





presents

THE HEIDI HO COLLECTION

an exhibition of artworks by outsider and naive artists from the collection of Ho Han Siu, aka Heidi Ho. Heidi was owner of New York's infamous Blue Angel erotic cabaret, and included in her collection are the artworks of dancers and clients of the Blue Angel, some of whom have since achieved some notoriety. A selection of these works, curated by Mary Feast, will be auctioned off during this exhibition to help establish the Blue Angel Museum. Some of the proceeds will also go toward Thieves Theatre's and Blue Angel Productions' jointly produced Millennium Project of Jean Genet's *The Balcony*.

Blue Angel Productions would like to thank the Board of Directors and staff of **HEREArt** for their support in the presentation of this exhibit.

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“I consider the artwork that Heidi has collected over the years a reflection, not so much of her patronage of art, but of her abiding commitment to certain people and respect for their power in the world. Accordingly, in selecting what pieces to include in this exhibition, I have chosen not just my favorite art from Heidi’s collection, but also my favorite people. I have known all the artists in this show personally and have been as deeply affected by their lives as by their art.”

Mary Feast
Curator

THE VISION of

ST. THERESA

“*[The Vision of St. Theresa]* is an altar of Bernini’s for a side chapel in a small Roman Church. It is dedicated to the Spanish saint Theresa, a nun of the 16th century who had described her mystic visions in a famous book. In it she tells of a moment of heavenly rapture, when an angel of the Lord pierced her heart with a golden flaming arrow, filling her with pain and yet with immeasurable bliss. It is this vision that Bernini has dared to represent...

“A Northern visitor may be inclined, at first, to find the whole arrangement too reminiscent of stage effects, and the group over-emotional. This of course is a matter of taste and upbringing about which it is useless to argue. But if we grant that a work of religious art like Bernini’s altar may legitimately be used to arouse the feelings of fervid exultation and mystic transport at which the artists of the Baroque were aiming, we must admit that Bernini has achieved this aim in a masterly fashion. He has deliberately cast aside all restraint and carried us to a pitch of emotion which artists had so far shunned...

“Even Bernini’s handling of the draperies was at the time completely new. Instead of letting them fall in dignified folds in the approved classical manner, he made them writhe and whirl to add to the effect of excitement and movement. On all these effects he was soon imitated all over Europe.”

E. H. Gombrich

The Story of Art with 370 Illustrations



THE BLUE ANGEL

The Blue Angel opened in the summer of 1993 on a factory street in the Tribeca area of Manhattan, where its low-tech burlesque charm and its smart performance and visual art quickly earned it a reputation as an atypical strip club that attracted audiences ranging from Wall Streeters to Williamsburg artists, club kids to TV producers, gay and straight men, women and couples.

The featured attractions also ran the gamut. Calling itself an "erotic cabaret," the Blue Angel was a place where anyone dedicated to the study of the human body could audition for a chance to present his/her findings creatively, in such forms as vaudeville acts, performance art, video, painting and sculpture, or a classic and time-honored strip tease.

"I feel powerful doing my performances," says Yvonne, "because having the chance to combine traditional sex work that pays the rent with feminist self-expression and conceptual performance art is not exactly an every-day option for a stripper." Admission to the club was \$10 and the talent kept any money earned from tips or sales.

Gaining some renown when Drew Barrymore stripped there and later demonstrated a tamer version of the experience to the David Letterman audience, the Blue Angel's radical chic attracted such celebrities as Naomi Campbell, Lou Reed and Demi Moore, who researched her role in *Striptease* there.

During its relatively brief but luminous existence, the Blue Angel erotic cabaret achieved a word-of-mouth in New York City that propelled it to legend status by the time it closed its doors due to rent disputes in the summer of 1996. Recently enacted and arguably archaic blue laws make it all but impossible to reopen elsewhere in New York City.

THE LEGEND of

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Ho Han Siu
(Heidi Ho)
was born in
Macau in 1952 and
grew up in Hong
Kong. The success of
her book, *Girlee*,
(Cotton Press, Hong
Kong, 1978), which
explores, in
photographs and
words, the night life
of the notorious bar
district, Tsim Sha
Tsui, led her to
similar explorations
in Bangkok, the
Philippines (*Pretty
Girls*, 1981; *Play Me*,
1986) and eventually
New York where she
opened the Blue
Angel, which in turn
opened her eyes to
other artistic
expression.

"I was born the illegitimate daughter of a cabaret singer named Mei. My father was a German-American who left my pregnant mother 'to marry Marlene Dietrich,' as my mother always put it. Am I looking for my father? Let's just say I'm obsessed with the idea of obsession, and it is people's spirit journeys that interest me the most.

Buying visionary art is like giving an honest man money to defend himself against false criminal charges. I'd like to think it lends dignity, encouragement to a lonely and often misunderstood drive. These people needed to go on but they needed resources which I had. Dollar bills."



"In collecting art, I am really collecting the artists themselves. Their work has a sort of hologram effect -- each piece contains and reflects the whole artist. Everything about that person is contained in every gesture, every choice. Look closely -- you will see Wanda, and Massimo and the others here in their work. Their pieces may even speak to you."

