

BRIGITTE HUCK : ONA B.

"In which city would you prefer to spend your nights?", Evelyne Egerer, member of the legendary women's artist group The Ladies, asks her colleague Ona B. "In any", Ona B. answers, "that lies at my feet".

The response shows self-confidence and wit, important survival tools for female artists. As a painter, photographer, performance and conceptual artist, Ona B. has enough of both to fearlessly challenge this male-dominated field. Of course, she does it elegantly and with style, since her chosen weapon is the bow and arrow. Not in the sense of any Alpine stone-age myths - Ona B.'s specialty is the aesthetic intellectual art of Kyudo, or Japanese archery. An amazon, "Dressed to Kill" in rouge totalitaire, red being the other passion of the passionate painter. "Basically everything is red", she says. "If you stop to reflect on all the things that are red, it takes your breath away."

Like the all over installations that have become her trademark. These are colored rooms with painted canvasses covering the walls, furnished in red: autonomous spaces that the artist moves in, her entire body taking on a blush, almost disappearing in the Camouflage of innumerable red shades. Spirituality and irony are not far apart. For instance, at the 1999 Frankfurt Art Fair, potential buyers had to cut "their" slice of canvas from Ona B.'s individual mythological space. The latent aggression in this destructive act contained the trauma of a laceration that wounded not only lifeless material, but the artist herself as well. The reference to the birth of painting out of physical experience was obvious, as was the affirmation of the unity of an artist with his or her work of art. It is part of Ona B.'s complex double agenda to incidentally create a comment on the art market and its demands. Ona B.'s space-image dialogues, the dialogues between abstract art and concrete architecture, are a web into which art and reality, dream and life are inextricably woven. Rowing shells play a unique, symbolic role in Ona B.'s triadic ballet of painting, space, and objects. These long, slim, needle-shaped boats maximize their aesthetic power when they are inverted: reaching skyward on the façade of the Stein Minorite church or wrapped in red flags spanning a huge exhibition hall in the Egon Schiele Center in Krumau. Ona B. identifies with the boat and its references to the ferryman Charon, to this world and the other world, or to the flow of water as much as she does with painting.

Ona B.'s person is always part other art. She is an element of her in situ installations, a model in her photo productions, and an actor in many performance and video productions. She recently co-produced a video with Tone Fink in which she covered her body with Nivea Creme and then wrapped it in paper maché, thus totally immersed in the white art-world of her colleague. Ona B.'s movements were supposed to illustrate Fink's objects until her moving and the material's drying out caused them to crumble off her body. "How to coolly shake off men's art" is one possible interpretation of this performance - that "bachelor" Fink then throws his undressed bride over his shoulder and carries her out of the picture would constitute a different chapter for Gender Studies.

An art happening took place at the Fushimi Inari temple in Kyoto in 1999/2000, when Ona B. went on tour. Dressed in red, three Japanese women and Ona B. strolled with little red parasols over the sacred grounds with its 1000 red gates. There is a simple reason for this visit: inari means fox, and the Japanese believe that foxes drive people crazy, causing them to be optimistic and creative. Ona B. thinks so, too.