An Excuse to Party: Tom Marioni's Museum of Conceptual Art, 1970–1974

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Art in Curatorial Practice

California College of the Arts

May 2021

Certification of Approval

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ABSTRACT

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2021

This thesis examines artist and curator Tom Marioni's curation of artwork by women at the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA), an alternative exhibition space Marioni founded in San Francisco in 1970. Marioni applied the principles of his socially-driven artistic practice to MOCA, making MOCA a crucial convening ground for Bay Area conceptual and performance artists. MOCA's artist roster reflected the biases of the regional art scene at the time, with only four women featured in MOCA's fourteen years of programming. However, Marioni also provided a platform for important feminist works during these years. This thesis analyzes three case studies that frame this paradox: Marioni's group exhibition, *California Girls* (1971); Barbara T. Smith's feminist performance, *Feed Me* (1973); and Lynn Hershman Leeson's site-specific installation, *Dante Hotel* (1973–74). These case studies demonstrate that Marioni's informal curatorial approach privileged social connections over critical curatorial functions, thus unintentionally perpetuating patriarchal systems of power.

Keywords: conceptual art, performance art, curatorial studies, museum studies, Bay Area Conceptualism, feminist art history, second wave feminism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My foremost thanks to my advisory committee: Jez Flores-García, Constance Lewallen, James Voorhies, and Christina Linden. Your guidance and encouragement shaped my thinking around not only this thesis, but the potentials of curatorial and archival research.

Thank you to the many personal and professional mentors who have directly and indirectly supported this project. Thank you to Curatorial Practice faculty Dena Beard, Glen Helfand, and J. Myers-Szupinksa for helping me to find and hone my practice. Thank you, Jeff Gunderson and Diego Villalobos, for your encouragement and recommendations during the preliminary research of this project.

This thesis could not have been realized without the generous support and contributions of the artists featured, all of whom patiently answered questions about events that took place over fifty years ago. Thank you, Tom Marioni, for your good humor and willingness to share your practice with me. Thank you, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Barbara T. Smith, and Cheryl Rutter-Zurilgen, for your candor and interest in this project.

I am indebted to my graduate cohort—Leandra Burnett, Katherine Jemima Hamilton, Youyou Ma, and Emily Markert—for being my friends, confidantes, and sounding board. Thank you. Finally, I extend heartfelt thanks to my family, friends, and partner for their endless patience and kindness during the past two years.

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Artist and curator Tom Marioni (b. 1937) founded the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) in San Francisco in 1970 "as an excuse to party."[1] Marioni galvanized Bay Area performance and conceptual artists through the exhibition space, which also hosted weekly social events such as video screenings with free beer.[2] While MOCA holds a mythic art historical status today, it also carries a reputation for being an "old boys' club."[3] Viewed through a feminist lens, Marioni's legacy as a curator is paradoxical; he presented the work of very few women artists and yet also provided a platform for important feminist works. Prior to MOCA, Marioni curated the 1971 exhibition *California Girls*, which he considers to be one of the first feminist exhibitions in the country, at Richmond Art Center.[4] A few years later, he included Barbara T. Smith's (b. 1931) controversial feminist performance *Feed Me* (1973, fig. 1) in the MOCA exhibition *All Night Sculptures*. Marioni and others testify that there were few women artists in the Bay Area in the 1970s, suggesting that MOCA's exhibitions featured an adequate number of women.[5] However, Lynn Hershman Leeson's (b. 1941) site-specific installation, *Dante Hotel* (1973–74, fig. 2), suggests that there were women artists making work relevant to MOCA's

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[1] Tom Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2003), 93.

[2] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 115.

[3] Matthew Harrison Tedford, "The Museum of Conceptual Art: A Prolegomena to Hip," *Art Practical* 2, no. 15 (April 2011), https://www.artpractical.com/feature/the_museum_of_conceptual_art_a_prolegomena_to_hip/.

[4] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 89.

[5] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 107.

program in the 1970s that were omitted.[6] Using these three projects as case studies, I demonstrate that Marioni's informal curatorial approach privileged social connections over critical curatorial functions. Marioni unintentionally perpetuated patriarchal systems of power by disregarding the content and political implications of representation of the artworks he curated.

The exhibition *California Girls*, Smith's *Feed Me*, and Hershman Leeson's *Dante Hotel* occurred between 1970 and 1974—a period in American history defined by the Vietnam War and the Black Power, Chicano rights, gay rights, and women's liberation civil rights movements.[7] The artists in these case studies were influenced by the changing socio-political environment and the feminist art movements that flourished in the United States and abroad. In Southern California, Judy Chicago (b. 1939) began the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State College in 1970 and moved it to California Institute of the Arts with Miriam Schapiro (b. 1923–

[6] Lynn Hershman legally changed her name to Lynn Hershman Leeson in 1992. In this text, I will use the name that the artist currently uses.

[7] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 9–10. Many media sources characterized the second wave of feminism as dominated by white, educated, middle-class women, but Black, Latina, Indigenous, and Asian women were actively involved throughout the movement. The dominant narrative also ignored the intersecting issue of transgender rights for which women such as Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson advocated. See Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 336–360.

2015) in 1971.[8] Chicago and Schapiro's students believed in alternative institutions for women and explored female consciousness and aesthetics using a cultural feminist lens in which gender is the assumed primary source of oppression.[9] By contrast, feminist critics and historians in New York, such as Lucy Lippard and Linda Nochlin, petitioned for equal income and representation within existing institutions.[10] British feminist artists followed Marxist ideology and prioritized building female audiences over creating equity with men. Meanwhile, the Feminist Actionists in Austria, such as VALIE EXPORT (b. 1940), identified themselves within the traditions of Surrealism, Tachism, and Action Art.[11] As was true of the second wave feminist movement in

[8] Judy Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2014), 21, 23. Fresno State College was renamed California State University, Fresno in 1972. Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*, 8.

[9] Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (September 1987): 329; Martha Rosler, "The Private and The Public: Feminist Art in California," *Artforum* 16, no. 1 (September 1977), https://www.artforum.com/print/197707/the-private-and-the-public-feminist-art-in-california-35980.

[10] Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 329.

[11] Valie Export, "Aspects of Feminist Actionism," *New German Critique,* no. 47 (Summer 1989): 71.

general, there was little consensus amongst the geographically and culturally disparate feminist art movements of the 1970s.[12]

While the general culture of the San Francisco Bay Area was steeped in the socio-political movements of the early 1970s, the area's prevailing art scene remained conservative and stagnant by comparison.[13] With little traditional artworld supports such as patrons, galleries, and critical publications, some Bay Area artists turned to performance—a medium that was at once ephemeral, noncommercial, and characteristic of public protest.[14] While women such as postmodern dancer Anna Halprin (b. 1920) and performance artists Bonnie Ora Sherk (b. 1945) and Linda Montano (b. 1942) were key to early performance, the Bay Area art world remained

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[12] Maria Elena Buszek, "Naomi Fisher: We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture" (lecture, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO, April 29, 2005); Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 332.

[13] Brenda Richardson, interview by James McElhinney, July 29–30, 2011, transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Baltimore, MD; Leta Ming, "Making and Unmaking the Museum: Tom Marioni and San Francisco Conceptual Art, 1968–1979" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2012), 17, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll3/id/8084. The San Francisco Bay Area consists of nine counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma, and San Francisco.

[14] Moira Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 6 (February 1978): 95.

exclusive and largely male-dominated.[15] As art historian Moira Roth wrote in 1978, "Bay Area women performers' position is intimately linked with the overall difficulties of women artists achieving recognition in the Bay Area, an area singularly inhospitable to them professionally. The situation of sexist bias is intolerable there."[16] Despite this, women artists in the Bay Area persisted, using outdoor and non-art venues to perform outside of galleries and museums.[17]

MOCA was one of the only Bay Area venues for performance art in the early 1970s, alongside Reese Palley Gallery in San Francisco and the University Art Museum in Berkeley.[18] The museum was analogous to the artist-run spaces of today; Marioni was the only person on staff, and he ran the museum out of the studio he shared with artist Terry Fox (1943–2008).[19] However, Marioni intended MOCA to be a traditional museum space, complete with members, a

[15] Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," 95, 100.

[16] Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," 102.

[17] Tanya Zimbardo, "Public Address: Bay Area Performances, Temporary Installations, and Nomadic Projects," in *Public Works: Artist's Interventions, 1970s–Now*, ed. Christian L. Frock and Tanya Zimbardo (Oakland: Mills College Art Museum, 2015), 38.