Timmy Blearier (1971 - 1992)
Tammy Blearier (1992 -)

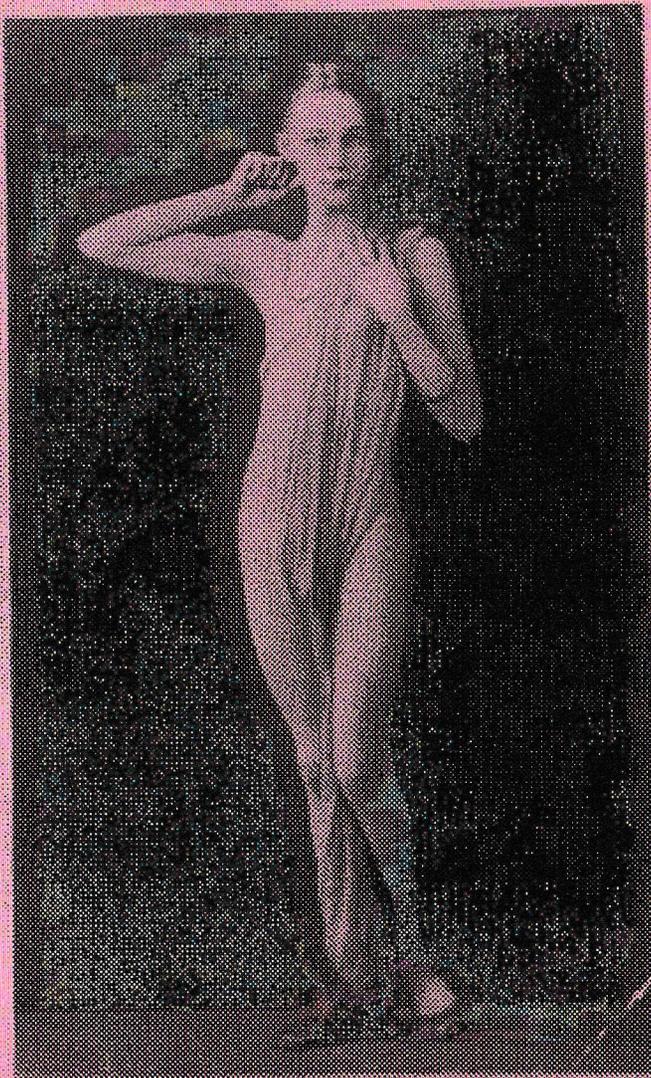
Growing up in Detroit, Timmy was obsessed with Motown girl groups (especially Diana Ross and the Supremes), and ultimately *with being* a girl. "I practiced singing in my mother's wigs and false eyelashes, with a broom stick as a makeshift mike. My feelings towards Diana Ross became a kind of worship."

Timmy was the lead singer in a band that brought him to New York, but despite what a reviewer termed his "true falsetto," he remained unfulfilled. One day, while performing in a Coney Island side show, Timmy heard Howard Stern going on about sex changes, so Timmy called in. Stern subsequently invited him onto the show on the same morning that Ho made her debut. "Heidi helped me make the change,"

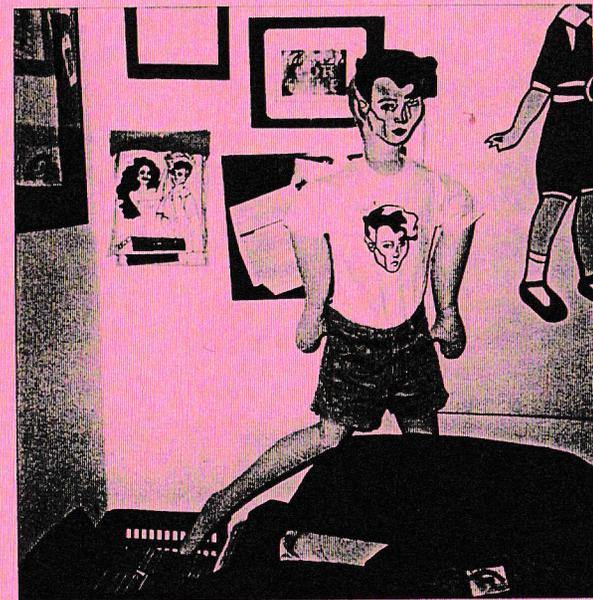
Tammy says today. "She said, 'Honey, you won't miss that thing at all,' and she was right."

She recognized his talent as a performer, too, and when Tammy finally completed the operation, in 1992, she found her niche at the Blue Angel, where she blew up a life-sized rubber doll of her former male self, the *I Can't Believe It's Not Timmy*® doll.





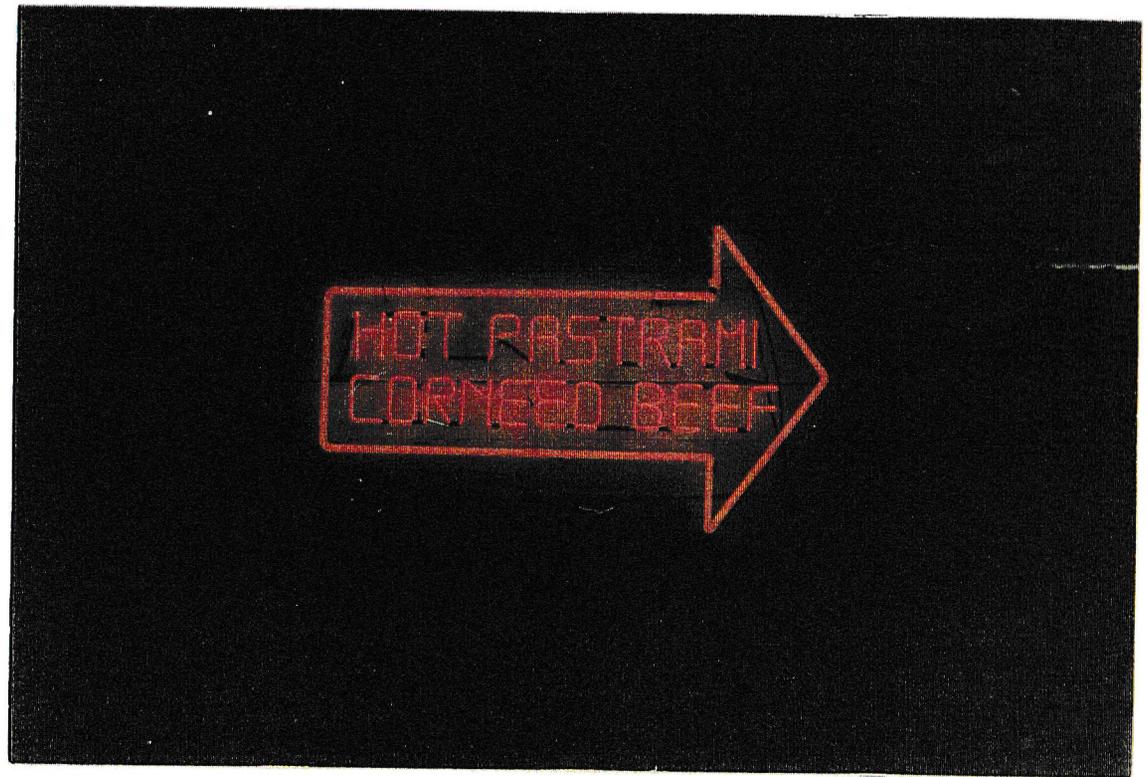
“Tammy turns her life upside down on stage,” Ho says. “Her former male self is a rubber dummy she blows life into, then she punches it until the life leaks out. You can feel the power of the sex change in the act. The doll is brilliant.”

