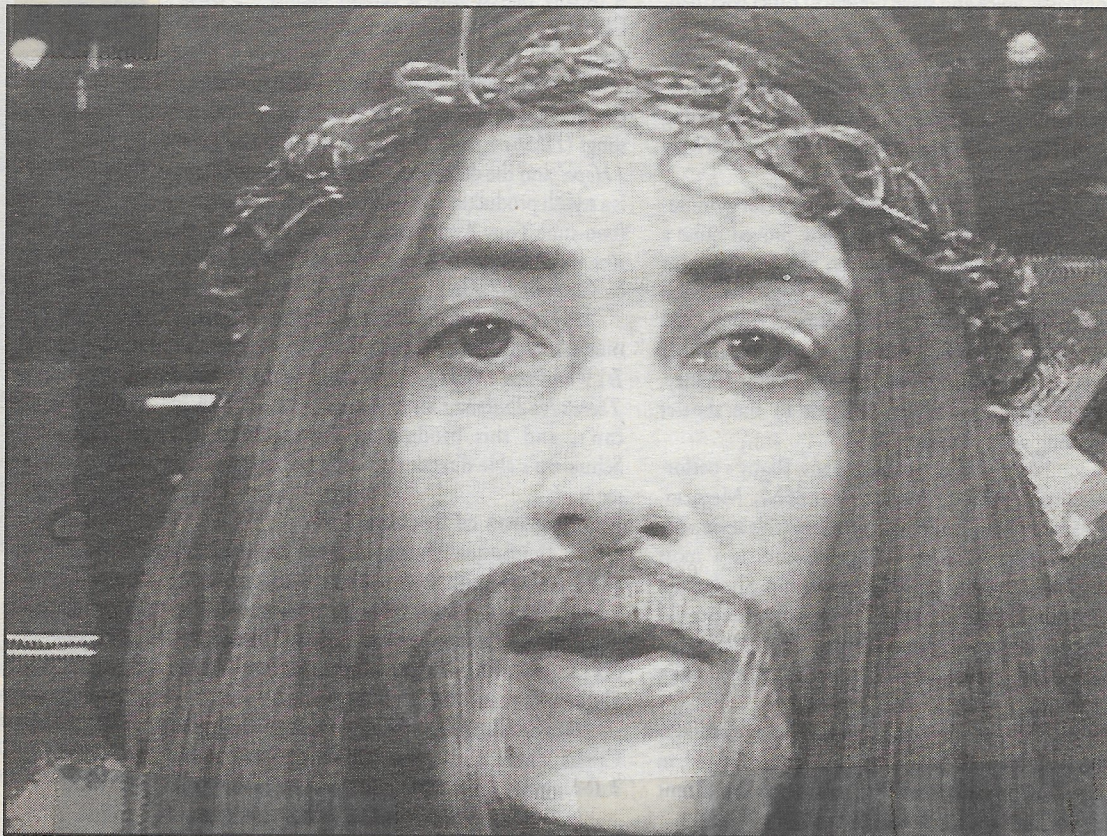


Drag: Rhinestones in Rough-Cut

Film and Video Review of Series One in "Undressing Crossdressing"

A Spy in The House Of Love by Suzi Silver.



by Wickie Stamps

In the Nineties, underground queer-content films, which were traditionally relegated to hip cafés, now premier in art museums. Fortunately for us, many of these filmmakers are queer, which increases the likelihood that they know something about fringe identities.

Undressing Crossdressing, a 3-night film program at the Institute of Contemporary Art, is clearly at the center of this underground-gone-uptown phenomenon. This particular film and video extravaganza is co-sponsored by Fishnet, a Boston-based collective of self-named "queer girl" artists who see their events as "irreverent and critical acts of resistance to the heterosexual imagery and ideology."

Clearly, these women meet their goal. Their first film and video marathon, held on April 30, 1993, targets a wide range of queer sexuality.

