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FRAU



Birth

The beginning of everything.
The pleasure.
The pain.

IM

The rapid unfolding of

Since she arrived on the art scene in the 1960s, British artist ANNE BEAN has been a pioneer in the realms of performance art and more. Her different means for expressing her work range from political to feminist issues.

Can art, Bean asks herself, prevail

to challenge the male mindset that has dominated our culture for centuries?

Having moved from Livingstone, Zambia to then studying in Cape Town, South Africa and finally relocating and finishing your studies in Reading, England, how did your moves affect your early work and inspiration? How did you visualize your art back then as a female artist and what were your themes?

I painted a lot as a young artist at high school, influenced by movements like Fauvism, The Blue Rider and Expressionism, as well by the colors and vibrancy of the local African dress materials, bead work and decorative wall painting. I was always frustrated that the outcomes of my work didn't seem to fulfill the imaginative leaps taken during the painting process. Arriving in England in late 1960's was thrilling for me as I became aware of the heady mix of art possibilities rapidly unfolding in the zeitgeist. Boundaries were transgressed between visuals, sound, writing, consciousness-raising, activism and alternative life-styles.

Having arrived from the toxicity of apartheid South Africa, I was wary of how labelling, definition and difference impacted a country and I wanted to be more present to my own being as an artist within an art community rather than defining myself as a female artist. In a way, in England, I felt like an explorer in a not-strange land. My interior landscape and the outside world seemed, at that point, to have a familiarity with one another. I wanted to be fully present to these possibilities and to dive into the edges of both the inner and outer pulses.



Drawing Life
Collage, White Room Project,
Reading University, 1970

You are one of the pioneers in performance art, how important is performance art as a woman? Especially touching upon feminist ideas and issues in your work.

At Reading University Fine Art department, as part of what had normally been a traditional

the Zeitgeist

life-drawing class, in 1970, the artist and tutor Rita Donagh initiated a space for us, her students, to reflect on and question our relationship to the model and, by extension, to art history and all the inherent implications. She stimulated the awareness of the model as a human being in the space, a living being with a particular story and not just a fleshy form. We had a large studio and the model was assigned to us for three weeks. We were excited by the potential and openness of the situation. Initially, I was aware of our eyes, our pencils, connecting to the model's body and thereby each other, as we contemplated her in this freed-up, lateral-thinking space. She told

“Boundaries were transgressed between visuals, sound, writing, consciousness-raising, activism and alternative life-styles.”

us she was a mother. She had given birth. Her breasts, her belly, her genitalia held narratives which emphasized the fact that we were drawing life, as opposed to life drawing.

The whole project led out from the model and the shared space we created between us into the world, acting as a direct trigger to see process and performance as a vehicle for my work and, like many women artists at the time, to see that this new form could challenge the art historical process and open explorations for this eruption of ideas. It unzipped and underpinned for me ideas and formative insight into notions I had been grappling with and continue to deploy in relation to collaboration, improvisation, process, materialization and the relationship of life and art. It was confirmation for me of the crossover of art/life, private action/shared space, personal/global, as well as the potent area of multiple “others” that are created through collaboration.

Yoko Ono said, “Art to me is a way of showing people how you can think.” Ono's constant challenging of accepted tropes, the sculptor Eva Hesse's “anti-form,” the artist Charlotte Salomon's incredible interrogation of life and art, the film-maker Maya Deren's belief in experience, the writer Virginia Woolf's ability to allow the mind to recognize its own workings, all contributed, at that time, to my awareness of a female challenge to a male mindset that had dominated ways of operating in the world.

Can you tell us more about the inspiration and the reasoning you created for your pseudo pop-band Moody and the Menstruators?

Moody and the Menstruators was meant to be a one-off event of absurd, in-your-face, high-energy jocularly, both confrontational and erotic, whilst simultaneously sending those stances up. It seemed to immediately gather a cult following, and we were invited to other gigs and several European tours ensued. The dilemma was how to keep the verve, spontaneity, ambiguity and fervent going. I wanted to continue to explore diversity, not only within the genre of song we sang, but also “who” the person delivering it was, not just in a dressing-up kind of way. I was always pleased when people thought there were more people in the band than there were, because of these persona changes. What also interested me was how we were perceived in different contexts.

I was often asked if we were a feminist band. It was a quandary for me. I discussed this with the feminist artist, Alexis Hunter, who had attended many of our gigs including a benefit for Spare Rib, the feminist magazine. We spoke about boundaries between expressions of sexual warfare on the one hand, and erotic desire on the other, both of us touching that fulcrum of subverting and



Drawing Life
Collage, White Room Project,
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Rabbitears (Drop and Flame)
Oxford Scientific Films 1990

As part of the ideas around transformative states, Anne Bean asked Oxford Scientific Films to photograph a drop of water falling into a flame, each extinguishing the other but thereby creating smoke and molecules of steam. These images were used as a photographic series in conjunction with *Rabbitears* in various exhibitions including Available Resources, Derry, Ireland, 1991

animating the male gaze by triggering layered, confusing signals, but with our own assured stance.