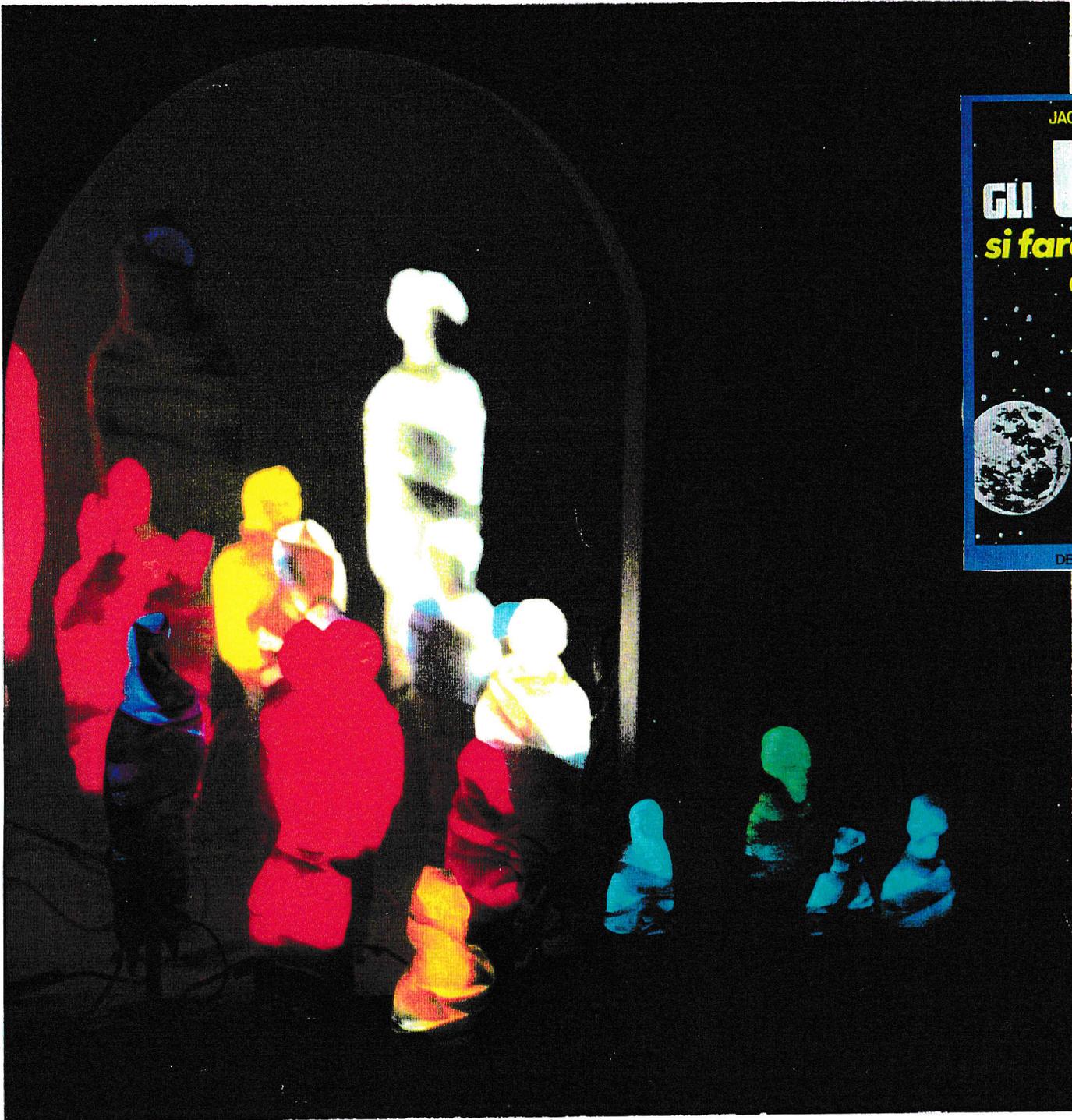


Massimo Gigano (1960 -)

Massimo "Nasone" Gigano has tried to recreate, in sculpture, his first religious experience. "It was 1990, I was in a drive-away car, on this hot, dark night in Nevada. I drove while my friends slept. The sky started glowing green and yellow and spun -- a sky full of art. I saw small figures dancing there. I want to make my life now this dance. I work to make it." When his friends returned to Italy, Gigano remained in Las Vegas, finding a job in a neon factory. "I needed to surround myself with this color."

