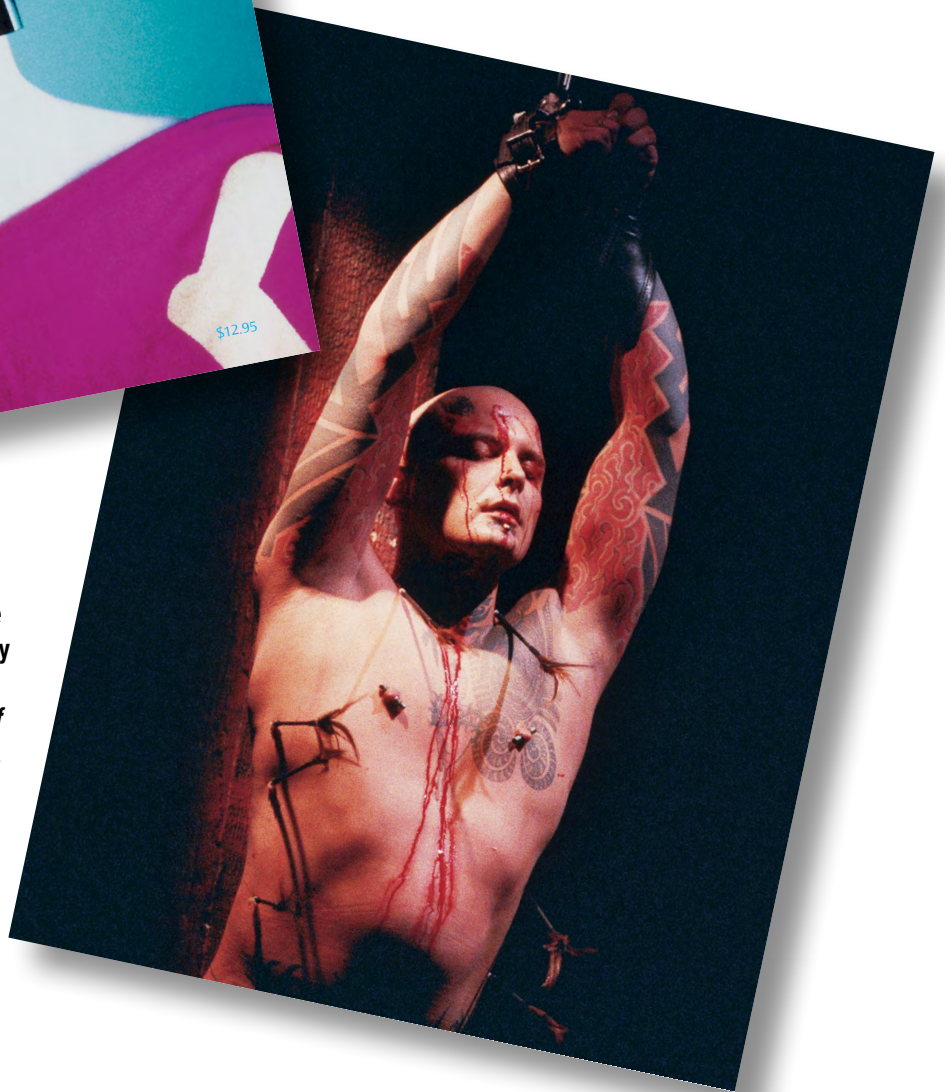


LOOKING BACK AT PERFORMANCE ART



Above, the cover of PFIQ issue 49 with Spike the Holocaust Girl photographed by Christine Kessler; *right*, back cover featuring Ron Athey in the “St. Sebastian Enlightened in a Zen Garden” scene of *The Casting Out/A Crown of Thorns* performance at L.A.C.E., Los Angeles, November 13, 1992. Photo by Dkon Lewis.

The following pages feature articles from issue 49 of *Piercing Fans International Quarterly*, 1992. Over 25 years have passed, but the art was as vital then as it is today. Used with the permission of Gauntlet Enterprises.



Paul King

Motivation and presentation may have changed, but the act of the artist using bodily fluids and perforated flesh as a vehicle of expression is nothing new. In the 70s, artist/groups such as Marina Abramovic and Coum Transmissions, later known as Throbbing Gristle, incorporated blood letting in their performances. In the 80s blood performances attracted greater attention. The artist Stelarc suspended himself from a crane over the streets of Copenhagen, held by giant hooks through his flesh. Portraying the human body as “obsolete,” he gained international notoriety. The collaboration team of Ron Athey and Rozz Williams, known as Premature Ejaculation, was filleting and nailing themselves—and a few road kill—for Los Angeles audiences. On the subject of nails, performance artist Bob Flannigan would hammer the head of his dick to a board and then pry the nail out. AIDS activist/writer/performance artist David Wojnarowicz utilized similar techniques when he stitched his lips shut as a visual testimony to the concept “Silence = Death.”