And also your involvement with the performance duo The Kipper Kids?

In the early 1970s, I met the Kipper Kids, Brian Routh and Martin von Haselberg. I found the fact that they managed to make the ridiculous sublime, deeply attractive. We lived together in the East End of London from the early 70s and we started to work together from 1972 intermittently, including last year when I collaborated with the remaining Kipper Kid, Martin von Haselberg at Tate Britain, in a performance to launch Dominic Johnson's book *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity* in the 1970s.

Artweek, Los Angeles described one of our performances at Vanguard Gallery in 1978: "What we end up with is a rude and joyful reminder of the sheerly exhilarating experience of dwelling in our curious, physical bodies in the puzzling and contradictory realities which constitute our 'world.'"

Since you started your work as an artist, there has been a shift in your medium of work, or rather, there you have a wider range of ways you present it. How important is evolving your work medium to convey new messages?

I see my work as constantly shifting. That shift is what is constant. It was exciting, in the 1970s, observing how Eastern sensibilities could infuse Western

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conceptualism, challenging perceived realities and stable ways of operating within them. John Cage said, "I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I'm doing." And, earlier, Duchamp stated, "I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste." I find these notions, a constant self-interrogation, playing devil's advocate to oneself, liberating and challenging.

Chance is often a strategy used to defy habitual behavior. On Chinese New Year, 2015 in Futuro House (a flying saucer construction) on the roof of Matt's Gallery, London, with an invited audience, I asked the director, Robin Klassnik to randomly pick a fortune cookie, which was one of 84 I had produced, each containing the name of a different medium-sized British town. As soon as Robin revealed the name, Trowbridge, I left immediately for this town with the intention of setting up a space called MOCA, Moments Of Consciousness And. I lived in the town for the first three months, during which I found a space and set up MOCA Trowbridge. I then lived in the space for a large part of the next three years, making various exhibitions as well as artworks seen through the window from the street, also inviting people into the space. I want to keep finding ways to take myself out of any comfort zone despite, or probably because of, having survival instincts that kick in and shout out loud to safeguard me from tipping over an edge.

What do you envision for future projects? Where do you get inspired?

In the mid 1970s I attended several Artist Placement Group meetings, where the late artist John Latham coined the expression "the Incidental Person," similar to an unbiased observer or a third-party mediator whose aim is not to be anything in particular but instead "to generate maximum public involvement, and maximum enthusiasm which goes with the involvement." Coincidentally, we were both born in the same small Zambian town, Livingstone. I discussed with him the possibility of returning there in the 1980s as an "incidental person," making interventions in what, at the time, was a dangerous situation in Zambia with civil strife and guerilla action.

In the last years, before her recent death, I have been speaking to Barbara Steveni, the artist and co-founder of Artist Placement Group, about ideas around African Incidentalism. She was supportive and insightful on this prospect. John Latham was born in February, 1921, and I have started making arrangements with local Zambian people to return to Livingstone, Zambia in February next year, the hundredth anniversary of his birth, to



Rabbitears 1990
Photos by Chris Bishop

Anne Bean's son playing with two dead rabbits of a similar size and shape to him, noting no distinction between them or stuffed animals.

explore African Incidentalism and what might lay in wait for this expedition.

Also, the group PAVES, a multilateral collective of women from countries of recent conflict, which I initiated in 2008 with the artists Poshya Kaki, Vlasta Delimar, Efi Ben-David and Sinead O'Donnell, are intending to make work together again next year, including applying to Eastern State Penitentiary Museum to create a project together there.

Can you tell me more about Chana Dubinski and what drew the idea of creating work through an alter-ego?

Chana Dubinski is not an alter-ego, but is as legitimate a name and construct as Anne Bean. I am carrying a name, Anne Bean, that arose through fear, displacement and hiding from a Jewish Lithuanian past, where the Anglicization of a former name was part of the confusion and survival strategies used by my family as victims of Russian pogroms. Anne Bean has the simplicity and resonance of a symbolic name, reminding me of a Wittgensteinian demystification process.