Gigano now has his own company in New York, *Tulip Signs*. At first he would roam the streets, find places in need of neon, and return home with deposit checks. "People trust me," he says. Noticing one evening that the Blue Angel sign was not working right, he inquired about a repair. So began the start of a long acquaintance. Ho and Gigano discovered a shared interest in aliens, the Roswell case in particular.





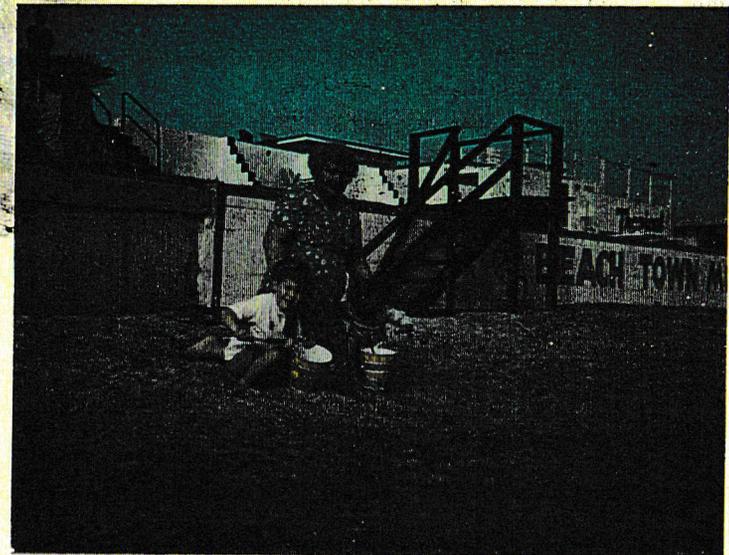
Finally Gigano, who does not trust people as easily as they do him, showed her some of his off-hours neon pieces, inspired by his Nevada experience. "My friend, you are an artist," Ho said as she bought "Twilight Zone" on the spot. "All Italians are artists," he said.

Irene Korsak (Babka) (1908 - 1974)
Johnny Korsak (1969 -)

Johnny Korsak, a frequent patron of the Blue Angel, is the 15th grandchild of Irene Korsak, nee Erenia Gladys Stasiowski, nicknamed "Babka" by her grandchildren. He lives with his family in Babka's house, where he was born, in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Not long ago, Johnny discovered his grandmother's "artwork" which had been squirreled away in the basement for 20 years. Babka, a cleaning lady for over 40 years, magnified some of her profession's greatest nightmares. There were scores of fantastically preserved "birthday cakes," empty liquor bottles turned into flower-like night table lamps, and hundreds of giant tin foil flies. Having heard word of Ho's art collection, Johnny persuaded Ho to come see the work. In particular, he thought she should "meet the talking flies." Johnny was diagnosed with schizophrenia four years ago. He calls it a big mistake. "Before the flies, everyone thought I was a crackpot, because I was receiving important messages through the radio, tv guide, the phone book and places." Soon after finding the flies, he began to entreat people to, "come visit the flies and you'll hear proof that I'm not crazy. I call them 'Babka's Little Angels'," he explains.



Entranced by what she saw (and heard), Ho found herself still in Greenpoint for dinner, where the family stories of Babka mesmerized her. “Her daughter, Irene, said over and over, ‘My mother was always very large’,” remembers Ho. “It struck me then that Babka’s ‘largeness’ as well as her largeness pervaded deep in the core of the family.



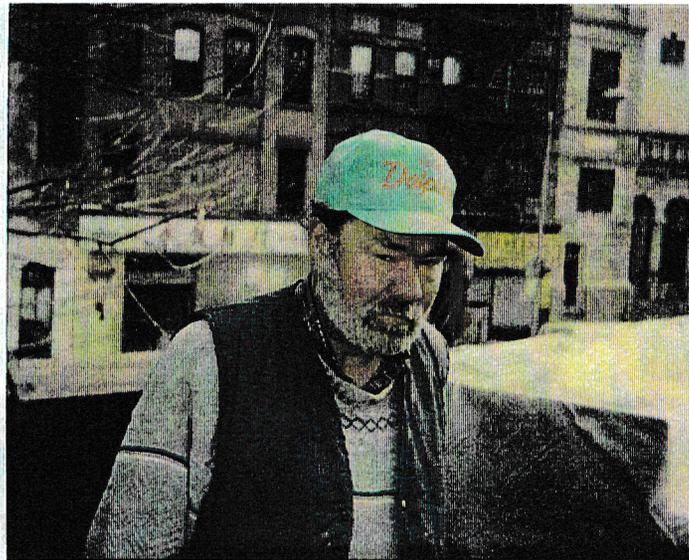
Arnold Lynch (1952 -)

Arnold Lynch has been a mailman in New York's Greenwich Village for over fifteen years. Each day he passes a hollowed-out triangle between two buildings on lower Seventh Avenue, filled with homeless people. Walking his route one day, Lynch heard one of them shout, "Hey, you got something addressed to Red?" Then another, "How 'bout Billy? You got any mail for Billy?"

Arnold came by the next day with a Polaroid camera and the day after with sketches of Red and Billy, the first in what he calls his "people without mail series." His final portraits are always done with charcoal and oil sticks on the opened-up dirty gray canvas of used mailbags. On the backside of each portrait are the bold letters U.S. DOMESTIC. Arnold never sells his portraits. "I try to find them homes."

Ho found the mailman after inquiring about one of the portraits she saw displayed behind the counter of a cafe on Bleecker Street. "Arnold gives these people a sense of permanence, first by drawing them, then by trying to 'house' their portraits with people in the neighborhood."