A handful of the April 30 *Undressing Crossdressing* videos and films were quirky confrontations with our queerness. *Made of TV*, a film by Tom Rubnitz and Ann Magnuson, stars Magnuson in a dozen diverse roles, creatively portraying female sex-role stereotyping. In other works, such as *A Spy in the House of Love*, a 3-minute quickie by Suzi Silver, Christ debuts as a drag queen.

Then there's *Gender Cruise On the Circle Line*, by Glen Belverio. In this goofy video, two young drag queen talk-show hosts named Glennda and Brenda interview anyone from transsexual lesbians to German divas. Complete with an entourage of transgenderists, the entire talk show takes place on a Staten Island cruise boat.

But other *Undressing Crossdressing* films and videos hone in on the underbelly of drag and transvestites. In *The Salt Mines*, by Susana Aikin and Carlos Aparicio, the filmmakers interview latino transvestite prostitutes as they huddle around an open fire in a New York City garage dump. The dump and the abandoned trucks are these transvestites' homes. The video is shot during a frigid New

films

York winter, when the transvestites, some of whom are also transsexuals, use the side mirrors of the dump trucks to put on their makeup and fix their hair.

Then they head out and comb the city for tricks. All of the cash they've whored for goes to feed their costly crack habits. After a night of prostitution, when all return to their garbage dump, they fill up rusty cans with water from the nearby fire hydrant and remove their makeup.

At one point in the 45-minute video, one trans-vestite shows up with illegally obtained hormones. And we, the audience, are privy to a horrifying feeding frenzy in which the young addicts draw the cherished drug into syringes,

pull up their layers of coats and inject the fluid into their abdomens. In *Split*, by Ellen Fisher Turk, we walk into the life of International Chrysis, a New York drag queen and an ex-lover of Salvador Dali's. Although the video glorifies Chrysis' life, one cannot miss the tragedy that tracked this mistress of drag.

In pursuit of his identity, he had breast implants, which at that time, meant having floor wax injected into his breasts. Chrysis, true to the drag persona that constantly spins glamour from garish reality, skims the surface of his own tragedies. Not only does he barely mention his painful queer childhood, he also completely skips any mention of the severe and chronic pain he suffers from his implants. These facts are left for his devoted friends to tell us or relegated to the video's press packet, which notes in passing that Chrysis died at age thirty-nine from cancer due to his hormone injections and breast implants' seepage.

Two Spirit People, a 20-minute video by Michael Beauchemin, Lori Levy and Gretchen

Vogel, stands in a class of its own. It is the first time gay and lesbian North American indigenous people, not whites, define Berdache, a cross-tribal tradition in which an individual encompasses both genders. Minute by minute, this video, which will hopefully receive wide distribution, dispels the myths that shroud the terribly misunderstood Berdache tradition.

But there is one video the dyke community could live without: *Gay Brothers*, by Greta Snider. It is advertised as "gay men discussing women bodies" and is further defined as a project which "explores the crucial irony of how homosexuality and concepts of gender difference live together in queer communities." Bullshit. It is nothing but gay men vomiting up every nasty and vicious comment they can think of about women's sexuality and anatomy. Who needs to hear it? Like my film-going dyke companion observed, "We don't let straight men get away with that garbage, why should we let the faggots?" Point well taken.

I might as well add that, despite lesbians

having produced over half of the *Undressing Crossdressing* videos and films, dyke sexuality remains in the shadows. This is an oversight that, judging from the *Undressing Crossdressing* press releases, is soon to change.

So, despite the one misogynistic monstrosity and *Green*, a super 8 by Tom Rhodes that is one of the most intentionally artistic assaults on the human psyche I've ever endured, *Undressing Crossdressing* brings us a step closer to understanding our queer sexuality.

Good show, Fishnet!

The next *Undressing Crossdressing* series is Friday, May 14 at 7:00 and 9:00 pm. This event will premier *Outcast*, about lesbians in Nazi concentration camps and *Flaming Ears*, a cyberdyke, lesbian, sci-fi flick. For more information, contact Fishnet at 433-7100 or the ICA at 266-5152.

IN newsweekly

May 17, 1993