In 2012, I left London for a year with just a bag, limited financial resources and the name I had never used but was so aware of, Chana Dubinski. I wanted to throw open an unknowable and chance trajectory and to allow other manifestations of myself to breathe. After 3 months of peripatetic wanderings and because of a chance incident, I decided to live in Newark-on-Trent, a small town in the Midlands, creating a different, unfamiliar life structure. Newark originally meant New Work. I pondered Robert Smithson's comment, "...the artist seeks... the fiction that reality will sooner or later imitate." I didn't know that I would make art as Chana Dubinski, but I ended up doing so. The situation gave me permission to do the sort of art that I would have found questionable in one way or another as Anne Bean, but that I found totally authentic as Chana Dubinski.

I didn't know if I was experiencing my life or my art. The heightened awareness that is intrinsic to the performance process was constantly transmitted into life, powerfully, almost too powerfully. This was a very exciting way of living. During the year I transformed the cottage in which I lived into a total art work called *A Transpective: How things used to be now*. I opened the cottage at the end of the year, inviting local people who called me Chana and London people who called me Anne. For me, a heterotopia had been created. Several people with whom I have spoken since experienced that heterotopian space. The writer, Rob La Frenais, referred to his experience of meeting me at the end of this time as "uncanny valley."

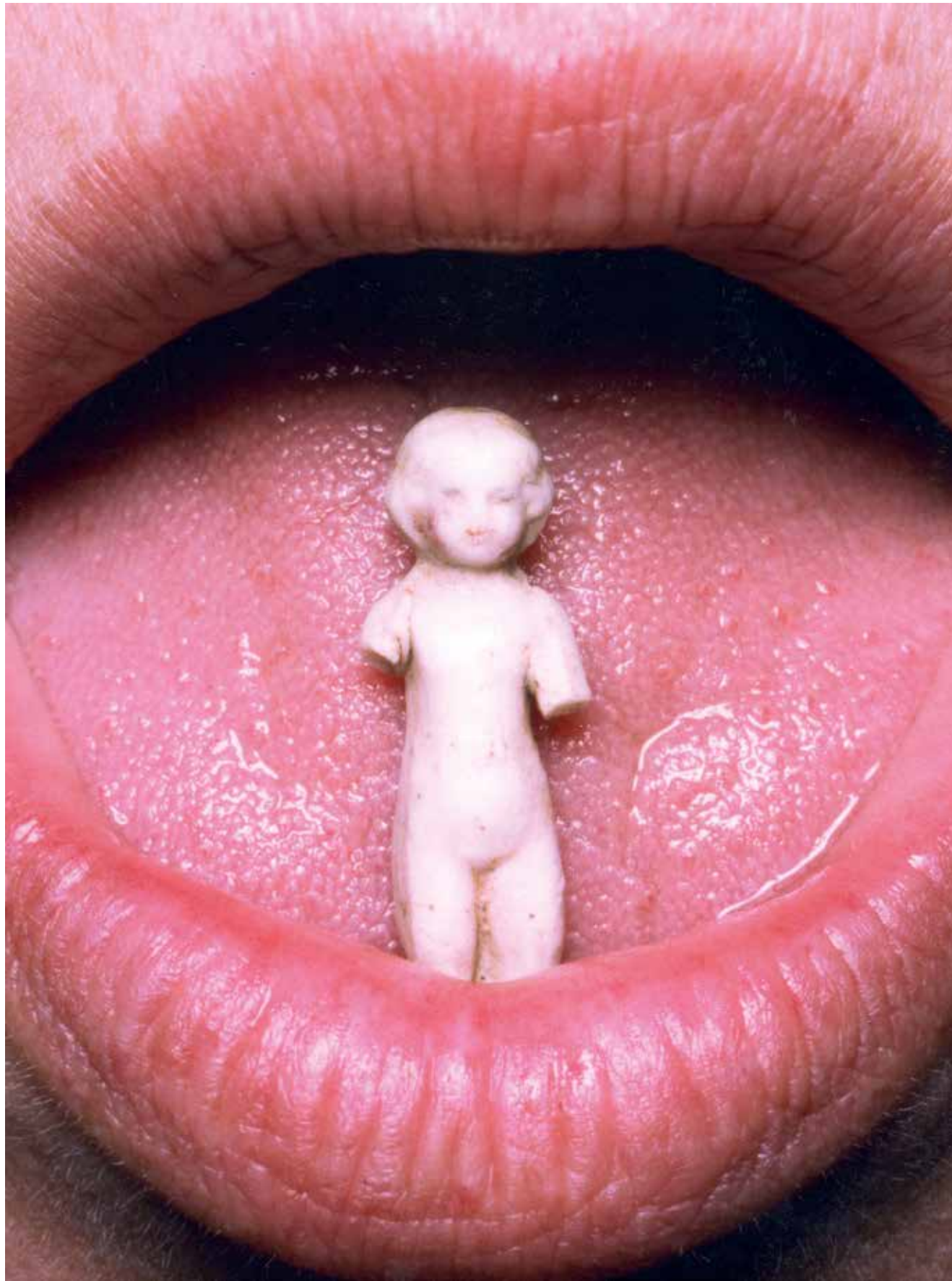


Photo by Chris Bishop

Who Speaks My Voice
photographic work from performance, 1982

The theme for this issue of *Fräulein* is birth. The idea of birthing new ideas. What can you tell us about today's performative art world? How is it evolving from when you first entered the scene? Should we be looking out for any upcoming artists?

