

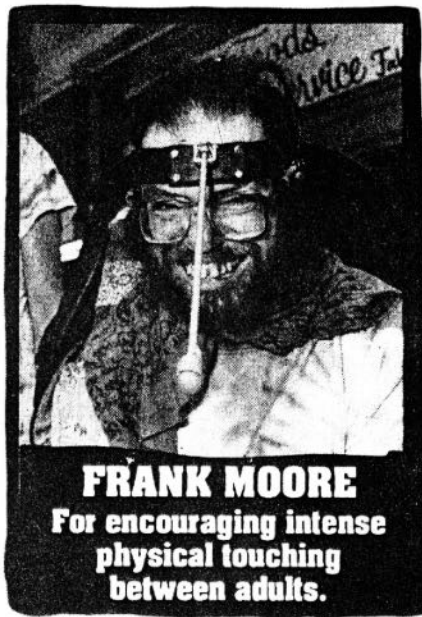
NEW CITY WANTED!

THE NEW BARBARIANS

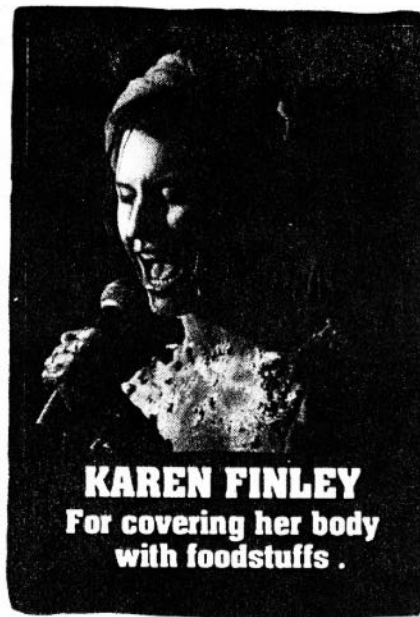
Alias (Art Outlaws, Performance Artists)



ANNIE SPRINKLE
For showing audiences her
cervix through a speculum.



FRANK MOORE
For encouraging intense
physical touching
between adults.



KAREN FINLEY
For covering her body
with foodstuffs.

Photo: Steve D. Aronson

Photo: Dwyer / Art. M.C. Idem

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OUTLAW ARTISTS

Porn? Play? Or Immoral Plot?

Story by JACK HELBIG

To conservative art critic Hilton Kramer, they are the "New Barbarians...licensed rebels at the taxpayers' expense." To Jesse Helms' rally Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), they are a threat to the established moral order. They are the NEA outlaws, controversial artists the conservatives would dearly love to silence. Three of these outlaw artists — Karen Finley, Frank Moore and Annie Sprinkle — will be performing in Chicago this month.

Of the three, Karen Finley is by now the best known, thanks in part to NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer's awkward defunding of her work, and in part to conservative columnists Evans and Novak who labeled her as "the chocolate-covered woman." (One wonders what they'd be calling her, if the right wing had been hip to Finley when she was performing "Yams Up My Grandma's Ass.")

Her fame has come quickly. Less than a year ago, only the alternative press followed Finley. Even when her shows at the Edge of the Lookingglass sold out every night, the dailies hardly noted her presence in town. Now on her triumphant return (for a four-week run at The Beacon Street Gallery), after a summer's worth of press (over-)exposure, she has received long stories in *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago* magazine.

Frank Moore and Annie Sprinkle are unlikely to receive such coverage. For one, both artists' work resists the easy and superficial descriptions that Finley's work had always attracted. Even Sprinkle's bit in which the audience is invited to take a peek at Sprinkle's cervix through a speculum is too gross to inspire, on retelling, the sort of ironic "oh yeah?" grins that Finley's bits involving covering her body with this, that or the other foodstuff do.

For another, both Moore's and Sprinkle's work challenge the consensus view more strongly and in

ways less acceptable than Karen Finley's angry tirades and bitter attacks on consumer culture (whose time has come). Sprinkle's sexually provocative performances, involving sex toys, onstage masturbation, and parodies of oral sex involving rubber dildos, have provoked attacks by both the right and the left (feminists of the Andrea Dworkin variety), neither of whom see much difference between real pornography and Sprinkle's "Post-Porn" deconstructions of the genre.

As an admitted former prostitute and porn star, Annie Sprinkle's world view seems tremendously at odds with an increasingly hung-up America. Even the Post-Porn Manifesto, written by fellow performance artist Veronica Vera and signed by Sprinkle in large John Hancockish script, seems like a relic from the pre-AIDs sexual liberality of the late '70s.