[18] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir,* 94; Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," 98. The University Art Museum was renamed the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) in 1996. "BAMPFA Mission and History," University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, accessed March 14, 2021, https://bampfa.org/about/history-mission.

[19] Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," 99.

collection, and government funding.[20] MOCA exhibited conceptual performance and installation art, adhering to Marioni's definition of conceptual art as "an idea-oriented situation not directed at the production of static objects."[21] These situations fell into three categories: language, system, and action.[22] In contrast with the language and systems favored by the New York conceptualists, California conceptualists created actions that often embraced humor and lessened the divide between art and life.[23] Marioni used MOCA to connect Bay Area conceptual and performance artists with their counterparts in Los Angeles and New York. He exhibited early work by artists such as Vito Acconci (1940–2017), Chris Burden (1946–2015), and David Ireland (1930–2009).[24] By the time Marioni closed MOCA in 1984, the venue had exhibited only four women: Diane Blell (b. 1943), Montano, Sherk, and Smith.[25]

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[20] Jennie Klein, "The Body's Odyssey," in *The 21st Century Odyssey Part II: The Performances of Barbara T. Smith*, ed. Jennie Klein et al. (Claremont, CA: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2005), 12.

[21] Tom Marioni, *Writings on Art: 1969–1999* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2000), 43.

[22] Marioni, *Writings on Art: 1969–1999*, 43.

[23] Constance Lewallen, "A Larger Stage," in *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970,* ed. Constance Lewallen and Karen Moss (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 10.

[24] Suzanne Foley and Constance Lewallen, *Space, Time, Sound: Conceptual Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, the 1970s* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 33–37; "Tom Marioni: MOCA (Museum of Conceptual Art), 1970–1984," interview by Andrew McClintock, *San Francisco Arts Quarterly* 13 (May 2013): 44–51.

[25] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 107.

Although MOCA played a key role in the development of Bay Area conceptual and performance art, minimal scholarship on the museum exists. As a result, a full assessment of Marioni's engagement with feminist art is yet to be realized. Marioni has authored multiple existing texts on MOCA via interviews and his memoir, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*—lending a favorable bias to much of the information on the museum. Meanwhile, critical perspectives on MOCA have been expressed via anecdotes or unsubstantiated claims of elitism or sexual bias. Matthew Harrison Tedford's "The Museum of Conceptual Art: A Prolegomena to Hip" is one such example.[26] Tedford ends his text with a claim that relatively few women artists exhibited at MOCA regardless of its existence "during the golden era of feminist art, in a city known for its progressive politics."[27] I build upon Tedford's observation by contending with *why* this may be. I complicate Marioni and Tedford's opposing conclusions regarding MOCA's exhibition of artwork by women by exploring Marioni's curation within the intersecting contexts of Bay Area conceptual and feminist performance art. I do so by drawing upon the scholarship of curators, art historians, and theorists of performance, feminist, and conceptual art such as Jennie Klein, Constance Lewallen, Karen Moss, Roth, and Kristine Stiles.[28]

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[26] Tedford, "The Museum of Conceptual Art: A Prolegomena to Hip."

[27] Tedford, "The Museum of Conceptual Art: A Prolegomena to Hip."

[28] See, for example, Jennie Klein, Moira Roth, Jenni Sorkin, and Kristine Stiles, *The 21st Century Odyssey Part II: The Performances of Barbara T. Smith* (Claremont, CA: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2005); Constance Lewallen and Karen Moss, eds., *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Moira Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 6.

I apply a critical art historical lens to three case studies in my examination of Marioni's treatment of artwork by women: *California Girls,* a historical precedent for Marioni's curation at MOCA; *Feed Me*, arguably the most feminist work Marioni presented at MOCA; and *Dante Hotel,* a work that should have qualified Hershman Leeson for inclusion in MOCA's exhibitions. I analyze these exhibitions and artworks from a contemporary feminist perspective while maintaining recognition that current understandings of feminisms and intersectionality differ greatly from those of the early 1970s.[29] The study of early performance requires that scholars rely on potentially biased archival documentation and recollections from those who were there. I work in the tradition of performance studies scholars Philip Auslander, Peggy Phelan, and Amelia Jones by formally analyzing these source materials, recognizing their limitations and generative potential.[30] I also incorporate the perspectives of curator, artist, and critic/audience through new and existing interviews and historical periodicals to form a social historical framework. I consider these perspectives in relation to, within, and across each of the case studies.

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[29] Due to the subject of this paper—Marioni and his circle encountered primarily white, straight, educated, and middle-class artists—my use of the terms "feminism" and "women" will refer to largely white and cisgender populations while recognizing those that are omitted.

[30] See, for example, Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 1–10; Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation." *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 11–18; Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

In analyzing why Marioni selected such starkly feminist artworks while showing so few women artists at MOCA, I seek to contribute critical scholarship to MOCA's legacy while historicizing and contextualizing the performances presented in the space. This project also allows a wider view of contemporary curation and arts institutions. By considering Marioni's curation of women's artwork from the perspective of the current moment, I hope to shed light on how simplistic ideas of representation in art institutions may be problematic. I seek to demonstrate how curatorial decisions may be made in solidarity with and with commitment to an artist's objectives. In interrogating Marioni's curation of artwork by women in the early 1970s, I advocate for fully informed curators, both past and present.

This thesis is organized into three chapters. Chapter One establishes a historic precedent for Marioni's presentation of artwork by women at MOCA by investigating his 1971 exhibition, *California Girls*, at Richmond Art Center. Chapter Two considers Smith's *Feed Me* in relation to the other artworks in MOCA's 1973 exhibition *All Night Sculptures* and in consideration of Smith's intentions for the artwork. Chapter Three analyzes Hershman Leeson's *Dante Hotel*—an aesthetically similar feminist installation which Marioni would have been aware of. I compare and contrast the aesthetic, conceptual, and social dynamics of *Dante Hotel*, *Feed Me*, and *California Girls* in order to understand why Hershman Leeson's work was not included at MOCA. I conclude that Marioni's reliance on his social network disproportionately impacted his curatorial approach. Thus, Marioni's curation reflected his own relative position of privilege and recreated elitist artworld systems that excluded women and others.

Chapter One: *California Girls*

Marioni often recalls that he was dismissed from his curatorial position at Richmond Art Center after the opening reception of *California Girls*—a group exhibition of more than sixteen

women artists.[31] It marked the end of his two years at Richmond Art Center and signaled his shift to focusing on MOCA full-time. In his memoir and various interviews, Marioni claims that *California Girls* was "one of the first feminist art shows in the country" and points to a performance involving cow's blood by one of Chicago's students as the reason for his ouster.[32] He describes a woman in a white, two-piece bathing suit who wore a cow's milking machine strapped to her stomach as she crawled on the ground, dripping blood on a long piece of butcher paper.[33] The performance was untitled; it was not photographed or recorded. Marioni cannot even recall the performer's name. Due to his dismissal, there is no installation photography of *California Girls*, either.[34] This chapter will complicate Marioni's uncontested narrative of *California Girls* by analyzing conflicting memories of this work alongside published reviews of the exhibition it was part of. By constructing a multivalent perspective of the exhibition, I reveal that Marioni's curatorial decisions cannot easily be classified as feminist, but instead expose larger issues within the early feminist art movement.

While *California Girls* and the untitled performance Marioni references have largely been lost to history, Cheryl Zurilgen (b. circa 1943), the performer whose name Marioni has

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[31] While there are only sixteen artists listed on the exhibition card, Marioni remembers that thirty artists participated in the exhibition.

[32] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 89–90.

[33] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 90. Based on the size and weight of a milking machine, this would likely be physically impossible.

[34] Tom Marioni, interview by the author, San Francisco, January 11, 2021; Amy Spencer (Exhibitions Director, Richmond Art Center), phone call with the author, February 26, 2021.

forgotten, remembers the opening reception of *California Girls* well. In a recent conversation, she vividly described driving in a pickup truck from Fresno to Richmond, California with her boyfriend, David Daniels (b. circa 1943). Both wore white—her in a chiffon dress with ribboned braids piled on her head, him in coveralls and work boots. Upon their arrival at the Richmond Art Center, Daniels taped two long pieces of white butcher paper to the floor of the museum's foyer. He placed a milking machine filled with cow's blood at one end. The stainless-steel canister stood ten inches high; two plastic tubes ending in teat cups extended from gaskets on the lid. Daniels tethered Zurilgen to the machine with a belt typically used for cattle. She removed a tube and covered the vacant spout between her legs as she squatted over the machine. Using a turkey baster, she siphoned blood from the machine and drained it in a pitcher at her feet. Daniels occasionally took the pitcher, scattering blood as he walked down the butcher paper. Zurilgen began filling it again when he returned and kicked the canister. They repeated this exchange throughout the duration of the performance, which ended when Daniels carried Zurilgen to the bed of the truck and drove off.[35] In recounting her memory of the performance, Zurilgen contradicts and complicates Marioni's singular historical narrative of *California Girls*.

