

frieze

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Lee Lozano and Bik van der Pol

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Abracadabra: at the peak of her artistic career the artist vanishes. From 1970 to 1982 Lee Lozano (aka 'E' who wanted nothing more to do with 'the universe') performed a piece commanding herself to disappear from the art world. She called it The Dropout Piece.

Hailed by Lucy Lippard as one of the era's greatest Conceptual artists and given a solo show of her earlier paintings at the Whitney in 1970, Lozano finally succeeded in dropping out of the world by dropping dead in 1999 and being buried in an unmarked grave in Dallas. She had turned away from the creation of paintings in the late 1960s, instead choosing to make art that was indistinguishable from the extremely disciplined life she led. These works were manifested as quirky commands inscribed in the notebooks and journals she fastidiously kept, some 16 wrinkled pages of which, both handwritten and typed, were on display at this show. At times Lozano was extremely funny: Grass Piece (1969), for example, involved buying a load of marijuana, smoking it and staying high every day, all day, over the course of six weeks. (Paranoia and tiredness led her to follow it up with a month-long No Grass Piece, 1969). At other times her practice was extremely private. It would have been great to eavesdrop, for example, on the conversations she had for her Dialogue Piece (1969), for which she telephoned all of the art-world notables she knew - among them Dan Graham, Walter de Maria and Robert Morris - and invited them to engage with her in an unrecorded dialogue. The resultant art work is simply a list of the people she spoke to and didn't speak to, accompanied by very minor anecdotes: 'Dan Graham and I have important dialogue in that definite changes were immediately effected because of it' is one such teaser of the many long tête-à-têtes she had over the course of eight months.

'Seek the extreme' is an entry in her journal during April 1969. She began The Dropout Piece in 1970, writing 'it is the hardest work I have ever done [in] that it involves the destruction of (or at least complete understanding of) powerful emotional habits. I want to get over my habit of emotional dependence on love.' A year later she would direct her dropout energies towards those of her own sex. Frustration with the feminist critics who railed on her for showing her paintings in the very male institution of the Whitney led to The Boycott Piece (1971), for which Lozano decided to avoid all women. The work developed into an extreme response she upheld until her dying day. She apparently even refused to go into a shop if there was a woman behind the counter.

Lozano's work is anything but blackballed today, even if she still remains a relatively unknown figure. Her reputation was recently resuscitated by two Dutch artists Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol (aka Bik van der Pol). They too have made their art indistinguishable from their life. Their own Disappearance Piece (1998-2000), for example, involved the theft of nearly 100 handbooks - How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found. This was a response to the public's willingness to steal books, and supposedly demonstrated the death of the 'spectator' by locating the art work as something distanced from artists and created by the hands of a somewhat kleptomaniac stranger. Documentation of this piece was haphazardly hung: blue gel was stuck to the windows, which gave the gallery an almost Yves Klein blue glow, or what Bik van der Pol described as 'separating the art space from the outside world'. Klein's declared '... hatred for birds which flew back and forth across my blue, cloudless sky, because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work' filled one corner of the room where a rifle was propped against the wall. However, the show was not so much a homage to a forgotten artist, who was driven to alienate herself from what she saw as her handicapping need for attention, as a springboard for discussion about the state of Conceptual art today.

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