Through literature, music videos, high fashion, media sensationalism and governmental hysteria, the subculture of permanent and performance piercing has penetrated the mainstream. Don't be surprised when Barbie starts sporting a “belly button ring.” Increased public attention, both negative and positive, has enabled cutting edge artists like Ron

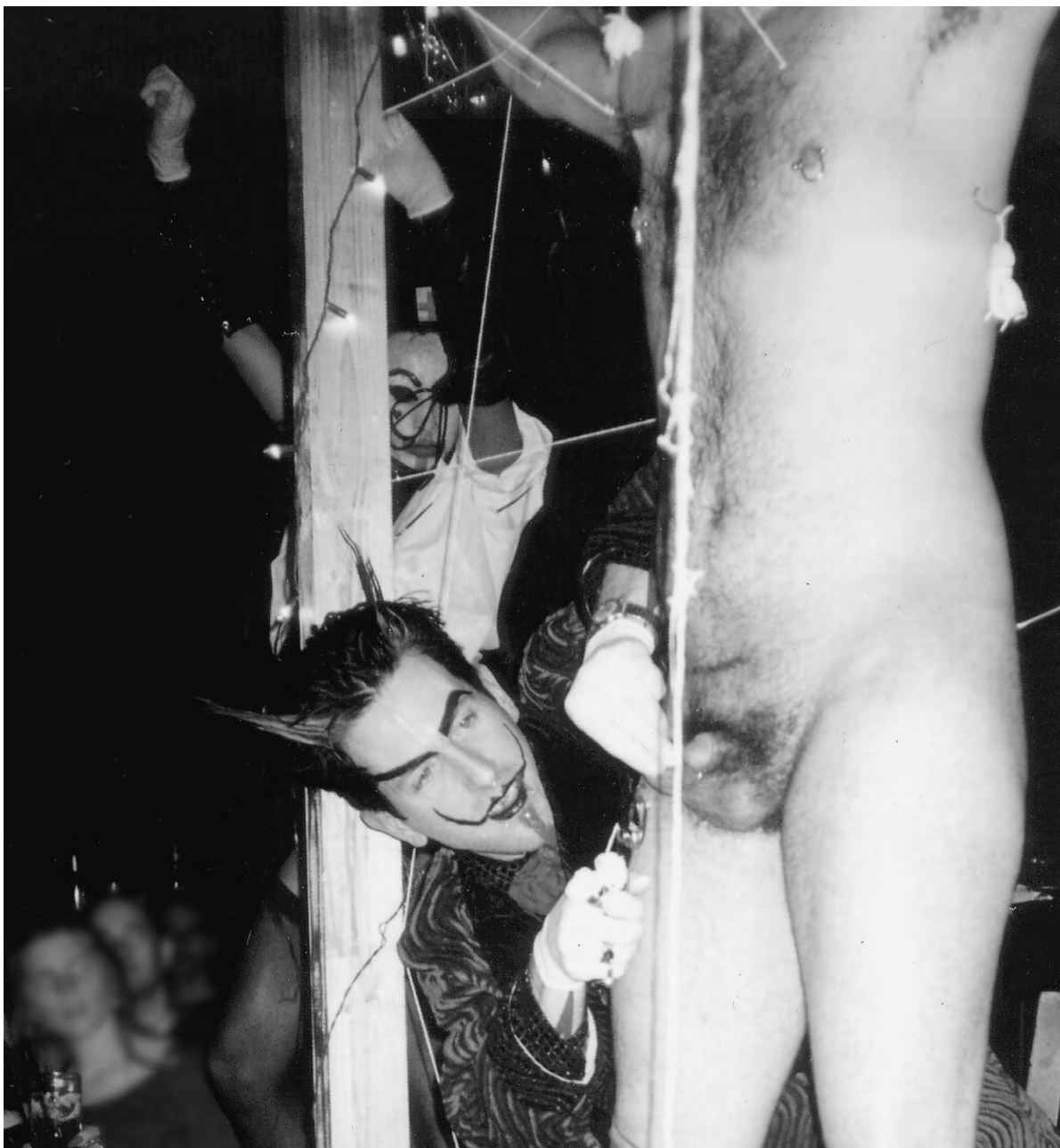


Right: Image from David Wojnarowicz photo series Silence Through Economics.