Topped by two erect penises saluting an open vagina, the manifesto reads: "We of the POST-PORN MODERNIST MOVE-MENT... celebrate sex as the nourishing life-giving force. We embrace our genitals as part, not separate, from our spirits. We utilize sexually explicit words, pictures and performances to communicate our ideas and emotions. We denounce sexual censorship as anti-art and inhuman...And in this love of our sexual selves we have fun, heal the world and endure."

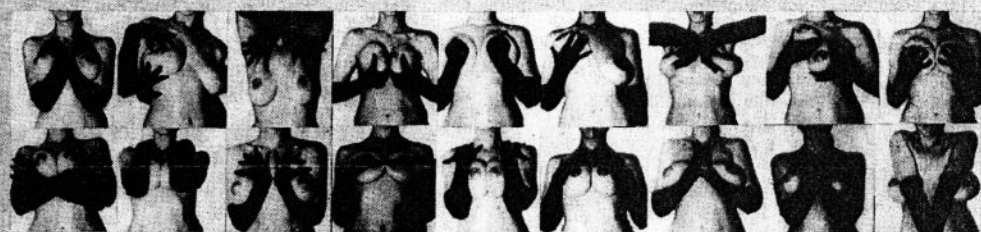
No wonder Rep. Rohrabacher, anxious to find the artist who could do for him what Mapplethorpe did for Sen. Helms, thought Annie Sprinkle an easy target. In February of this year, he launched his attack on the "feminist porn activist" by telling the House of Representatives that Sprinkle was "the recipient of taxpayer funds for her live sex act show in New York." "Actually," wrote C. Carr in *Village Voice*, "she has never received or applied for a grant of any kind. ...Neither did she perform a 'live sex act.'"

It seems Rep. Rohrabacher based



Photo: Steve D. Anzures

ANNIE SPRINKLE'S



B O S O M B A L L E T

"If this community doesn't want me to... have an orgasm from breathing on stage, I'm not going to rub it in their faces."

his whole attack on Sprinkle articles published in the ultra-conservative *New York City Tribune* and the supermarket tabloid *National Enquirer*. *National Enquirer* proved to be an especially dubious source for information, since it based its allegation that Sprinkle quipped in the middle of her performance: "Usually I get paid a lot of money for this, but tonight it's government funded." Sprinkle, it turns out, was just joking.

However, the fact that his accusations were baseless didn't keep Rohrbacher from, again in the words of C. Carr, "sending a letter headlined: The National Endowment for the Arts Is At It Again! to every member of the House, describing Sprinkle's show" in detail. Nor did it keep John Frohnmayer from leaping into the fray and issuing the odd statement that "if the performance by Ms. Sprinkle was accurately described in recent media reports, then it is something that would not have been funded by the Endowment."

When asked about Rohrbacher's attack, Sprinkle's reaction is surprising. "I refuse to let anyone make me a victim," she says in a surprisingly girlish and innocent voice, "especially people like that... these people like Jesse Helms have only heard

about what I do. They're totally misinformed... They just have no idea what my work is really like, or what it's about. But that's okay. I'm really happy with the way things are moving along. I'm really, really much more appreciated here in Europe. I get 100 times more money. A hundred times more offers. The people who don't see [my work], don't understand performance art, don't see sexuality anywhere near the way I see it, they have a problem [with my work]."

I asked Sprinkle if Rohrbacher's attack had in any way affected where she can perform. Sprinkle denied that it had, mentioning only that she had gotten "a lot of publicity" but still had been able to do her show unimpeded. However, half way through her denial she remembered one incident on her recent tour. "So I don't feel — uh, in Cleveland, Ohio, there were police in the audience who would've arrested me," if Sprinkle had invited the audience to take a peek at her cervix. "So there was a blatant case of censorship. But I think there is a such thing as community standards. If this community doesn't want me to..." Sprinkle pauses as if unsure how I'm going to take what she's about to say, and then continues speaking a little too quickly, "have an orgasm from breathing on stage, I'm not going to rub it in their faces. I go where I'm appreciated and wanted. And it's fine with me that there are states and cities and people who don't want to see what I do... I don't see it as them against me. I see it as we are all one, and I love them, and it's all quite perfect, you know?"

Sprinkle's laissez-faire attitude about the right wing's attacks on her art is in marked contrast to her buddy Frank Moore's reaction, who is absolutely livid about the treatment he's received lately by Helms and Company. "If you have anything to say to me or to ask me," Moore wrote in an open letter to Helms, published in *High Performance* magazine, "come to talk to me man to man. Otherwise, get your big brother foot off my back."

