

ARTS

Art performance:

Social commentary or social disease?

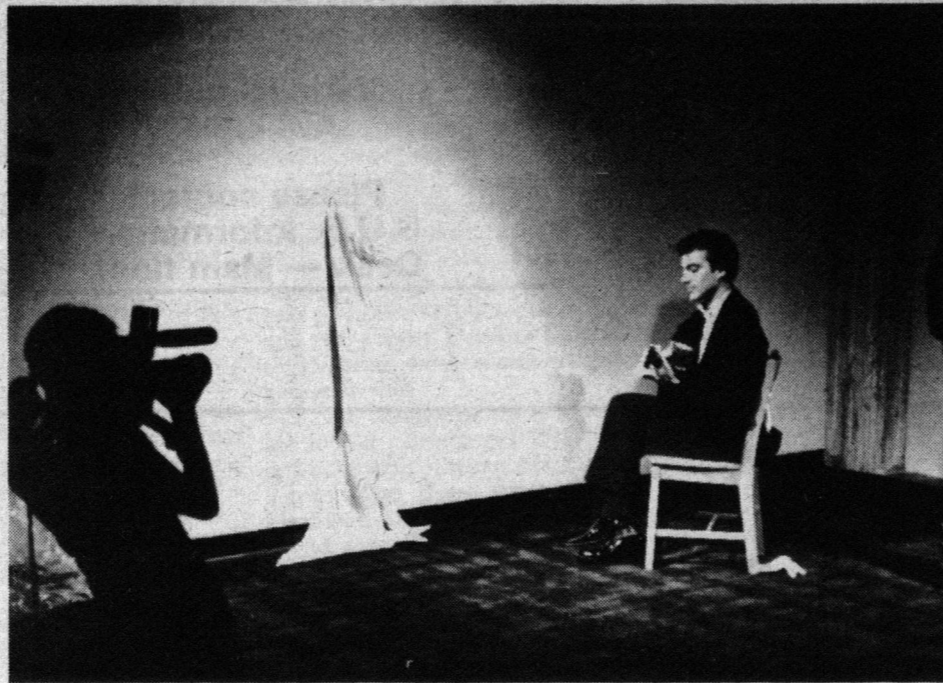
Cherie Moses: Brides and opening Ceremonies
S.U.B. Art Gallery: until November 2,

review by Donna McAlear

Art performance surfaced in the early twentieth century and had a strong comeback in the early sixties, but Edmonton audiences have had little exposure to this art form. It is no wonder that a large crowd gathered outside the S.U.B. Gallery the evening of October 15 in anticipation of "Brides and Opening Ceremonies", a sculpture performance staged by Edmonton artist Cherie Moses.

As is typical of bridal ceremonies the audience waited twenty minutes for the event to begin, apparently because of the late arrival of a groom, which served to intensify their mood of curiosity and excitement. At long last the doors were opened and the crowd was ushered into the dimly lit gallery where a cock's crow signalled a new dawn and church bells began to ring incessantly. The six brides, the sculptural elements in the performance were already positioned at intervals along two walls. The sculptures, suggesting the female form costumed in bridal attire, were mysteriously hidden under pastel tinted plastic wrappings. When the bell's peals faded, the clip-clop of horses' hooves on cobblestone were heard and the shuffle of feet on pavement preceded the entrance of the grooms. Dressed in full tux and tails the men parted the audience and positioned themselves before their brides.

Moses directly parodied the traditional wedding ceremony and the performance took a humorous turn as the grooms confronted brides in a sexual relationship. To the thud of heavy heart beats and female cat calls the grooms proceeded to remove the protective wrappings from the bridal sculptures in the ritual act of sexual initiation, causing the brides to laugh. Discarding the wrappings the grooms carefully fondled the gowns provoking a satisfied purring from the brides. Another stage in the ceremony complete, the grooms stepped into the next role where they earnestly performed activities that expressed their feelings for the brides. The audience, having played their role as observer, was encouraged to participate at this point and mingled with the grooms who continued to address their brides in their chosen roles as serenaders of love songs, reciters of Japanese poetry, and tormented lovers (she loves me/she loves me not). Towards the end of the evening, the social reception being well underway, the grooms brooke away from their brides



A bridal gown designed by Cherie Moses is serenaded, filmed and subjected to other male attentions. What does this say about the role of women in society? Read the reviews and discover the truth.

and waltzed the first dance with some people from the audience. A gala time was had by all.