Below: In demonic drag Paul King torments Andrew Fucker during the San Francisco performance of Man's Ruin.

Athey to break from the underground circuit to “proper” performance theaters. Performing in established art environments with greater budgets, the artist can more accurately and elaborately bring their vision to stage.

Performance piercing in the 90s originated



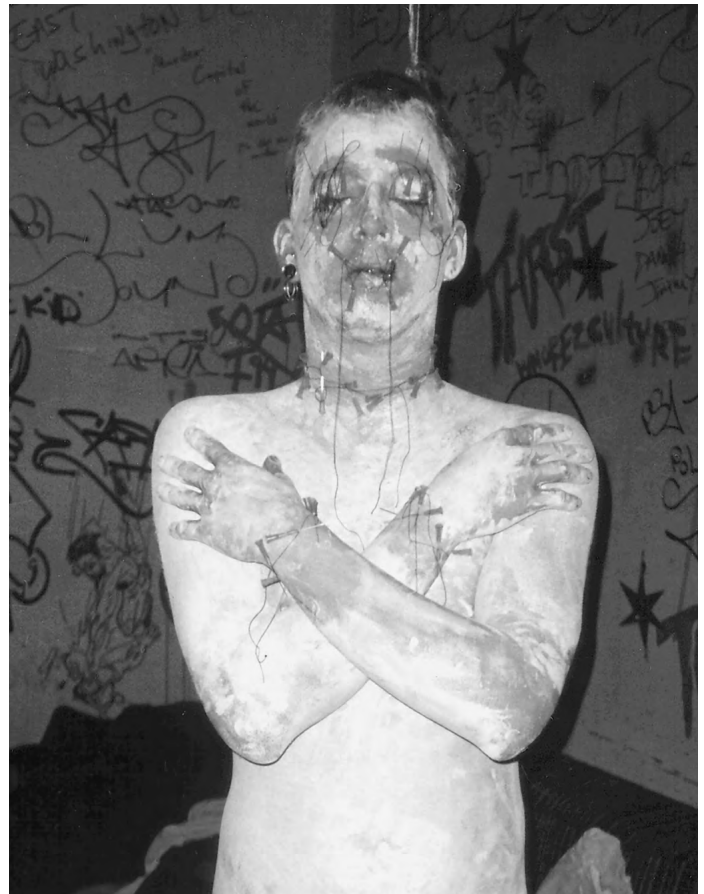
in the nightclub. At L. A.'s nightclub "Fuck!", friends of the promoters included S/M practitioners, who started bringing their sex lives to the dance podium. Performers such as Elayne Binnie, Ron Athey and Crystal Cross were at the forefront. Fetishism and exhibitionism were the primary motivations. Initial responses ranged from shock and revulsion, to admiration and lust. Most of what you see in nightclubs these days has become narrowly focused on shock value.

Don't get me wrong, I love a good shock more than anyone. However, one cannot rely on sticking needles through flesh to be shocking forever. At some point the shock fades. With repeated exposure even a strong image will lose its power. Just think of TV violence. Unfortunately for most viewers, there's little variation available. Play pierced lips and ball dances are becoming as passé as navel piercings. It's difficult to pinpoint where content and progression began to evolve with the individual performer. The process seemed to evolve unconsciously through the repetition of recurring fetish themes.

I was doing shows in nightclubs and as demonstrations for S/M organizations. I became detached; mechanical. The repetitive action of sticking needles through skin had become monotonous; perhaps I had just come to realize that action alone is empty. I began to incorporate my darker feelings into the pieces, creating a sort of psychodrama. Oftentimes I had preexisting relationships with my collaborators and assistants. When I allowed my feelings for the person to fuel the inspiration, the pieces developed depth. My work was now the expression and release of love, obsession, fear, insecurity and vanity. I used images of operating rooms, dungeons and dark basements. Bodily fluids, such as vomit, blood, piss, spit and tears are my favorite medium.