Ho explained, "I think I was first inspired toward establishing The Blue Angel Museum because of his unique vision of art: as a form of community, and in something as common but personal as mail."



Alex Salem (1963 -)

Though reticent about his past, Alex Salem will talk about it, "for the sake of art, I guess." Though for a long time he hardly considered what he did after long days as an ambulance driver to be art. He has lasted on the job seven years, which is four more than average. And so has his identical twin brother, John, also an ambulance driver, who spent many an evening winding down at the Blue Angel, where he dragged a reluctant Alex one night. "I'm glad he did, because I was beginning to think of women as just body parts," Alex says with a smile.

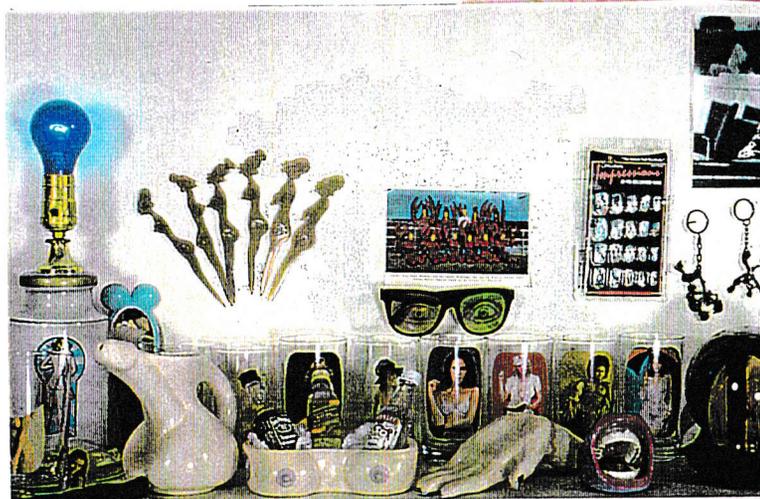
John fills in where Alex still hesitates to go: "Our mother was sick almost from the day we were born. She died when we were eight. Our father ran off a year later. I guess that's something we'll be trying to fix for the rest of our lives."

Alex says he works intuitively. He returned to the Blue Angel often until he got up the nerve to comment to Ho about the art on the walls and to mention to her his own hobby. Ho bought two pieces from him, one a phallic statue he had collected, artist unknown.





“They were his first sales,” said Ho, “an event which seemed to completely change his outlook on it all -- his job, his art, himself.”



Yvonne Teetor (1970 -)

Yvonne Teetor hails from Texas, what she calls the "big hair state." After a bout with cancer at the age of eight, chemotherapy left her bald for more than a year. That's when her strong relationship to hair began. At fifteen she got an after-school job sweeping the floor at a hair salon in Austin, but found herself unable to throw the hair away. The same salon, where she became a hairdresser a few years later, hosted the first public showing of her work -- Hair Pieces, they called them -- which got her some notice in the local press.

When she became pregnant, she followed her boyfriend to New York. A miscarriage was followed by three tumultuous years of domestic, financial and emotional upheaval which ended with the death of her boyfriend in a car accident and a ten-week stay in a psychiatric ward for Teetor. After a brief recuperation period in Austin, Yvonne returned to New York, where a friend connected her to a job in a hair-salon at which Ho became her client.

The two became good friends. Yvonne enthusiastically returned to making her "hair pieces" and would help Ho out at the club when needed.



"Yvonne had the most unusual picture frames on her counter at work. I was amazed when she told me she made them," says Ho, who became a patron of her art as well as her day job.



Wandering Wanda (193? -)

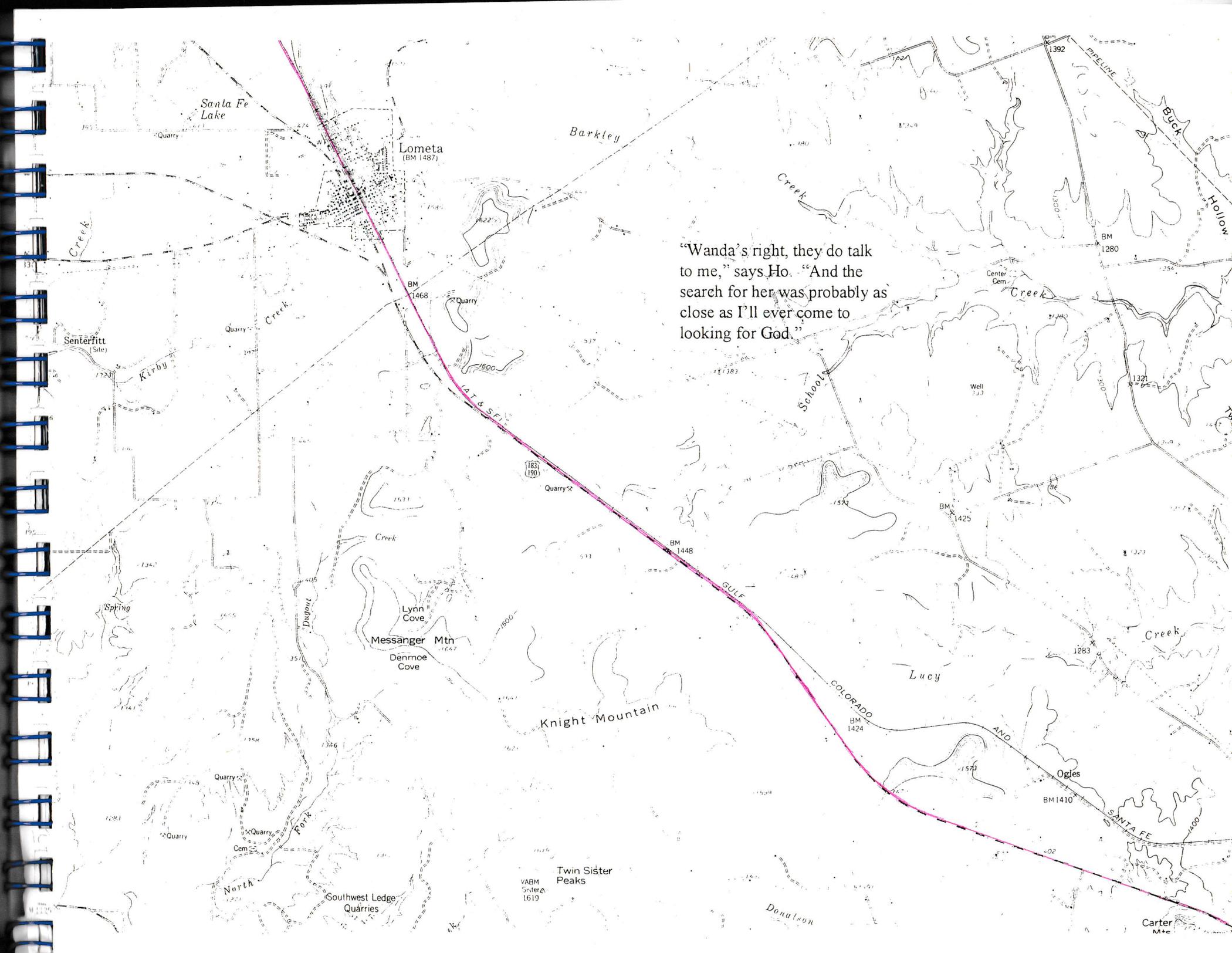
Ask Wanda what her last name is or her age or almost anything about her past and all you will get is a shrug. She lost it in the dark times, she says. She resembles a Medieval peasant, wears a necklace of her own lost teeth, four so far, "one for each season," and wanders the edges of roads, her "lifelines," she calls them, picking up bones, dead animals, gloves, panties, anything that speaks to her. "Gloves can become animals. The Spirit is in them." If you ask too many questions about her work, she'll say, "Buy one. It will tell you what it is." She has lived for years by selling and bartering her work.