Although she was not at the opening of *California Girls,* Chicago, Zurilgen's professor at Fresno State College, describes a remarkably similar performance in her 1975 autobiography, *Through the Flower*.[36] She writes about a weekend when she invited women artists from Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Francisco to share their work at her studio. Chicago recalls a performance

[35] Cheryl Rutter Zurilgen, interview by the author, January 21, 2021.

[36] Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 89–90.

with two women—one strapped to the milking machine, the other performing as a male butcher. Chicago remembers that the woman tied to the machine was nudged by the butcher and left to siphon blood into a pitcher. Her narrative diverges from Zurilgen's in the performance's ending. "He tied her up by her hands and then, as slides of meat and parts of mutilated cattle were shown, he poured the blood/milk she had 'given' onto her body," Chicago writes. "The last slide was cattle strung up by their haunches, projected onto the bloody body of the woman."[37] While Zurilgen may have performed the piece twice, she claims that she did not perform it again after *California Girls.* Over fifty years later, it is impossible to know how Marioni, Zurilgen, and Chicago's memories relate to one another; nor can one confirm any account as accurate.

Phelan suggests in "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction" that memories are divorced from the object itself, reflecting primarily on "the subject's own set of personal meanings and associations."[38] By rejecting claims of accuracy and embracing "the performative quality of seeing," Phelan emphasizes the meaning that loss acquires through memory—particularly in relation to performance. Viewing Marioni, Chicago, and Zurilgen's memories through this framework suggests that their individual positions determine their different perspectives. One may speculate that Zurilgen places Daniels in the performance because of his presence during her college years. Chicago may believe that two women performed because of her investment in separatist feminist institutions. Similarly, Marioni may visualize the milking machine strapped to Zurilgen's body as she wore a bathing suit and crawled on the floor—a more bodily and potentially controversial scene than Zurilgen

[37] Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, 89–90.

[38] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 147.

and Chicago describe—because the performance led to his dismissal from the Richmond Art Center. As Phelan's framework illuminates, the study of performance is the study of memory—a subjective pursuit.

Through an examination of written reviews of *California Girls,* a comprehensive image of other artworks displayed emerges. Thomas Albright, Margaret Crawford, and Brenda Richardson covered *California Girls* for *Artweek, Arts Magazine,* and *San Francisco Chronicle* respectively.[39] The writers describe numerous sculptures, such as Elizabeth King's (b. 1950) "drab female puppet hung against a dreary door."[40] Albright pays particular attention to Judith Linhares's (b. 1940) sculpture of found objects, describing a "macabre, vulgar, perversely beautiful folk object with the eerie, ritualistic quality of glow-in-the-dark crucifixes and fluorescent Jesuses."[41] Apart from Zurilgen, one performer is included in these reviews: Sherk's photographs of herself sitting in empty cages at the San Francisco Zoo, staring back at her audience.[42] Crawford, Richardson, and Albright also express their opinions of the curatorial conceit of the exhibition. While Albright praises *California Girls* and voices skepticism of the women's liberation movement, Crawford and Richardson question whether *California Girls*

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[39] Thomas Albright, "Richmond Art Center Women's Exhibition Defeats Premise," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 23, 1971, 38; Margaret Crawford, "Real California Girls," *Artweek*, February 27, 1971, 2; Brenda Richardson, "Bay Area," *Arts Magazine* 45, no. 6 (April 1971): 75.

[40] Crawford, "Real California Girls," 2.

[41] Albright, "Richmond Art Center Women's Exhibition Defeats Premise," 38.

[42] Albright, "Richmond Art Center Women's Exhibition Defeats Premise," 38.

represents a true commitment to women artists. Taken together, these reviews shed light on the exhibition's content: artwork in a range of different media by artists at various points in their careers, some working with decisively feminist content while others shared the aesthetics of their male contemporaries.[43]

Miss Chicago and the California Girls (c.1970–1971, fig. 3) is the most extensively documented work from the exhibition.[44] *Miss Chicago and the California Girls* is a black and white photograph that shows twelve women with light skin arranged into three tiered and staggered rows. They stand against a blank backdrop, popping their shoulders, blowing kisses, and thrusting their hips. They wear bikinis and sashes that bear the names of American cities; many also wear their hair long and unkempt, display unshaven underarms, or don oversized hats, hairbows, and dramatic makeup. A woman wearing dark sunglasses, a tiara, and a sash that reads "Miss North Hollywood" stands in the center of the image. Her dark hair falls over her left shoulder as her right shoulder and hip jut forward. Her image is circled in a dark, thick line with an arrow that extends to the right into the negative space. Below the arrow, "Miss North Hollywood" is written in loose cursive above the dark imprints of two lips. To the left of the image are two more sets of lips. Above them, "Best wishes—you're a pussycat!" is scrawled. Below the women are the words "Miss Chicago & the California Girls." This photograph

[43] Crawford, "Real California Girls," 2.

[44] See Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Judy Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art* Education (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2014); Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist* (New York: Harmony Books, 2007).

appears in numerous texts on Chicago's years at Fresno State College, such as Chicago's *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*.[45] While Marioni himself often notes Chicago's involvement in *California Girls*, he has forgotten *Miss Chicago and the California Girls*—a photograph that shares and challenges the name of his exhibition.[46]

Miss Chicago and the California Girls shows twelve artists from the Fresno State College Feminist Art Program, including Chicago, Zurilgen, Nancy Youdelman (b. 1948), and Faith Wilding (b. 1943).[47] The photograph exemplifies what Harmony Hammond describes as "women-centered" art: the women present themselves as "strong, healthy, active, comfortable with bodies, in contrast to the misogynist attitudes towards women's bodies and bodily functions that we observe in the history of western art."[48] They parody hypersexualized and objectified representations of women, proudly displaying their bodies while playfully mocking social constructs of beauty. Gail Levin's *Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist* notes that Chicago found the title *California Girls* condescending, suggesting that the piece was in direct response to it.[49] Marioni's title evokes the Beach Boy's 1965 song which describes California girls as tanned, bikini-wearing "dolls"—the very one-dimensional stereotype that Chicago and her students sought to dismantle.

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[45] Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art*, 18.

[46] Marioni, interview.

[47] Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 156.

[48] Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 338.

[49] Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 156.

California Girls is indicative of Marioni's hands-off approach to curating, which reflected principles established by his "social artworks."[50] Marioni's best-known social artwork is *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art* (1970, fig. 4). For this piece, Marioni invited sixteen friends to the Oakland Museum on a Monday, when it was closed, to drink beer in the empty museum.[51] The trash they left behind was displayed as the document of the work; their act of drinking beer was privileged as the work of art.[52] Marioni similarly centered conviviality and his social network when identifying artists to exhibit. He implicitly trusted the artists he invited and allowed them to select artworks for display without his curatorial oversight.[53] As such, when curating *California Girls,* Marioni simply invited all the women artists he knew and accepted any artworks the artists proposed.[54] Unsurprisingly, many of the women artists Marioni knew and included in *California Girls* were the wives of his male

[50] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 93. Performance scholar Nick Kaye describes Marioni's social artworks as situations in which "Marioni purposefully defers attention to the periphery of a conventional staged event, and toward that which occurs within it, precedes it, or continues through its presentation." Marioni also considered MOCA to be a social art. Nick Kaye, "One Time Over Another: Tom Marioni's Conceptual Art," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 35, no. 2 (May 2012): 27.

[51] The Oakland Museum is now known as the Oakland Museum of California.

[52] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 93.

[53] Marioni, interview.

[54] Marioni, interview.

friends.[55] Other invited artists, such as Rita Yokoi (b. 1938) and Zurilgen, studied at the Fresno State College Feminist Art Program; Marioni was socially connected to these artists because he was friends with Chicago and her then husband Lloyd Hamrol (b. 1937).[56]

This casual curatorial approach muddled the political impact of these works while also inadvertently reflecting debates within the feminist art movement. In her review of *California Girls*, Crawford writes,

> Very little of this [current political] activity is reflected in the Richmond show. Instead, it presents a miscellaneous collection of work, extremely varied in style and quality, produced by artists, some very well known, others students exhibiting for the first time, whose only common trait is that they are all women.[57]

Crawford commends the inclusion of works that "demonstrate an artist's conscious concern with her roles as a woman" but critiques the inclusion of these works alongside others that "are concerned with essentially the same problems male artists are working with."[58] However, these juxtapositions illustrate the diverse approaches and aesthetics undertaken by early feminist artists.[59] Even the language Marioni used, claiming that his exhibition of all-women artists was a feminist one, reflects the common conflation of the terms "woman artist" and "feminist artist" in

[55] For example, Marsha Fox (b. circa 1943) was married to Fox, Judy Raffael (b. 1937) to Joseph Raffael (b. 1933), and Janet Webb (b. circa 1939) to Larry Bell (b. 1939).