The first work of mine that contained any real substance was "Fuck Art...This is Love." My partner at the time, Bud Cockerham, was an artist who is HIV positive. I delved into my unconscious fear of watching someone I love being reduced, wasted, and destroyed. I focused my anger at the idea of making love becoming synonymous with cross contamination. Intimacy was death. My anguish materialized. The piece takes place in a plastic-encased operating room. The audience's view is clouded and nightmarish. Masked, goggled and garbed head to toe in surgical scrubs, I catheterized him, infused his scrotum to monstrous proportions, sutured his lips shut, carved "HIV+" into his chest, and sprayed him and the enclosed room in his blood. In later performances this image was pushed and the ending changed. I introduced another character who is HIV-. Both drenched in their own blood, they make love through a polyurethane wall.

"Puff-n-Snuff" is playtime in my darkest fantasies. The piece is a tribute to the bogeyman, killer clowns, **Texas Chain Saw Massacre** and of course, Dennis Cooper. It's a snuff (murder) fantasy. The killer clown has two victims in a basement, mummified and tied to ladders. Hundreds of pictures of one of the victims are obsessively scattered all over the walls. One of the pictures is placed over a victim's face. The clown straps on a dildo harness equipped with a 10" steel knife and proceeds to fuck one of the victims to death. A sterile piercing needle is attached into a battery powered drill which the clown presses



Mic Rawls in a Paul King performance Halloween night in New York.

through the victims' cheeks. The clown then uses a circular saw to rip through arms and gut the abdomens of the victims. The lights dim while the clown writhes in organs and masturbates with the intestines. Don't worry; all mutilations, except the drilling, are stunts.

My recent work has gotten lighter, even playful. In the piece "Man's Ruin," co-creator Brian Murphy and I brought to life the elements of the traditional tattoo flash of the pin-up girl sitting in a martini glass framed with playing cards and dice. The image pays respect to vice and the sorrow it brings. The piece is staged as a game show hosted by a Las Vegas devil boy and devil girl. Flashing lights, blaring trashy rock, outrageous costumes and props set a dream-like mood. We tempt the contestant with the vices of sex, money, drugs, liquor and vanity. Every time he reaches for his desire we "hook" him. The viewers are the game show's audience. Their cheers and cries egg us on to hurt him more. One by one, fishhooks pierce his finger webs, cheeks, scrotum and legs which are then strung up to a frame in the image of giant dice. The game continues until he dies. The show ends with rock-n-roll drag-queen nurses body bagging and toe-tagging the loser.

Owning my feelings and fantasies, confronting social taboos and phobias is my work's passion. Catharsis became the mother of invention. The audience doesn't always understand the artist's motivation or the message; with art that isn't always relevant. Whether awe-inspired or repulsed, rarely is one unmoved. ♦

**Julie, right, secures a
cheek spike through
Tjet Clark.**

No performance issue would be complete without including Julie Tolentino Wood.

Julie is based in New York but was born in San Francisco in 1965. Now aged 30—turning 31 in October—she is truly bi-coastal. With a very full plate and a lot of integrity, Julie serves up plenty of goodies. She works with Ron Athey and David Rousseve, runs the Clit Club in New York, and is a student of many things, including acupuncture and yoga. Having Julie as part of the family is a pleasure, and I was excited when I was asked to interview her.

With Ron and David, her family, and many friends in California, she keeps a not-too-distant hand on the West coast. With the management of three companies (her own, David's, and Ron's), Julie is constantly planning a tour, event or performance. She tries to sustain balance in all her achievements, her body playing just about the biggest role in her life. Yoga, Chinese medicine, acupuncture, tattoos, piercings, and her latex glove fetish combine to help sustain this, her temple of creation.

Movement has been a part of her life from the beginning, and perhaps because of it Julie has always been a performer. Tattoos and piercings were a natural progression, still just expressions of her body. Most of Julie's tattoos are commemorative; one of my favorites is the word "loved" on the