Meanwhile, time and weather have taken their toll. The pinky finger on one hand is gone. "Frostbite," she says.

Intrigued by a handmade sign, "Wild-God animals 4 sale," Lou Reed bought a piece from the side of a Bucks Country road, on the way to his country house. A friend of his through the Blue Angel, Ho saw Reed's acquisition at his apartment and drove to Pennsylvania herself, looking for Wanda. Ho now owns several pieces.



Meadow Creek Cow Camp



"Wanda's right, they do talk to me," says Ho. "And the search for her was probably as close as I'll ever come to looking for God."

Excerpt from the Mary Feast Theater Interview

Mary Feast (curator) is a member of The Harlequins, a performance group in Coney Island responsible for many of the "grind shows" there each summer. In the off-season, she was one of Heidi's most popular dancers at the Blue Angel, combining certain unmentionable carnival feats into her erotic stage act. She and Heidi became close friends, both sharing a love of art outside the mainstream.

THEATER You and The Harlequins run some of the grind shows down at Coney Island each summer. The Two-headed Baby. Punko, The Killer Clown. The Gorilla Girl. What else?

MF Why're you laughing? It's an honest living.

THEATER I was just remembering how I met you.

MF That was in my youth. I don't do the gorilla girl anymore.

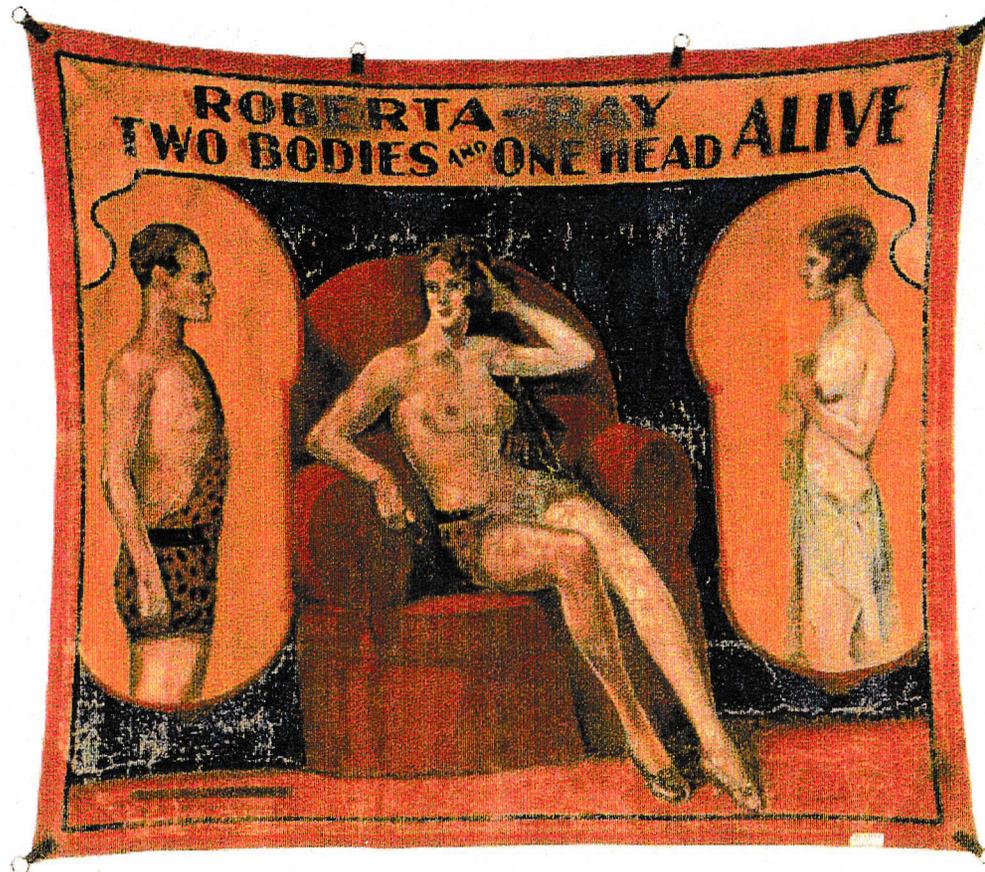
THEATER What do you do now?