[56] Marioni, interview.

[57] Crawford, "Real California Girls," 2.

[58] Crawford, "Real California Girls," 2.

[59] Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 329.

the early 1970s.[60] As such, *California Girls* serves as an imperfect record of the contradictory dynamics and myriad artistic approaches of the early feminist art movement.

Marioni presents his curation of *California Girls* selectively in his memoir and various interviews. Marioni focuses on Zurilgen's undocumented performance as a way of framing his ouster from Richmond Art Center, but obscures her identity by referring to her only as Chicago's student. He has forgotten works, such as *Miss Chicago and the California Girls*, which signal the participating artists' critique of the exhibition. As in his artistic practice, Marioni's curation of *California Girls* centered on geniality and social relationships. By relying on his personal network and allowing artists to select their own artworks, Marioni neglected considered curatorial engagement. By carelessly curating *California Girls*, Marioni unknowingly muddled and ghettoized the work of the artists exhibited. Ironically, *California Girls* served as a reflection of the nuances and contradictions within the feminist movement in the early 1970s. The exhibition was also an important predecessor for Marioni's work at MOCA in the years to follow, when he continued to curate exhibitions without demonstrating much consideration, especially with regard to the representation of women artists.

Chapter Two: *Feed Me*

Two years later, Smith staged *Feed Me* in the women's restroom at MOCA—a former print factory.[61] She plugged in a space heater, placed a mattress on the floor, and arranged bottles of wine, fruit, incense, books, massage oils, and flowers around the room. She sat naked and

[60] Rosler, "The Private and The Public: Feminist Art in California."

[61] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 101.

alone as a looped recording of her voice played, "feed me, feed me."[62] A black and white photograph of *Feed Me* shows a slender, nude woman with light skin standing amongst scattered objects. The room's lighting, cast from above, reflects off the crown of her head and highlights her bare torso and breasts. Her body, positioned in front of a grid of white lines on a grey surface, occupies the right half of the image. She gazes down as she cups her left hand below an object she holds in her right. Her hair hangs over her face, revealing a sliver of her profile. She rests her weight on her right leg, bending her left slightly at the knee. A low plank holds a stack of white napkins, two wine glasses, and three bottles. Smith allowed visitors into this room one at a time to offer her nourishment—from reading books aloud to proposing affection or sex.[63] Smith conceived of *Feed Me* with feminist intentions, which she continues to defend to this day. Through a close reading of *Feed Me* in relation to other artworks in *All Night Sculptures,* I explore how Marioni's curation bolstered *Feed Me*'s feminist ideals, yet also contributed to critics' misrepresentation of the gendered power dynamics at play in the work.

Smith performed *Feed Me* in *All Night Sculptures,* a group exhibition at MOCA that lasted from sunset to sunrise for one night in 1973. Marioni's idea was simple: he invited his friends to create artworks that lasted all night.[64] Nine artists participated.[65] In *Memento Mori*

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[62] Jennie Klein, "Feeding the Body: The Work of Barbara Smith," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21, no. 1 (January 1999): 30.

[63] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 101.

[64] Ming, "Making and Unmaking the Museum: Tom Marioni and San Francisco Conceptual Art, 1968–1979," 178; Roth, "Towards a History of California Performance Art," 99.

[65] Marioni, *Beer, Art, and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 100.

(1973, fig. 5), Fox built a small room, accessible by ladder, under the shaft of a skylight on the roof of MOCA. Inside was a low board covered in white sheets—resembling a mattress—and a metal bowl holding a sponge soaked in vinegar.[66] In *Pretending to be a Gargoyle* (1973, fig. 6), Sherk posed as a gargoyle on the rooftop and scrambled eggs for an audience of pigeons.[67] Marioni hired a friend, Frank Youmans, to perform his piece, *The Artist's Studio* (1973, fig. 7), to disguise his conflict of interest in curating his own art.[68] Marioni had already selected artists for *All Night Sculptures* when Smith shared the idea for *Feed Me* with him during a conference in Idyllwild, California.[69] Although the exhibition card was already printed and press for the show released, he invited her to join them regardless.[70] Smith wrote to Marioni a few days later to accept his invitation.[71]

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[66] Marioni, *Beer, Art, and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 102.

[67] Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong, eds., *Performance Anthology: Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980), 75; A. Belard, "All Night Sculptures," *Artweek* 4 (May 26, 1973): 3.

[68] Marioni, *Beer, Art, and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 102.

[69] Barbara T. Smith, interview by the author, January 18, 2021. Marioni and Smith were also friends. They met through Robert Irwin (b. 1928), who introduced Marioni to Smith and Burden's alternative art space, F-Space Gallery. Marioni, interview.

[70] Smith, interview.

[71] "Letter to Tom Marioni from Barbara T. Smith," 1973, 1995.46.4.218.a-s, Museum of Conceptual Art Archive, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.

Smith created *Feed Me* to respond to the gendered power dynamics she encountered as a female artist.[72] After a divorce, she enrolled in the University of California, Irvine's MFA program, hoping to join a community of artists invested in sharing ideas and discussing artworks. Instead, she quickly realized that men attempted to seduce her during studio visits.[73] These predatory encounters led Smith to reimagine the stereotypical roles of passive women and active men. In *Feed Me*, she exercised authority over her audience and challenged them to treat her as she wished. Smith filled the room with sensual objects, prompting visitors to offer her food, wine, marijuana, and massages. Most of Smith's visitors discussed art with her; she granted sex or affection to a few.[74] By embracing her intellect and her sexuality, Smith defied the stereotypes held by patriarchal society, including some feminists, that women who enjoy sex are immoral and witless.[75] She also contradicted the belief held by some feminists that, as art historian Lisa Tickner wrote in 1978, "the most significant area of women and erotic art is the *de*-eroticizing, the *de*-colonizing of the female body."[76] Challenging these sexually conservative beliefs, Smith

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[72] Klein, "Feeding the Body: The Work of Barbara Smith," 31.

[73] Klein, "Feeding the Body: The Work of Barbara Smith," 30.

[74] Barbara T. Smith and Kate Johnson, eds., *What You Need to Know: The Story Behind One of the Most Talked About and Misunderstood Early Performance Art Pieces* (self-published, 2019), 5–13.

[75] Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 338.

[76] Lisa Tickner, "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970," *Art History* 1, no. 2 (June 1978): 239.

forged ahead—in *Feed Me* and throughout her career—in search of ways to manifest her full intellectual and sexual self when interacting with men.

Only sixteen men and three women visited Smith during *Feed Me.*[77] The vast majority of viewers at *All Night Sculptures* only saw a line of people outside of Smith's door and heard a rumor that she was having sex with any man who entered the room (fig. 8).[78] After the one-night exhibition closed, Fox published the only review of *All Night Sculptures* in *Artweek* under the pseudonym A. Belard.[79] He inaccurately claimed that "Barbara Smith exposed herself in a series of one-to-one relationships with all who would impose their egocentric needs upon her naked open body."[80] Fox's writing implies that Smith occupied a passive role in *Feed Me*, meeting the needs of her (male) audience rather than establishing her own terms. As the only published writing on *Feed Me* at the time, Fox's essay left an enduring mark on the performance's historicization and Smith's artistic legacy. Perhaps due to this false narrative, the emerging feminist community dismissed the piece.[81] Marioni later relayed to Smith that Richardson,

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[77] Jones, "Lost Bodies: Early 1970s Los Angeles Performance Art in Art History," 146–147.

[78] Smith, interview.

[79] Marioni, interview. Smith notes that Belard is Fox's twin brother, Larry Fox. Smith and Johnson, *What You Need to Know*, 27.

[80] Belard, "All Night Sculptures."