Moses was not a participant in the performance but choreographed it and was responsible for the sculptural display of "bride bags" that will remain in the gallery with tapes and slides of the performance until the exhibition closes November 2. Moses' first performance piece successfully pulls together various aspects of the work she has produced over the past four years. Her under-graduate studies focused on photography and printmaking, but while working towards a Masters degree at U. of A. she developed an interest in sculpture, particularly via the papermaking medium. Moses' sculptural objects, concerned with material and process, were imbued with ritualistic connotations as they possessed non-functional and functional qualities. They were also decorative, subtly colored, and carefully made and presented, aspects which are again evident in the "bride bags" of "Brides and Opening Ceremonies". For a time Moses abandoned object-making for photography. Found objects and the artist herself were the stereotypical subjects for scenarios that commented on the roles and categories we create in life situations. In the photographic work Moses came to address feminist concerns in a direct manner, often using texts with photographs to emphasize social posturing in various sex roles.

In "Brides and Opening Ceremonies"

Moses returns to a sculptural mode, continues to parody stereotypical events by focusing on the matrimonial couple, and uses actors and sculpture to play the roles. The performance was refreshing. Because of the straightforward symbolism and direct manner of presentation it was accessible to the audience. Moses' wedding ceremony continued the humorous, subtle sarcasm that her photographic work often has. Throughout the ceremony the bride and groom never connect. This is emphasized by the use of a passive bride sculpture (instead of a real woman) who remains without personality (despite the name tags and different costumes) and unresponsive to the attentions of the groom. The only aggressive reaction from the bride is they hysterical laugh which tends to mock the groom as he adoringly caresses the fold and frills of her luxurious dress. The groom whose personality is defined by the role he has chosen to play, be it reciter of poems or telephone books, is performing more for the audience than for the bride, and this is made evident by the audience participation at this time during the event.

Moses, while reinforcing the ritualistic ceremony, comments on the realities that exist behind the social posturing, implying that our ideals are never realized and are often the opposite of what they appear to be.

review by Jens Andersen

Someone named Lelde Muehlenbachs says in the September issue of *Interface*, "Jokes about modern art are finally becoming passe, not to mention inappropriate."

God help us all! If Ron Moppett's recently displayed Coleman stoves, snow shovels and borrowed Penguin paperback covers are deemed to be art; if Phyllis Green's concurrently exhibited tree-branch-connected-to-the-crutch-which-is-connected-to-the-clay-foot-connected-to-the-bathroom-tile sculptures are greeted with solemnity rather than healthy laughter; if all this abstract baloney that has no relation to reality (or only the most tenuous connection) is considered art, then we are in worse shape than even the gloom-and-doom mongers imagine.

The modern art connoisseur, of course, replies with the sniffling retort that detractors have a defective aesthetic or intellectual faculty, and thus are incapable of appreciating the true greatness of works of modern art.

A beautiful retort it is too, for there is virtually no answer to it. If a person claims to be moved by, say, Moppett's painted cardboard replica of a Coleman stove, who is to say the response is incorrect?

The only argument that can be made is the ad hominem argument: people who ooh and ah over fake Coleman stoves, or who think Cherie Moses' wedding gowns are a witty and penetrating comment on marriage and/or sexual stereotypes are generally dingbats, strangeness for strangeness sake connoisseurs, and phonies. In contrast, people who laugh at such things generally prove to be intelligent and sensitive to genuine beauty in other matters (admiring things like the lovely female nude in the entranceway to the Rutherford library, or really humorous and incisive comments on marriage, like Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* or Sheila Ballantyne's *Norma Jean the Termite Queen*).