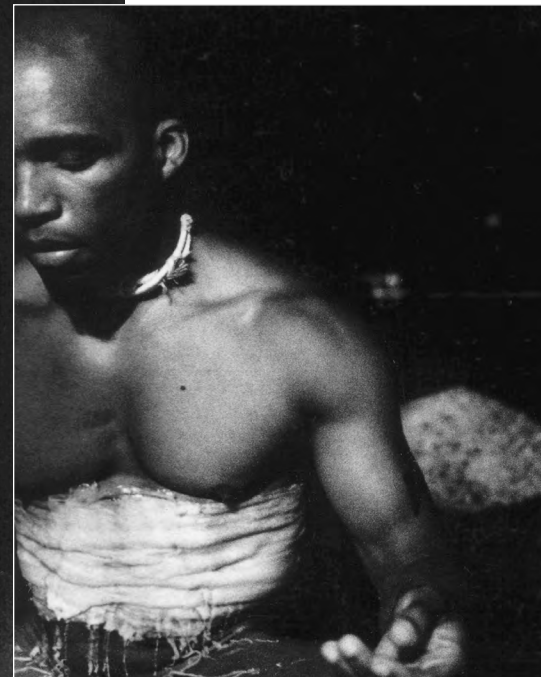




Julie Tolentino

Article by Taj Waggaman

Photos by Peter Ross



Left: Julie during a recent performance at Chicago's Lure bar. Above: Billy Diggs, left wearing a wax corset and D. M. Machuca, right, with eyebrow piercings, during a meditation moment. Right: Julie weaves thread through biceps piercings of Billy Diggs to create an altar of his extended hands.

Julie Tolentino

back of her neck. It's so great because when you read it you feel loved too.

Julie enjoys her piercings and the experiences that go with them. Crystal Cross from Primeval Body in LA pierced Julie's vertical nipple piercing. Raelyn Gallina pierced her nostril.

Brian Murphy of Gauntlet San Francisco pierced her triangle.

One of Julie's more rewarding piercing experiences occurred when she and Brian were in London to do a performance with Ron Athey and company. The piercing took place at Alex Binnie's shop, Into You, where Brian was training another piercer. Ron, Crystal, Pig Pen, and Darryl came along as onlookers. Julie said she wanted something to make her feel like a princess, not a queen. She felt she knew all the queens. As it turned out the "princess" got a labret piercing with a tiny diamond.

1990, the year she turned 25, was very significant for Julie. This was the year she

was introduced as part of Reality, David Rousseve's New York company. She also started the Clit Club. Previously involved as an activist for gay rights and AIDS awareness, she worked with Act-Up and other organizations, championed womens' rights, and worked to fight racism. She was also a primary caregiver—her first experience—for Ray Navaro, a dear friend suffering with AIDS.

During this time Julie describes herself as seemingly tireless. Every aspect of her life was a full time commitment. It was not unusual for her to wake up, go to class, from class to rehearsal, run errands, maybe take a nap, go to the club, and put in a shift as a caregiver for Ray at four o'clock in the morning. The next day was a repeat.

In November of 1990 Ray passed away. In his memory Julie had a flying dragon tattooed on her left shoulder.



1992 was the year Julie discovered yoga. She also met Ron Athey. For about a year they had spoken on the phone. They finally met at a tattoo convention. Both were a bit nervous about meeting the other.

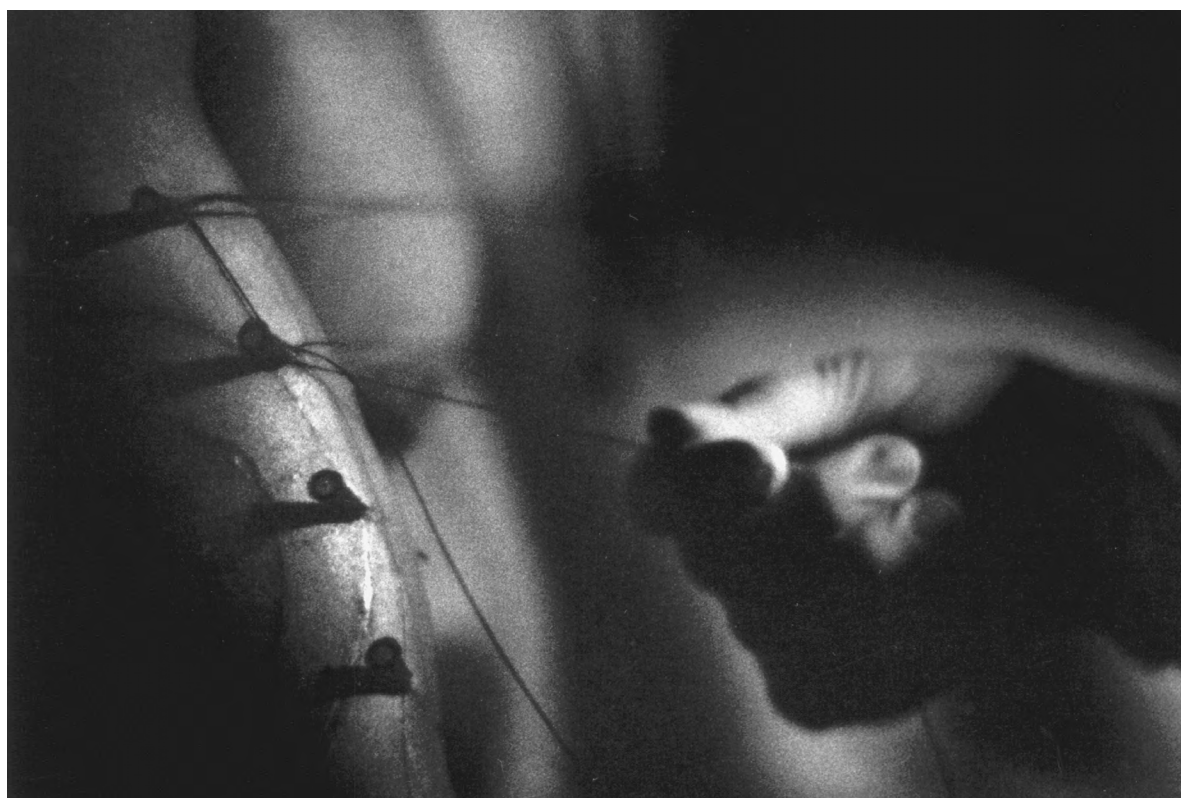
When Julie was introduced to Ron's work, it became clear to her that this was something she wanted to be involved in. She also felt a sense of protectiveness towards Ron and this work. The rawness and realness of what he was expressing as well as the special chemistry between them encouraged her to become involved as choreographer, performer, co-director, and Ron's manager.