[81] Today, *Feed Me* is widely considered a pioneering feminist performance by feminist art historians. See, for example, Jennie Klein, "Feeding the Body: The Work of Barbara Smith," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 21, no. 1 (January 1999): 24–35; Jennie Klein, Moira

curator of the University Art Museum, Berkeley said Smith had "set women's lib[eration] back twenty years"—framing the controversy to blame Smith, rather than Fox or others who misrepresented her.[82] Fifty years later, Smith is still working to correct these misconceptions about *Feed Me* through projects such as *What You Need to Know* (2019), a performance and panel discussion at Highways Performance Space and Gallery in Los Angeles.[83]

The pervasive misunderstanding of *Feed Me* overlooked Smith's use of sexist tropes to critique women's representation throughout western art history. Roth observed in a 1973 interview with Smith that the artist's naked body and the sensuous objects she surrounded herself with evoked the archetype of the odalisque.[84] Smith knew how men would respond to this imagery. She writes, "I designed this piece knowing that the image of a nude woman by herself in a room would provoke certain expectations. I wanted to challenge each participant entering to face their projections and see me as a person, not an object."[85] As Lippard describes in "Projecting a Feminist Critique," tactics such as these posed challenges for early feminist artists and their audiences. "The earliest feminist artists . . . found that no matter how much they talked about their intentions, public perception was unable to grasp the meaning of the work as they had

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Roth, Jenni Sorkin, and Kristine Stiles, *The 21st Century Odyssey Part II: The Performances of Barbara T. Smith* (Claremont, CA: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2005).

[82] Smith and Johnson, *What You Need to Know*, 13.

[83] Smith and Johnson, *What You Need to Know*, 58.

[84] Smith and Johnson, *What You Need to Know*, 39.

[85] Smith and Johnson, *What You Need to Know*, 5.

intended it," she writes.[86] Similarly, Smith's audience misinterpreted her use of her body, placing her into the familiar trope of passive female subject available for consumption.

Smith countered these perspectives by using tactics of performance to resist the objectification and voyeurism that women have been subject to throughout history. "In their traditional exhibitionist role," writes film theorist Laura Mulvey, "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.*"[87] Mulvey defines voyeuristic scopophilia as the pleasure taken in the disembodied gaze, which is allowed to see without being seen. Smith challenged voyeuristic scopophilia with the structure of *Feed Me,* which limited entry to one person at a time. Mulvey defines voyeurism as relying on predictable narratives and outcomes, such as those found in mainstream media.[88] *Feed Me* dissolved the boundary between audience and artist by relying on the viewer's engagement to determine the outcomes of the performance. As such, Smith sought to prevent viewers from comfortably objectifying her by destabilizing traditional narratives and bringing the audience into a space of potential confrontation with the performer.[89]

While Smith resisted the voyeuristic gaze, *All Night Sculptures* included works that encouraged the objectification of women. Marioni's own contribution, *The Artist's Studio,*

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[86] Lucy Lippard, "Projecting a Feminist Critique," *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 338.

[87] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1975): 11.

[88] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 9.

[89] Erin Striff, "Bodies of Evidence: Feminist Performance Art," *Critical Survey* 9, no. 1 (1997): 10–11.

featured a topless woman whose torso was trapped within a wooden plank. Marioni instructed Youmans to spend the night making a mold from the woman's body—privileging the act of creation, rather than the final product, as the work of art.[90] In *The Artist's Studio*, Marioni explored time as sculpture.[91] He also inadvertently encouraged the fetishistic scopophilia described by Mulvey; he did so by reducing the model's body to a sculptural object and visually fragmenting her body by isolating her bust.[92] *The Artist's Studio* and *Feed Me* used similar visual language; both used women's bodies as sculptural forms to comment on the role of objects in museums. In contrast to Smith, who subverted traditional gender dynamics, Marioni recreated the well-worn dynamic of the mute and passive nude female and the male artistic "genius."[93] While Smith required intimacy and interaction with each viewer, *The Artist's Studio* and the model's body sat in plain view for anyone to behold—allowing for a disembodied and

[90] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 102; Ming, "Making and Unmaking the Museum: Tom Marioni and San Francisco Conceptual Art, 1968–1979," 182.

[91] "Tom Marioni," interview by Nick Kaye, *SiteWorks: San Francisco Performance 1969–85*, October 24, 2012, http://siteworks.exeter.ac.uk/interviews/tommarioni.

[92] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 13–14.

[93] *Parallels and Intersections: Art/Women/California 1950–2000*, October 13, 2002, box 289, Barbara T. Smith Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Ming, "Making and Unmaking the Museum: Tom Marioni and San Francisco Conceptual Art, 1968–1979," 182–183.

voyeuristic viewing experience that privileged male desire.[94] Marioni created a confusing experience for viewers by pairing these works, which appear to be similar but stake opposing claims.

Regardless of this curatorial oversight, Smith saw MOCA as the "perfect place" for *Feed Me* and believes she may have never performed the work had Marioni not invited her to participate in *All Night Sculptures*.[95] MOCA also allowed *Feed Me* to operate as an institutional critique of the gendered space of the museum, confronting the men who occupy such spaces. As Klein highlights in "The Body's Odyssey," *Feed Me* took place during the height of the debate surrounding feminist separatism, as Chicago and others advocated for alternative institutions such as the Woman's Building.[96] However, *Feed Me* could not have functioned as Smith intended in a women-only institution. *Feed Me* required that she interact with men who assumed women to be sex objects and "challenge the masculine 'museum' from within its walls rather than remove herself entirely from that venue."[97] By posing as an object of fetishized display in a space that embraced the boyish and rebellious aesthetics of Bay Area Conceptualism without consideration of those excluded, Smith's work questioned the norms implied by these aesthetics.

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[94] This is not the only piece of Marioni's to employ voyeurism with the nude female form. He also "performed" as an artist drawing a nude female model in bars in order to circumnavigate nudity laws in the 1960s. See Marioni, *Beer, Art, and Philosophy: A Memoir*.

[95] Smith, interview.

[96] Klein, "The Body's Odyssey," 13.

[97] Klein, "The Body's Odyssey," 13.

Little documentation of *Feed Me* exists, save for a few photographs and Smith's personal journal. With scarce documents of the performance to work from, the language used by artist, curator, and participant to describe it carry particular weight. Across multiple interviews and narrative texts, Marioni defends Smith's intentions in an unconvincing and reductive manner.[98] Most frequently, Marioni evades reflecting on *Feed Me* by simply describing the work as being "about how men relate to women."[99] In a 2014 interview in *San Francisco Arts Quarterly,* Marioni described Smith's performance as catering to the male viewer—replicating Fox's critique in *Artweek*. Marioni stated, "It was designed for the men or the people to interact with her, or use her, even, so outside this room was just a single light bulb hanging, it was like a street corner."[100] While Marioni claims to defend Smith's intentions, this description of the performance counteracts Smith and reinforces the very problems she sought to critique.

By including *Feed Me* in *All Night Sculptures,* Marioni provided the ideal platform and context for the work—allowing Smith to bring an institutional critique of the museum and the men who occupy it to that space. Considering other artworks in *All Night Sculptures*, it is clear that Marioni's inclusion of *Feed Me* was rooted in Marioni's appreciation for the formal provocations of the work rather than an understanding of, or commitment to, its political and conceptual implications. The MOCA audience and feminists alike struggled to understand *Feed Me* as feminist—an issue exasperated by rumors at the opening, as well as Fox's and Marioni's

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[98] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy*, 101; "Tom Marioni: MOCA (Museum of Conceptual Art), 1970–1984," 25.

[99] Marioni, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: A Memoir*, 102.

[100] "Tom Marioni: MOCA (Museum of Conceptual Art), 1970–1984," 25.

misrepresentations of the work. Furthermore, Marioni paired *Feed Me* with *The Artist's Studio*—a work that used visually similar components to reinforce misogynistic traditions. Thus, while Marioni's inclusion of *Feed Me* at MOCA provided the context Smith required to achieve her feminist aims, Marioni also perpetuated misunderstandings of Smith's work.

Chapter Three: *Dante Hotel*

In October 1973, Hershman Leeson rented Room 47 at the Hotel Dante at 310 Columbus Avenue in San Francisco.[101] A faintly colored photograph shows the room's bed. Two tufts of dark hair rest on one pillow, emerging from a pile of crumpled blankets and sheets. The wrinkled fabric fills the lower two-thirds of the image; a bright light positioned behind the viewer creates stark peaks and shadowed valleys in the folds. The mound of fabric casts a stark shadow onto the adjacent door and wall, which meet in an obtuse angle. On the wall at the head of the bed, multiples of one indiscernible black and white image are arranged in three rows and three columns. The grid of images is torn and peeling on its left edge. Dark corners of carpet extend from both sides of the bed, flanked by stark white bedding and weathered walls. *Dante Hotel,* Hershman Leeson's installation in Room 47, is indicative of the artist's unconventional tactics to circumnavigate art world institutions that refused her entry in the early 1970s. By considering *Dante Hotel* in relation to Marioni's curation of *California Girls* and *Feed Me*, I suggest that Hershman Leeson was not exhibited at MOCA due to Marioni's social approach to curating, which relied on the artists in his network. Although Marioni did not intend to make curatorial

[101] Lynn Hershman Leeson, *The Dante Hotel: November 30, 1973–August 31, 1974* (self-pub., n.d.), n.p. (7). Located in Lynn Hershman Leeson papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Palo Alto.

decisions based on gender bias, he perpetuated exclusionary systems through his undiscerning curatorial style.