MF Mostly I just read the cards. Aunt Sylvia. Now I've even got a web site, where I give out fortunes. Madame Illusion.

THEATER Do you consider giving Tarot readings theater?

MF Not exactly. Maybe a better question is: Do you consider theater as a way of giving Tarot readings. The answer there is yes. If its done right, theater is not about communication. Theater is about makingshithappen. Directly and ineluctably, the same way pulling a trigger does. When I give a Tarot reading, I'm reading the gun the client is trying to visualize, but for some reason can't. By gun I mean their partially realized action. Theater is the camouflaged sniper you can't see, but holds your destiny in its telescopic sights. I guide their hand toward the trigger of action.

THEATER You also guide their



MF Of course, but remember I'm giving them priceless information. Self-knowledge without illusion.

THEATER What does this self-knowledge cost them?

MF Depends how much it's worth to them? There once was a commercial on television about motor oil. It told you how well this certain brand of oil protected your engine from wear.

The commercial ended with the mechanic's warning "You can pay me now, or you can pay me later." The Harlequins have the Pied Piper as their model. In the legend the Pied Piper was promised a reward if he would get rid of the rats in Hameln. He played his pipe and all the rats followed him into the river Weser. But the people of Hameln refused to pay him, so he piped again, and led all the children to Koppelberg Hill, which closed over them. But this is where the Rattenfaenger played his prank. It is said that the children did not perish in the mountain, but were led over it to Transylvania, where they formed a German colony. The Harlequins are descendent from that colony and it's not that we're out to really hoodwink the good citizens of Hameln -- after all we're related to them as well -- but the saying is "Who's to pay the piper?" And the answer is "You can pay me now, or you can pay me later." But all of you WILL pay.

Mary Feast Interviews Heidi Ho

HH: There are some things I would like to say about the stuff I collect.

MF: Could I be my own woman please? I'm conducting this interview... (Sings the old song) What's your name, who's your daddy, is he rich, rich like me?

HH: Ho Han Siu. I don't know who my daddy is. That is T-H-E question.

MF: I'm asking the questions: So Heidi Ho is a stage name?

HH: Yes, ma'am.

MF: "Heidi" is a German name.

HH: Yes, lady.

MF: And Ho is what, Chinese?

HH: (sighs) Yes.

MF: In this country, "Ho" could have some derogatory implications. "Heidi Ho" is kind of a slur, considering your "background," isn't it?

HH: Yes, lady. How'd you get your name, Mary Feast?

MF: What's that all about, your choosing a name like that?

HH: It's not derogatory so much as it gets the job done. Also, it gets the obvious, the boring, nicely out of the way, don't you think?

MF: But what is the job to get done?

HH: Harriet needs Diana Ross. You need your Tirza's Wine Bath. You need the men to drink up your naked conversation as much as they need you. Nasone needs to make contact with his aliens. I need to find my father

MF: Do you really think you're going to find your daddy?

HH: The [Blue Angel] club was open for three years. I saw a lot of men that could have -- some of them should have -- been my father.

MF: But they weren't. Do you have a daddy complex?

HH: Everyone is complex. Everyone's daddy is complex. Our lives are like one of those multiplex theaters in the suburbs where you have a dozen or so movies all going on at the same time and same place, but we can only watch one at a time. I hope to make the whole Blue Angel thing a kind of mobile multiplex. Whatever it is, this "daddy complex" as you call it, it entertains more than it cripples.

MF: So you like men?

HH: I like women too. All this is more than sexual. Sex of course is more than the act of coitus. It begins with the delicious feeling of attraction between two people, any two people. Always that slow sexy dance toward one another. I don't know where my father is but if I get up enough of that delicious attraction, send it out there, find it and expose it, it will be like a giant magnet for all sorts of things and people. He'll come.

MF: So it's more than sexual.

HH: (stands starts to dance and sing Private Dancer) Well I guess I want a family. I'm your private dancer, a dancer for money, do what you want me to do."

MF: Yeah. When I was younger, I had only one ambition. To be able to walk like Tina Turner.

Tirza's Wine Bath, 1931-1964

Tirza's was the most glorious and notorious of the "girlie revues" in Coney Island. Its sumptuous pink decor, fabulous bubble machine and swell girls earned Tirza's a renown well beyond Brooklyn's coast line.

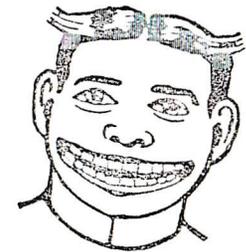
Saturday nights in particular sizzled with excitement and expectation. That was when the celebrated Tirza herself would perform. Her act was so popular -- it spanned the entire 33 years of the establishment's existence -- that to gain a grasp on exactly what it consisted of is impossible today, as hearsay and legend have obscured much of its true nature. The one and only irrefutable fact is that Tirza was immersed in a bathtub full of red wine during at least part of her performance.

Tirza's Wine Bath, 1997 -

Mary Feast and other luminaries from the legendary Blue Angel will host an exotic, erotic tribute to the girlie revues of old every Saturday night this June, July, and August at the Coney Island Museum, 1208 Surf Avenue at West 12th Street.