In addition to working with Ron, Julie has done many solo pieces and collaborations. When I met her two years ago she was doing a performance in San Francisco with Diviana Ingravallo called "Through Our Blood." Since then Julie and I have performed a very light piece together at the Clit Club. Our friend Patty Powers was stripping and gave myself and two others lap dances. Julie pierced us on stage. I guess that's what we get for being "bad girls" with our cigars.

This past June at a club in New York called Pork, I was fortunate to see Julie and her lover/collaborator Tjet Clark do a show entitled "Five Elements" (fire, water, earth, air, metal).

When I heard Julie was planning to incorporate acupuncture and body work into her already busy schedule, I asked if that meant she'd have to give something up. She replied, "Well, I'm not getting off the stage!" They just make sense to her and compliment everything else she does.

Julie's blood runs through everything she is a part of. If you have the opportunity, see one of her performances at the Clit Club in New York City where she appears every Friday night. ♦



BODY MANIPULATION & CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTUAL ART

Body modification can be thought of as a physical manifestation of conceptual thought. As our culture becomes more conceptually focused, many people now deal with body manipulation, although for most it is unintentional. We eat regardless of whether or not we are hungry. We sleep according to arbitrary schedules. We dress with little thought to the surrounding environment. We allow the mind, rather than the body, to control our physical actions. Because this behavior is so prevalent in our culture, it is understandable that it is being represented in contemporary art.

The act of piercing is about forcing my body to take a back seat to my thoughts and allowing my mind to decide what is going to be done in order to create work. The final product of my art generally takes the form of photographs which are displayed alone or included in an installation. The piercings are real, not photographic tricks. Viewers ask why I don't retouch the photographs to make it "look like" the piercing depicted; I think it is vital that the manipulation is real. This is the point where the idea of performance and time enter my work. The action becomes a tangible, genuine form of conceptual thought. Moreover, the experience informs the work and the artist.

Recently, I did a series of work dealing with social stigmatization and penalization. I was researching legislation created to publicly identify sex offenders and reading articles written by policy-makers discussing the use of shaming as a plausible, economical form of punishment. Nathaniel Hawthorne's book *The Scarlet Letter* and the incident a few years ago when the American teenager was caned in public for a vandalism offense in Singapore also seemed relevant to my investigation. It seemed that body manipulation was a natural way of dealing with these issues.

In one piece, a red plastic tag was attached to my ear with a labret. In big letters, it read "Sodomist" and beneath it was "Unlawful to Remove, Sec 602 VA Penal Code." I wore this in public for several days. It gave me a greater sense of the ideas I was dealing with and helped me open up to possibilities for new work. It also seemed that it was an important way for getting this kind of art work out of the galleries and art magazines and into the daily lives of a broader audience.