Hershman Leeson and Eleanor Coppola (b. 1936) decided to rent a space for a site-specific installation after seeing the 1973 exhibition *Works in Spaces* at the San Francisco Museum of Art.[102] The young artists were frustrated with their limited exhibition opportunities as women making ephemeral works. "I started to think, who needs a museum anyway," Hershman Leeson recalls. "If you want to show your work, you can do it anywhere."[103] This mentality aligned with the practices of other women in the Bay Area, such as Montano and Sherk, who used public locations as alternative exhibition and performance venues.[104] In this spirit, Hershman Leeson and Coppola sought a space outside of museums and galleries to show their work. After scouting a church basement, dance studio, vacant doughnut shop, and dime store, they selected Hotel Dante—a run-down residential hotel in San Francisco's North Beach

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[102] Hershman Leeson, *The Dante Hotel: November 30, 1973–August 31, 1974*, n.p. (7). San Francisco Museum of Art was renamed San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1975. "Our History," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, accessed March 14, 2021, https://www.sfmoma.org/read/our-history/.

[103] Lynn Hershman Leeson, "A Talk with Lynn Hershman Leeson" (lecture, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, March 21, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY1Tb1SVHig.

[104] Zimbardo, "Public Address: Bay Area Performances, Temporary Installations, and Nomadic Projects," 40.

neighborhood.[105] Visitors could request a key from the hotel attendants to visit Hershman Leeson's work in Room 47 or Coppola's in Room 50, which were open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (fig. 9).[106]

Hershman Leeson used the environment of the hotel and the North Beach neighborhood to construct the identities of the figures who occupied the bed in Room 47. "The space is the sculpture," Hershman Leeson wrote in her journal shortly before *Dante Hotel* opened to the public. "Anything I put into it takes from it."[107] She replaced the lightbulbs in the room with one green and one pink bulb.[108] She used lipstick to scrawl "Drop Dead! I love you. C U Later," on the mirror of the vanity (fig. 10). She scattered sundries on its counter—"curlers, Tampax, skin cream, lipstick, rouge, [and] birth control pills."[109] In the closet, a radio played local news. Near the bed, a hidden tape recorder played breathing sounds.[110] Albright wrote of the scene in the *San Francisco Chronicle*,

> one gets the sense of having entered the isolated room of someone—friend or stranger—who has quietly overdosed on sleeping pills; looking through the bric-a-brac of their possessions, you try to reconstruct a life, a reason, only to conclude that despondency is

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[105] Hershman Leeson*, The Dante Hotel: November 30, 1973–August 31, 1974*, n.p. (7).

[106] Peter Weibel, ed., *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2016), 66.

[107] Hershman Leeson*, The Dante Hotel: November 30, 1973–August 31, 1974*, n.p. (10).

[108] Peter Selz, "Lynn Hershman at the Dante Hotel," *Art in America* 62, no. 2 (March–April 1974): 119.

[109] Selz, "Lynn Hershman at the Dante Hotel," 119.

[110] Weibel, ed., *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar*, 66.

always the same color, a shabbily clinical off-white.[111]

This effect is reflected in *Dante Hotel*'s sudden closure. After a visitor called the police, confusing the artwork for a crime scene, law enforcement dissembled the installation and took the artifacts in as evidence, where they presumably remain today.[112]

Hershman Leeson never exhibited at MOCA. Marioni claims that this is because she was not a performance artist.[113] However, Hershman Leeson's focus on the sculptural space of Room 47 aligns with Marioni's interest in site-specific installations. Marioni practically describes *Dante Hotel* in writing that, "Situational, or environmental, art is art made for the place it is shown, physical space and often political and social position of the inviting institution taken into account."[114] Hershman Leeson used the space of the Hotel Dante and its surrounding neighborhood as her guide in constructing the scene in Room 47. She considered the position of the residential hotel within larger structures and in relation to the more traditional exhibiting institutions from which she was excluded. Furthermore, it is disingenuous for Marioni to claim that all MOCA artists exclusively presented performances. Take Fox's *Memento Mori,* shown in *All Night Sculptures,* as an example. Marioni describes this piece as "a kind of Surrealist environment tableau sculpture," similar to the language Albright and others used to describe

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[111] Thomas Albright, "A Ghostly Hotel Room Tableau," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 22, 1973, 31.

[112] Weibel, ed., *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar*, 66.

[113] Marioni, interview.

[114] Marioni, *Writings on Art: 1969–1999*, 40.

Dante Hotel.[115] As Hershman Leeson did with *Dante Hotel*, Fox created an installation that was activated by the audience's presence—the artist was absent, relying on the environment he constructed and the space that it occupied to serve as the sculpture.

Furthermore, Smith's *Feed Me* and Hershman Leeson's *Dante Hotel* shared formal and conceptual concerns. In her journal from 1973, Hershman Leeson describes an evening with Coppola and Roth in which the three women discuss recent artworks referencing sex work and bedrooms. "We talked also of Barbara Smith's creation of a one-woman brothel at MOCA last spring," Hershman Leeson wrote. "I am glad that I have my deposit at the Dante. People already seem to have brought the flop house to the Museum; it seems logical to accomplish the reverse."[116] While Hershman Leeson clearly misunderstood *Feed Me,* her writing suggests how the two works echo one another in using seedy aesthetics to spotlight women's bodies and sexuality. Both artists commandeered the female stereotypes of harlots, odalisques, or whores deemed undesirable and requiring repression by male-dominated culture throughout history.[117] Embodying these roles, Smith and Hershman Leeson challenged the space of sanctimonious art institutions by embracing the smutty environment of the "flop house." They also defied the notion of the museum as the singular space to view artwork—*Feed Me* by interrogating and reimagining the role of women in these spaces, *Dante Hotel* by circumventing the museum entirely.

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[115] Tom Marioni, "ALL NIGHT SCULPTURE," n.d., 1995.46.456, Museum of Conceptual Art Archive, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.

[116] Hershman Leeson*, The Dante Hotel: November 30, 1973–August 31, 1974*, n.p. (8).

[117] Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 338.

Dante Hotel and *Feed Me* also had stark differences, most notably in how the artists mitigated the male gaze in relation to the artist's body. *Feed Me* hinged on Smith's physical presence and her interactions with the audience, which forbade voyeurism by confronting the viewer. Hershman Leeson constructed the identities of her alter egos through the use of objects, space, and place—a tactic that required her absence and encouraged voyeurism. However, Hershman Leeson left a trace of her body in the work by using her own face to mold the masks she placed in the bed of *Dante Hotel*.[118] This gesture indicates Hershman Leeson's exploration of the social construction and performance of (female) identity throughout her practice. Amelia Jones compares Hershman Leeson's work to that of surrealist feminist Claude Cahun, née Lucy Schwob (b. 1894–1954), in this regard—noting how both artists use "simulacral self-display . . . as a component of feminine masquerade, central to female experience in patriarchy."[119] Similar to Cahun's photographs, Hershman Leeson staged multiple versions of herself in *Dante Hotel* through masking—calling attention to the artist's body and countering the modernist tradition of veiling the artist's identity.[120]

Hershman Leeson and Smith also differed in their approaches to finding exhibition opportunities in the early 1970s. As women working in the emerging media of performance and

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[118] Weibel, ed., *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar*, 66.

[119] Amelia Jones, "Roberta Breitmore Lives On," in *The Art and Films of Lynn Hershman Leeson: Secret Agents, Private I*, ed. Meredith Tromble (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 107–108.