Of course, Helms' campaign against Moore has been considerably more subtle than Rohrbacher's blatant, baseless, and almost farcical assault on Annie Sprinkle. It seems that, according to *Los Angeles Times*, Helms demanded that the General Accounting Office inquire into the work of four performance artists: Karen Finley, Frank Moore, Johanna Went and Cheri Gaulke. As part of the GAO's investigation, the GAO "sent letters to the Franklin Furnace and the Kitchen (two of New York City's most prominent alternative performance spaces) formally requesting information on appearances since 1984 by these four artists."

This was not the first time that Finley, Moore, Went and Gaulke had found their very different works lumped together. Around the same time that Rohrbacher was accusing Sprinkle of the misuse of public funds, *New York City Tribune* (which is, itself, funded by Rev. Moon's Unification Church) began a series investigating the "obscene" art of, that's right, Finley, Moore, Went, and Gaulke.

The connection between Rohrbacher and *New York City Tribune* is well documented; Rohrbacher's press secretary David Eisner, admitted they had gathered information about Sprinkle from the *Tribune*. And the connection between the *Tribune* articles and the Helms' requested GAO investigation is clear.

Still, Frank Moore would seem an odd choice for Helms to pick on. Born with cerebral palsy, Frank Moore is not only wheelchair bound, he is also unable to control his arms or legs and incapable of making any sound except a kind of howling yelp. It is Frank Moore's conviction that Sen. Helms just plain doesn't know he's a disabled artist. (A fact the *New York City Tribune* article on Moore also failed to mention.) Which is why Moore is so anxious to meet Helms "man to man."

After all, Moore can communicate. Thanks in part to a device Moore developed when he was a teenager that allows him to paint, operate a personal computer, or, during interviews, spell out what he wants to say one letter at a time.

We start off talking about whether being on Helms' list hurt bookings for Frank Moore's performances. Moore spells out the answer: "They have closed Franklin Furnace." Linda

Mac, long-time companion and fellow performer adds, "The [New York] Fire Department closed down the performance space and said it was not up to standards. So galleries are reluctant to book us because they see what happened to Franklin Furnace and they see what's happening to the Kitchen and they don't want to have to go through that."

Frank adds, "except clubs like Lower Links. I am lucky. I always have done grassroots—" "Galleries," Linda Mac pipes in, "Is that right?"

Frank grins his toothy grin and yelps.

Mac continues: "Places that don't get NEA money. In Seattle we performed at a place — A.F.L.N. (A Flimsy Lace Nightie) — that pays its bills by selling coffee and toast during the day. On the one hand we don't make very much money. But we always have places to perform."

What could Moore have done to bring down the wrath of Helms? Certainly, Helms can't be upset about "The Outrageous Horror Show" (which Frank and his troupe will perform at Lower Links). In this show, Moore confronts the audience by "singing" (howling, really) a number

of rock standards "for one or two hours." "Moore jokes, "Maybe Helms doesn't like my singing."

Frank Moore suspects that it is "Eroplay," a form of performance he has developed, involving "intense physical touching between adults without limits but is non-sexual." Often performed nude, and involving audience participation, it has been described by Moore in the Spring 1989 *Drama Review* as being "fun...innocent and childlike!" Unfortunately, just how innocent Eroplay seems depends upon your definition of innocence. Certainly, anyone hoping to find obscene art could call Eroplay obscene. "In my work," Moore writes in the same essay, "I always have used nudity and physical acts which most people would call sexual." Though Moore makes the point that "Eroplay is a safe, fun, lusty, channel for physical touching" which does not lead to "physical intercourse," many of the photos of Eroplay in performance could pass for group grope sessions.

The question of obscenity, however, is just a smokescreen, Moore believes. In his essay, "The Combine Plot," (published in the current issue of *P-Form*), Moore argues that "The real goal of Helms' and Rohrbacher's attacks is to make all art, not just the N.E.A.-funded art, the agent for the established order, to debail art, to tame down all art. ...The message is clear: eliminate controversial, experimental, and avant-garde art."

(Karen Finley will be performing "We Keep Our Victims Ready" at Beacon Street Gallery, 361-3500, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, October 5-28 at 8. Frank Moore will perform his "Outrageous Horror Show" at Club Lower Links, Thursday, October 11, at 7. Annie Sprinkle's "Sex Education Class" will take place at Club Lower Links, Saturday, October 20, at 7 and 9. To make reservations for Frank Moore and Annie Sprinkle call 248-5238)



Karen Finley