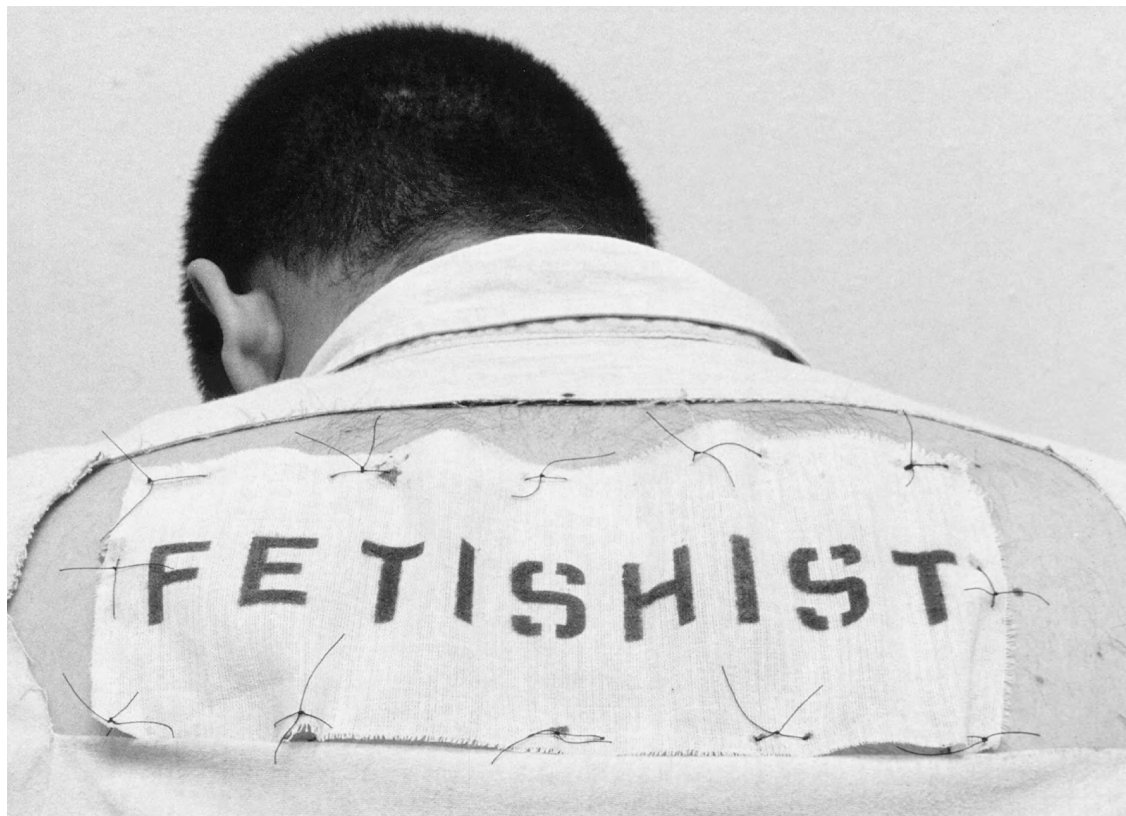
In another piece, I had a piece of muslin sewn to my back on which was stenciled the word "fetishist." Again, I wore it in public for several days. The clothes I wore for the piece

“I enjoy getting pierced. This shouldn’t have any bearing on my art, and I would hope I would have created this work even if I didn’t enjoy the process.”

—Dave Tavacol



BODY MANIPULATION & CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTUAL ART



consisted of blue jeans and a blue chambray shirt with the back cut open. It forced people to wonder about their own views of stigmatization and shame first hand—not just theoretically. Was this person a sex offender? Who did this to him? Is this an art piece? Is this real? How would I feel if someone did this to my brother?

I enjoy getting pierced. This shouldn't have any bearing on my art, and I would hope I would have created this work even if I didn't enjoy the process. It is a kind of pleasure that is both physical and psychological. It gives me a strong, physical sense of mind over body when I watch someone taking a needle and putting it through my body. However, because it causes me so much pleasure, I am careful about

deciding what projects to take on. I have to consider the roots of my need to do a particular project. Is there artistic merit in this endeavor? Am I using art as an excuse to do harm to myself? It can be a very fine line. To make sure I am on strong footing before undertaking a project, I allow several months to consider and develop the project before executing my plans. I also talk about the piece with other people before going forward. I make the final decision. However, I think it is a good idea to sound out projects thoroughly before hand, especially if they have a high element of physical, psychological, or even financial risk.