[120] Jones, "Roberta Breitmore Lives On," 107.

installation, they had few peers or supporters.[121] Smith navigated this hurdle by befriending powerful men such as Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), Paul McCarthy (b. 1945), Burden, and Irwin.[122] Through this circle—specifically Irwin's admiration of her collaboration with Burden on the alternative art space F-Space Gallery—Smith became connected to Marioni and exhibited at MOCA.[123] Hershman Leeson, by contrast, overcame her isolation as a woman artist by manipulating the artworld systems that denied her participation. This tactic extended beyond her rejection of the white cube in *Dante Hotel*. In the late 1960s, Hershman Leeson wrote under three art critic pseudonyms: Prudence Juris, Herbert Goode, and Gay Abandon.[124] Hershman Leeson wrote the articles so that, while the critics often disagreed with one another, they all asserted that she made noteworthy work. She collected the published articles and brought them with her to galleries when seeking exhibition opportunities.[125] Of this project, she states, "Some people say it was dishonest, but exclusionary practices are also dishonest."[126] Projects such as this emblematize the prioritization of freedom and subversion of authority that Hershman Leeson applied to art world structures.

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[121] Lynn Hershman Leeson, interview by the author, February 26, 2021.

[122] Klein, "The Body's Odyssey," 9.

[123] Marioni, interview.

[124] Weibel, ed., *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar*, 36.

[125] Weibel, ed., *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar*, 36.

[126] "Interview with Lynn Hershman Leeson," interview by Hou Hanru in *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar,* ed. Peter Weibel (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2016), 175.

As a result of this approach, Hershman Leeson operated outside of conceptual, performance, and feminist art circles in the early 1970s.[127] Hershman Leeson describes her early experiences as an artist in San Francisco as follows: "Nonsupport; being an outsider; being in a landscape . . . where I had complete freedom, because I was not part of any market system or commodity."[128] Considering herself separate from any art scene, Hershman Leeson posed as wealthy by applying for credit cards, moving to San Francisco's well-heeled Pacific Heights neighborhood, and wearing Armani suits.[129] She also forged new social circles, as demonstrated by her collaboration with Coppola and her husband, filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola. She befriended feminist sex worker and founder of COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) Margo St. James, anti-war activist Jerry Rubin, Timothy Leary, and Hunter S. Thompson, among others.[130] While not belonging to any cliques, she did connect with key individuals in the art community, such as Peter Selz, director of the Berkeley University Art Museum, Bruce Conner (1933–2008), Helen and Newton Harrison (1929–2019 and b. 1932), and Christo Javacheff

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[127] "Interview with Lynn Hershman Leeson," 174–175.

[128] Kristine Stiles, "Landscape of Tremors: Lynn Hershman Leeson, Toward an Intellectual History," in *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar,* ed. Peter Weibel (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2016), 133.

[129] Stiles, "Landscape of Tremors," 134–135.

[130] Stiles, "Landscape of Tremors," 135–136. COYOTE was the first sex workers' rights group in the United States when it was founded in 1973. "COYOTE Founded in California," Global Network of Sex Work Projects, accessed March 14, 2021, https://www.nswp.org/timeline/event/coyote-founded-california.

(1935–2020) and Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon (1935–2009).[131] "I always enjoyed the advantage of disguising to fit unobtrusively into diverse factions of society;" Hershman Leeson writes, "observing all of them; belonging to none of them."[132] These communities provided professional opportunities for Hershman Leeson, such as her role as associate project director for Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Running Fence* (1976), and allowed her to develop her artistic practice outside of the restriction of expectations.[133]

Although Marioni was a core figure of the art scene that Hershman Leeson felt excluded from, the two interacted professionally on occasion. Marioni included Hershman Leeson in a 1970 exhibition at the Richmond Art Center, *Three One Man Shows by Three Women*.[134] Hershman Leeson interviewed Marioni in 1973 as Prudence Juris for *Studio International* and *Artweek*. Hershman Leeson admired MOCA and thought the space was vital. She recalls attending "almost all of [the MOCA exhibitions]" and trying to be friends with Marioni and his circle.[135] She also remembers approaching Marioni after noticing that he neglected to mention her in a text he wrote about *Running Fence*.[136] Hershman Leeson claims that Marioni stated he

[131] Stiles, "Landscape of Tremors," 136.

[132] Stiles, "Landscape of Tremors," 138.

[133] Stiles, "Landscape of Tremors," 136–137.

[134] Spencer, phone call.

[135] Hershman Leeson, interview.

[136] Hershman Leeson is likely referring to Tom Marioni, ed., *Vision #5—Artists' Photographs* (Oakland: Crown Point Press, 1982).

omitted her because "no one knew who she was."[137] This perspective privileges reputation and social status over artistic production, a stark contrast to Marioni's curatorial approach to *California Girls*. While Marioni exhibited numerous unknown and unrepresented artists in *California Girls*, many of the artists had a social connection to Marioni. Hershman Leeson's claim suggests that, without such connections, Marioni denied her wider recognition, such as that which could be gained by exhibiting at MOCA.

Dante Hotel reveals the gaps in MOCA's exhibition history. *Dante Hotel* was well-publicized. Marioni was doubtless aware of it as a curator well-versed in contemporary art and a leader of one of the Bay Area's only conceptual and performance art institutions. In *Dante Hotel*, Hershman Leeson worked with formal and conceptual ideas similar to the ones Smith explored in *Feed Me*. However, Hershman Leeson was not part of Marioni's circle. Rather than ingratiate herself to this group, she chose to circumvent it. As such, Hershman Leeson was excluded from MOCA—a gross omission on Marioni's behalf.

Conclusion

The exhibition *California Girls,* Smith's *Feed Me,* and Hershman Leeson's *Dante Hotel* reveal Marioni's undiscerning curatorial approach that was rooted in his social network. In *California Girls*, Marioni sought to highlight the emerging feminist art movement by inviting the women artists he knew to exhibit a work of their choosing. This approach resulted in an aimless exhibition united solely by the gender of the artists. In *All Night Sculptures*, he gave Smith a platform for *Feed Me*, a controversial and pioneering feminist performance. However, Marioni superficially engaged with *Feed Me* and paired the work with *The Artist's Studio*—signaling that

[137] Hershman Leeson, interview.

he held conflicting stances on the objectification of women. By examining *Dante Hotel*, I suggest that Marioni omitted Hershman Leeson from MOCA's program due to her place outside of his social circle, regardless of the similarities between her work and the work that he exhibited. Analyzing these case studies recalls a playful but revealing line from Marioni's *Writings on Art, 1969–1999*, which reads, "A true artist has no sex. A true artist has no race. A true artist has no money."[138] By disregarding differences of race and gender, Marioni inadvertently privileged white, middle-class men when selecting artists, thus perpetuating exclusive systems. As such, MOCA and Marioni's wider curatorial practice in the 1970s reflect a notable gender bias, which intersected with the exclusion of other populations due to race or social status.

These case studies invite consideration of how artists and curators of the twentieth century may inform and inspire future work. The legendary status of figures such as Marioni does not preclude historicizing and analyzing their oversights from a contemporary perspective. Grappling with these figures' shortcomings, we can reimagine the engrained structures and systems—such as networking and nepotism—that reproduce inequity in the contemporary art world. Examining MOCA as an institution also highlights the curator's responsibility in entering artists and artworks into the historical canon. In doing so, I advocate for rigorous, scholarly curation which roots itself in research and exploration, rather than the convenience of readily available networks. Marioni's curation at MOCA also reveals the limitations of working within traditional notions of arts institutions or museums. While Marioni sought to break apart from

[138] Marioni, *Writings on Art: 1969–1999*, 82.

modernist legacies through MOCA, he recreated their systems and biases by replicating the authority of the museum.

The ramifications of Marioni's informal, perfunctory curatorial style shed light on the importance of fully informed curators who advocate for more than artistic freedom and platforms. Curators must consider the contextualization of works, grapple with the meanings produced when artworks are juxtaposed with one another, and contend with the politics of representation. Without serving these critical curatorial functions, curators may unknowingly perpetuate systems of power, as Marioni did at MOCA. Marioni presented groundbreaking feminist performances at MOCA, regardless of how few and far between these works were. However, whether a curator shows work by any artist from a marginalized community matters less than *how* this work is curated. As such, MOCA's institutional bias is most evident in Marioni's mishandling of the scant feminist works he presented.

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Figure 1. Barbara T. Smith, *Feed Me (Preparation)*, 1973, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Dick Kilgroe. Source: Peggy Phelan, ed., *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970–1983* (New York: Routledge, 2012), n.p. (plate 55).

Figure 2. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Dante Hotel (Sleeping Figures)*, 1973, installation documentation, color photograph. Source: Lynn Hershman Leeson papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Palo Alto.