Don't get me wrong: Moses' wedding gowns are pleasing to the eye, they obviously took a lot of painstaking work to construct, and they are quite interesting to look at. But no more so than real wedding dresses. And all the extraneous clutter that is apparently part of some statement about femininity, stereotypes or whatever - all the colored cellophane, the potted flowers, the Japanese painting, the guitar, the chairs, the book of poems, the opening night mock-marriage ceremonies, etc. - all this is only pretentious nonsense to impress the impressionable.

The only social message it conveys is that a great many people interpret the trite dramatization of a few feminist truisms as profundity.

Scorching film noir with a new twist ending

Body Heat
Capitol Square

review by Elizabeth H.

Director-screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan's latest cinematic achievement is a film of streamlined quality and dramatic style. Carefully constructed imagery complements a finely crafted storyline. These combined qualities make *Body Heat* a unique film and an original modern tribute to the 'film noir' genre of the 1940's and 50's.

William Hurt (*Alienated States*) is again well-cast as Ned Racine, a young Florida attorney. Hurt's all-American physical magnetism reinforces the quality of ardent lust in Racine's nature that leads to his romantic entanglement with Matty Walker.

Kathleen Turner's debut performance as Matty Walker, the beautiful young woman married to the rich older man, is excellent. Visually, she fosters an aura of high-style glamour. Vocally, she possesses an unusual quality, imparting a unique, jagged sultriness to the dialogue.

Romanticism in 'film noir' tends to be perverse. Love, when allowed at all, must

be doomed; if required, the lover's bliss can only lead to further unhappy complications. And so it goes for Ned Racine.

Racine's unrequited lust and sexual unrest are apparent from the start, mirrored by the visual motifs of oppressive heat and destructive fire. The establishing shot contains all these elements, as Racine stands half-clad watching a distant fire from the window of his sweltering apartment. The camera pivots around Racine's point of view, and denies the audience any identification with the woman in his room, providing an insight into Racine's condescending view of women.

The visual 'dialogue' of the film continually stresses the theme of oppressive heat. Table and ceiling fans constantly impose on the field of vision; the bright day-lit restaurant where Racine lunches creates the photographic impression of an over-exposure.

The spoken dialogue also constantly refers to the awesome heat. This seems an amusing reversal of the over-worked weather discussion that plagues us all in reality and ironically, it lends authenticity

to the atmosphere.

When Matty Walker enters the situation, she does so as Racine's sexual equal; the heat of Racine's desire gets hotter and takes on a dimension of obsessive violence. Once required, the heatwave seems to subside. The climate becomes noticeably cooler (no more straight shots of air conditioners) but the 'fires' of Racine's obsessive and ultimately destructive passion continue to smolder. Street connections and legal knowledge enable Racine to plan the 'perfect' crime.

Body Heat depicts a typical 'film noir' hero, a man with tragic flaws he does not perceive, adapting his values to fit a typically 'noir' society that honors success over principles. Visually, the film is punctuated by the type of high contrast shots containing grids and silhouettes, implicitly symbolic of values and duplicity, that are the hallmark of 'film noir'.

What makes *Body Heat* more than simply a slick adaptation of the 'noir' format, however, is the originality of Kasdan's screenplay.

You are led to expect the typical 'noir' twist endings; the woman of mystery

walking out of the picture (Dietrich in *Touch Of Evil*), the hero who turns in the 'scheming woman' (Bogart in *Maltese Falcon*).

Kasdan's version of the twist ending puts *Body Heat* in a category with films like *Sunset Boulevard*, and makes it an unmistakable classic.

Artistes solicited

Friday Nov. 6 has been set as the deadline for submitting your poems, short stories, graphics, photos, cartoons or works of modern art to the *Gateway* offices for inclusion in the literary supplement. A fair wad of copy has already come in but there is still room for more, especially in the dirty limerick category. Would you believe not one of our thousands of engineers has submitted any yet? Why, the buggers haven't even expressed their tormented souls yet this year by a mob attack on our offices. Maybe they lost their virility?