"If you wanna see something that's red hot and blue, this is the place and now is the time. These girls will shake it up one side and roll it down the other. It makes the old feel young and the young wanna feel. Hurry up inside folks, it's showtime right now where the girls twitch it and twatch it while you watch it. Hurry, hurry, hurry..."



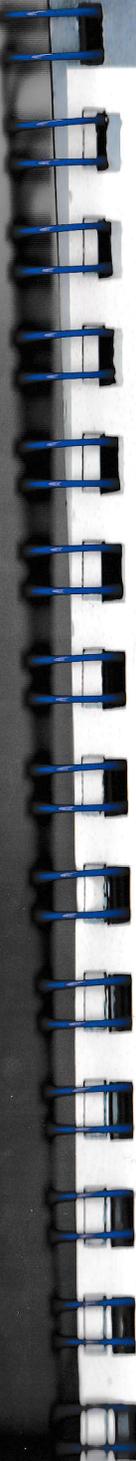


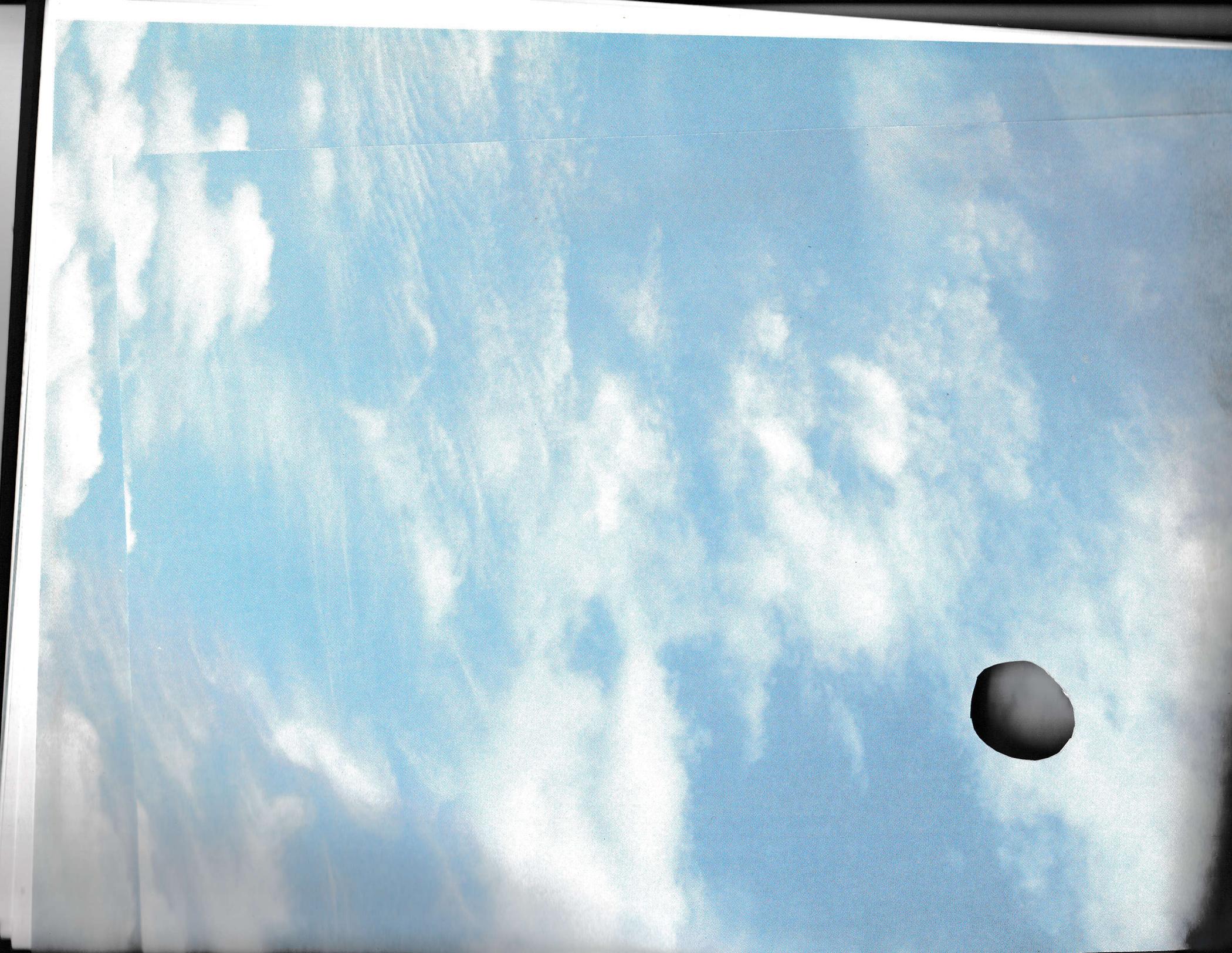
Thieves Theatre is a founding member of the RAT Conference, an affiliation of more than 40 small independent theaters from around the country. Their Millennium Project is more than just the twentieth anniversary of its first production, Jean Genet's *The Balcony*, it's a culmination of the theater's by now legendary techniques of identity exchange and site specific adaptations. More than just "theater," Thieves Theatre productions challenge the reality surrounding them, often exposing and exploring stigmas in the social, legal, and cultural body. In various linked incarnations *The Balcony* will examine the stigma of adult entertainment and restrictive blue laws enacted in various venues and jurisdictions. This ambitious three year project will include artists, actors, writers, and dancers residing in major urban areas around the country.





thieves theatre







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HEREART
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The Heidi Ho Collection

curated by Mary Feast

March 27 - April 19, 1997
Opening Reception: March 27th 5-7pm

Performances TBA

Gallery Hours : Tue. - Sat. 12-8pm



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