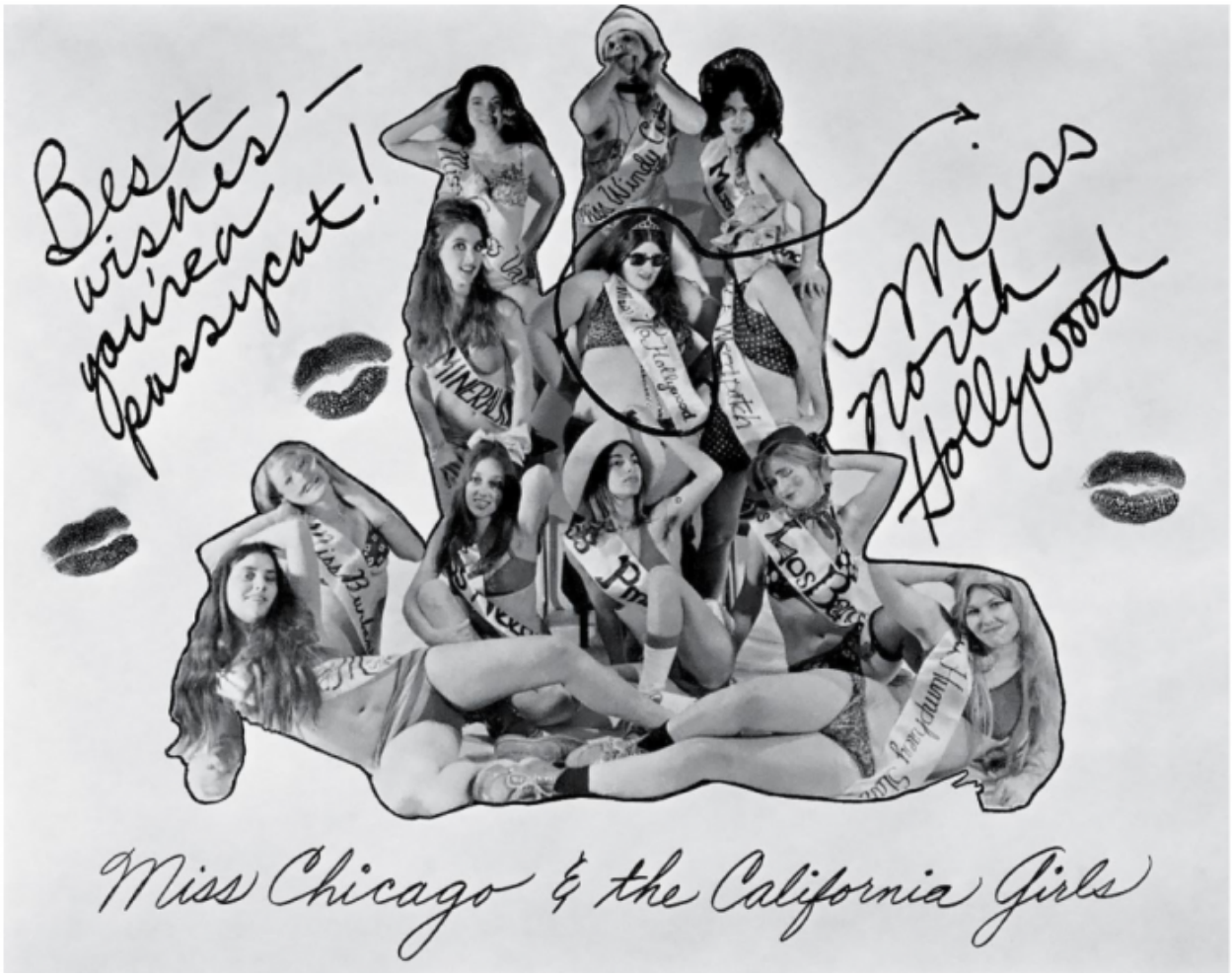

Figure 3. Judy Chicago et al., *Miss Chicago and the California Girls*, c. 1970–71, poster. Photograph by Dori Atlantis. Source: Judy Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2014), 19.

Figure 4. Tom Marioni, *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of* Art, 1970, action documentation, color photograph. Source: "Tom Marioni," interview by Nick Kaye, *SiteWorks: San Francisco Performance 1969–85*, October 24, 2012, http://siteworks.exeter.ac.uk/interviews/tommarioni.

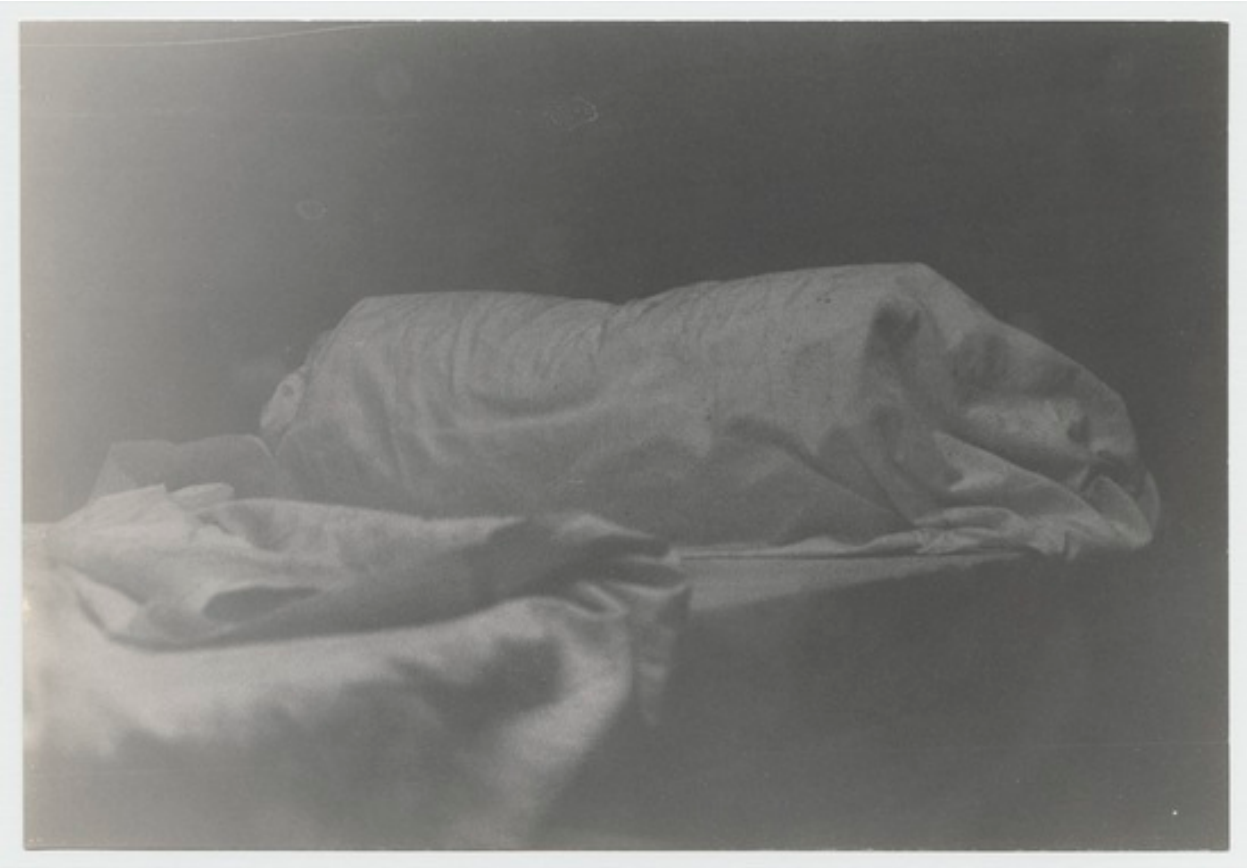

Figure 5. Terry Fox, *Memento Mori*, 1973, installation documentation, gelatin silver print. Source: Museum of Conceptual Art Archive, University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.

Figure 6. Bonnie Ora Sherk, *Pretending to be a Gargoyle*, 1973, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Source: Museum of Conceptual Art Archive, University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.

Figure 7. Tom Marioni and Frank Youmans, *The Artist's Studio*, 1973, performance documentation, color photograph. Source: Museum of Conceptual Art Archive, University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.

Figure 8. Barbara T. Smith, *Feed Me (Line Up)*, 1973, performance documentation, gelatin silver print. Photograph by Dick Kilgroe. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 9. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Dante Hotel (Lynn Signing In)*, 1973, installation documentation, color photograph. Source: Lynn Hershman Leeson papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Palo Alto.

Figure 10. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Dante Hotel (Dresser)*, 1973, installation documentation, color photograph. Source: Lynn Hershman Leeson papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Palo Alto.