I made a series of works, *Obituaries*, and a short film *Night Chant* in 2015, relating to the deaths of five women artist friends, all within a year of each other. One of the women, Monica Ross had written to me about a shared trail of golden threads, in terms of insights passing through us from ancestral lines, which I saw almost like umbilical cords, birthing new ideas and concepts. As Hannah Arendt wrote, the presence of others "who see what we see and hear what we hear, allows us to feel that our reality of both the world and ourselves is viable and thereby gives courage and openness to push these thoughts to tough and complex edges, battling between ourselves individually and the group in a living, breathing dialogue." In these terms, the works I created during the *Obituaries* series, which arose from death, actually became about birth and the gifts that these women had given me.

I am aware of this gifting process as being the real history.

The performance art world is now a much more inhabited space than when I started out, with an extensive range of work under its umbrella. Last year, partly with a sense of bridging and exploring the fifty years I have practiced as an artist and holding the inherent ethos of the work, I initiated, with a collective of women artists, Sarah Andrew, Hayley Newman and George Pringle, monthly events called *Come Hell or High Water*.

The invitation to attend reads:

Please join our pocket of resistance on the banks of the River Thames by Canary Wharf, a place that exists between water and land, private and public space, wealth and poverty, past and present, and an unknowable future. Where the tide slowly recedes, and a small foreshore is temporarily exposed, there will be a series of performances.

The younger artists who have already or who will perform or present work during these events, (alongside more established artists) include Whisky Chow, Phoebe Patey-Ferguson, Alicia Radage, Nayoung Jeong, Jade Montserrat, Moa Johansson, Jade Blackstock and Nicole Garneau. All of them have a passionate and committed practice.

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Who Speaks My Voice
photographic work from performance, 1982

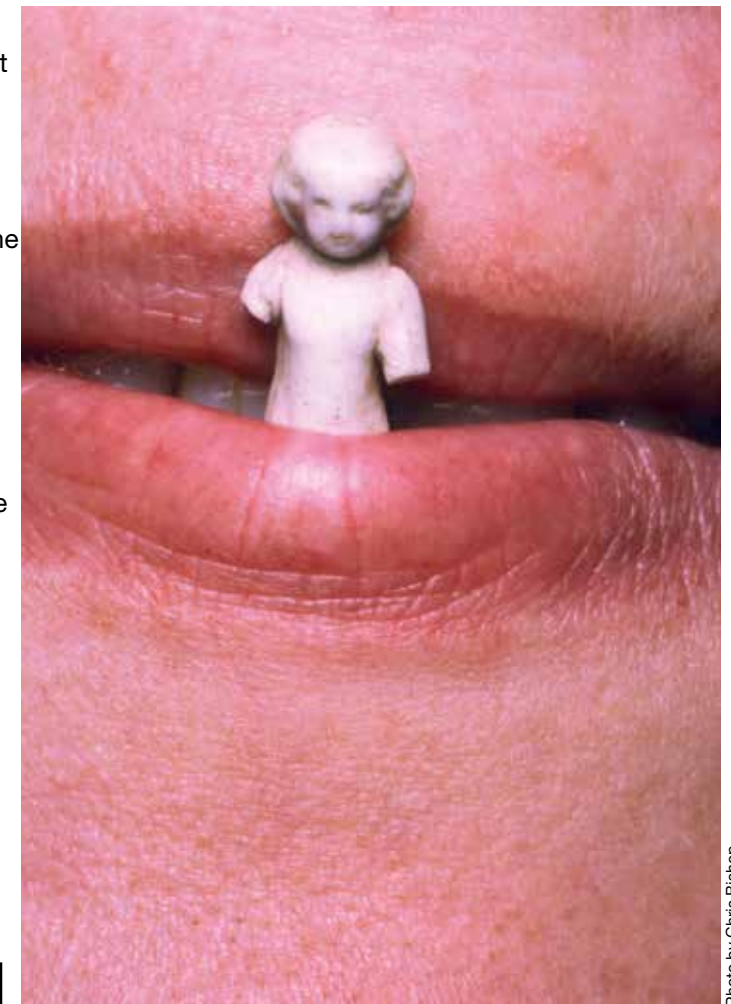


Photo by Chris Bishop