I look forward to including more body modification in my work. One of the greatest challenges for artists using this approach in their work is to avoid being regarded as a side show freak. I want to take the audience beyond shock and have them move into the more subtle, personal, and aesthetic dimensions of the work. ❖

PHOTO CREDITS:

For Fetishist: Piercing by Chance of Gauntlet, Inc. Photography by Lynn Borowitz.

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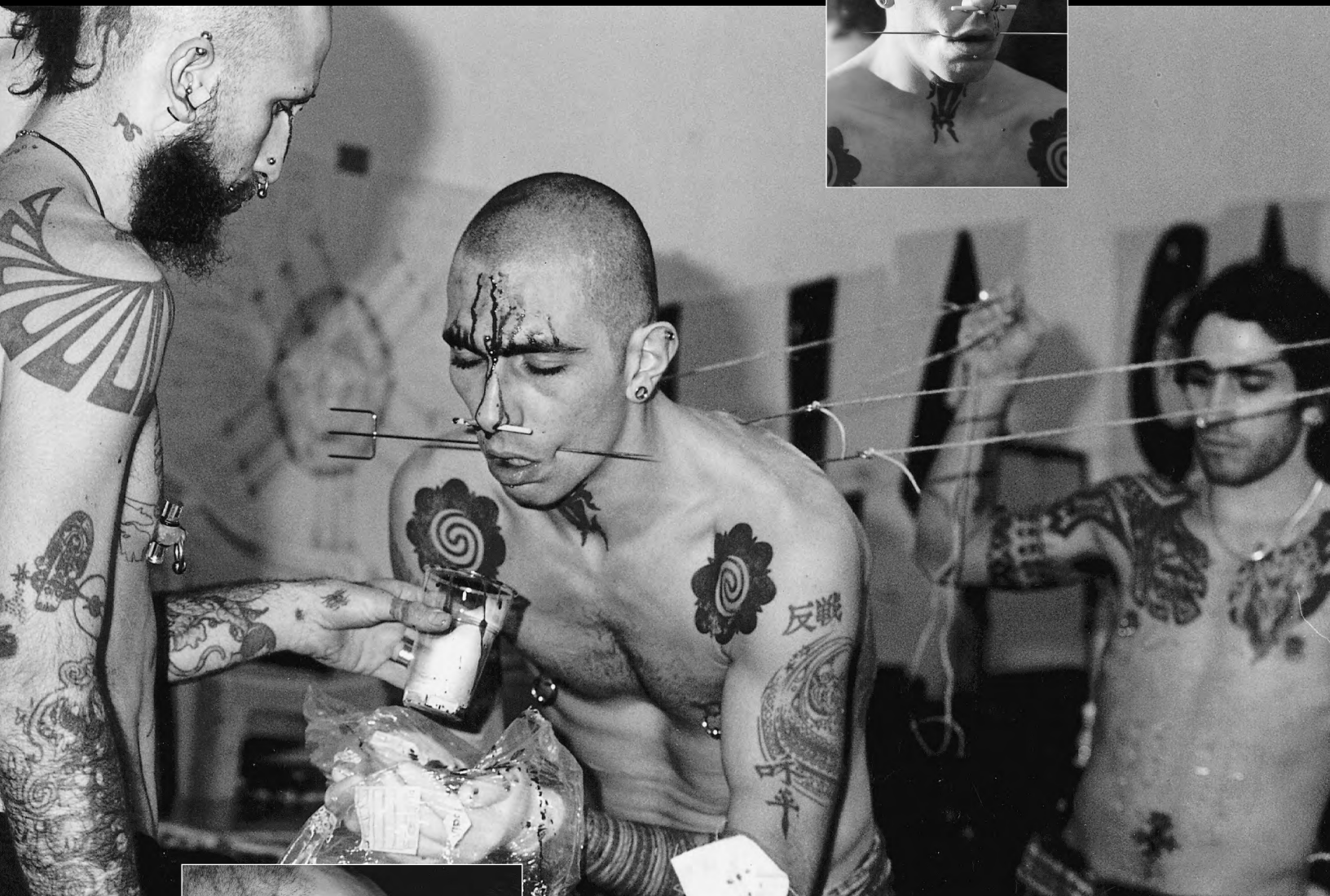
For Sodomist: Piercing by Jo of Body Manipulations. Photography by artist.

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Mr. Fab



Mr. Fab, (center) performing at the Pergola Cultural Center, is assisted by G. P. (left) and Beppe (right).



G. P.

MR. FAB & CO.