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MARY KELLY'S  
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# INTERVENE! INTERRUPT! RETHINKING ART AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

TEXT BY JENNIFER KLEIN



In 1991, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art presented *Out of Action: Between Performance and the Object, 1969-1991*, arguably the most important live-art exhibition to take place in that decade. Ten years later and several hundred miles north, the University of California, Santa Cruz recently hosted an equally critical live-art conference and festival, *Interventive Interrupt! Rethinking Art as Social Practice* (May 17-19, 2001) offering panel discussions on the role of art in building community and the problematic relationship between interventionist art and the gallery. It was followed by live-art interventions done around campus and beyond. The festival culminated with the spectacular *Green Wedding #4* of Angela Espinola and Elizabeth Stephens, provocatively timed to take place just days after the California Superior Court ruled in favor of same-sex unions.

In the pivotal essay she wrote for *Out of Action's* catalogue, art historian Christine Eiles argues that art action "was imagined as a means to remedy the aestheticism that transformed art as an integral part of the production of meaning to follow into the empty category of 'art for art's sake.'" The premise of *Interventive* was that live art/action is inextricably woven into and into its social and political fabric. As such, it is the most efficacious way for an artist to intervene "formed" from the increasingly hegemonic world of repressive objects made for art market. In addition, *Interventive* was conceptually indebted to the long (and) exhibition, *The Interventionist: Art in the Social Sphere* organized by Hans Thompson for MAMO MUCA, in fact, *Interventive* featured several of the same artists as the interventionists, such as the *Yes Men* and The Center for Tactical Magic. Always iconoclastic, Thompson kicked off "the first panel" by posing a series of controversial questions that undermined the historical institutionalization/corporate versus artist/public/transgression that have characterized much of the discourse concerning public art activities over the last twenty years. *Interventionist art*, Thompson requested, must remain unstable, responding to the particular social and political conditions in which it is deployed. **On intervening art.**

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** *Out of Action*. Elizabeth Stephens & Angela Espinola, *Green Wedding #4*, May 1998 (photo: Lynda Sussler) following at the University of California, Santa Cruz (MAMO) (photograph by Elizabeth Stephens and Angela Espinola's *Green Wedding #4* (photo: Lynda Sussler), 1998). **THIS PAGE:** *Interventive* (photo: Jesse Wilking 2001). **TOP TO BOTTOM:** Angela Espinola, color (also painted Stephens for interventionist) *Yes Men* (May 1, 2001), performance (photo: Cory Elliott); *Interventive* (photo: Jesse Wilking 2001) *Green Wedding #4* (photo: Lynda Sussler).



The Center for Tactical Media staged an intervention at World Forge in protest of Boko Haram's involvement in Ouagadougou. Big Unknown's tactical imagination brought business to a halt by occupying all of the front and back offices for hours as artists, preventing them from holding their usual business in the process. Canadian Dolly Cadoux organized an intervention of itineraries as an exhibition featuring video of art made for social engagement, at the Tessen Gallery at UCCO in conjunction with the festival. The highlight of that show was Patrick (Among) Anankwa's Action Figure series, which, in a more reminiscent of the Seattle Liberation Organization's shoplifting action from 1991, was granted to visitors who-MARL, STARZ, and Target stores. The video of the artist attempting to purchase the action figure at Target is simultaneously humorous and chilling: Everything, even security, can be had for a price.

But, *Intervene* did not simply recapitulate the interventionist exhibition, *KaKa*, it was carefully curated to suggest the development of an

international genealogy of engaged actions under the rubric of "art." The festival began with a pre-conference seminar that included a discussion of national parties and Allan Kaprow's work by Judith Rodden. The following morning, the keynote address was given by Peter Wayne Ramirez and Steven Ramirez on their collaborative environmental work since the 1980s. On the second day of the conference, Linda M. Stewart, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, and Jennie Spinale and Elizabeth Stephens spoke on the panel "Art and Life: Life and Art." Although unable to be physically present due to illness, Suzanne Lury was represented by the *Intervene* archive OPEN ACCESS, a three-city conversation inspired by the archival remnants of the Cultural Project on which she worked from 1991 to 2000. The Tessen Gallery also hosted two Ramirez inflatable museum during the festival.

Morning panel discussions were followed by outdoor, site-specific actions-performances that took place in and around the Porter College

Quad in conjunction with the interventions at the Tessen Gallery, many of these pieces were inevitably unfair, even uneven. Appropriately titled *Low Frequency*, these pieces waited clearly in time and space, demanding a heightened level of attention and mindfulness on the part of the viewer. During the two days of *Intervene*, Santa Cruz experienced an unprecedented heat wave, which raised the program for these pieces by making the original discomfort of the artist apparent. In particular, Marilyn Annex's *Green's King*, performed later-on May 16, beautifully illustrated the increasing shortage of water: holding a globe of ice in her cupped hands, a film-still frame stood in one place while the ice melted. Equally moving was Angela Silverstein's *In This the Place Is, Rain Is Absent*, Silverstein and several performers—including Tina Takemoto as the main performer—recreated the journey made by her indigenous ancestors who walked in Utah in order to build a utopian community Elsinore and her fellow



performer, wearing Roman-style rings, finger studs and pincers into the drupe of a mountain before moving on and repeating the ritual. *Adina Bar On's* 2011 made reference to her life companion's inability to say anything but "oi" (children) for their child on the morning of the birth—and holds in general by pushing words a wallowed, low-sounding low-sounding words "Heavy Body" on the four sides while dancing and whispering "Heavybody." Like *Adina Bar On's* 2011, *Reiko Okamoto* addressed the chronic shortage of potable water, particularly in California in the state in the *Message An Inventory of Effort*, Okamoto vocally and spatially danced with a face in her mouth, pausing periodically to fill water balloons that floated behind her as she moved through the space. In 2011, *Alphredo Torres* vocally filled and then drank fifty-one glasses of wine, opening each glass and allowing the wine to flow out of her mouth and down her neck and down. By the end of the piece, the wine-drenched Torres had stimulated the

Christian communion, making her own body into the sacrificial water directed to the blood of the lamb.

The final event of the festival, *Green Wedding #4*, was an extravagant affair that included twenty-one mini-performances, three large sales, two dinners, and a *Green Dinner* prepared by *Christina Gillingham*, Dedicated to "love, compassion, earth, and environmentalism." *Green Wedding #4* was produced by *Stephens* and *Sprockle's* *Love Art Laboratory*. The related weddings relate to *Marlene's* *up there of living art* a performance based on the artist *Marlene* for this piece, *Marlene* was the color of each drink for an entire year, and they repeated the performance—for seven more years. She then requested the work to other artists: *Sprockle* and *Stephens* decided to make their love into art just as *Marlene* has earlier shared the love between art and life by looking toward a work of art. By performing queer love as art, *Sprockle* and *Stephens* performatively challenged love's

hetero-normative construction, which made legalized gay marriage a seemingly unattainable goal. If *Out of Art* suggested that *Marlene* was no longer relevant, then *Informed* has re-introduced an epistemology that art/writing/artists make a difference.

#### NOTES

1. *Adina Bar On's*, "Unscripted by Intentional Art: Actions," *Out of Art*, *Adina Bar On's* and *Stephens* and *Sprockle*, page 100. Paul Inghram, ed., *Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art*, 2011, 100.
2. See <http://www.mocva.org/our-features/love> accessed here as cited.

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