EVE FOWLER
AND
A.L. STEINER

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EVE: You don’t exist until you’re photographed. How do you want your work to function? What do you hope it will do?

A.L.: Everyone likes pictures. I don’t so much glorify or deconstruct in code. I want to work with images that are familiar or not to the viewer, but in any case they know exactly what I’m talking about and maybe agree or not, maybe question who or what they are in relation to the imagery. It’s a lot to ask, but I guess I hope the work serves as sensory advertisements that look really good and tasty and provide some nutritional value. Do you feel like your work is “doing something”?

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EVE: Who knows? I want it to do something and undo a lot. I think there’s a very sexist impulse to desexualize lesbians. I’ve tried to work within the parameters of mainstream tropes to undo that. For example, I think a really hot picture of someone who is trans that is taken in a very traditional way is “doing something.” I hope it makes viewers respond viscerally to the beauty or sex appeal of the person and the surface of the image—and then they start asking themselves questions.

Something that’s important for me in my work is: We know some very powerful women. Amazing artists, very smart women, and powerful. That’s what I have been trying to get across in my pictures. I’m trying to make it visible, and through that visibility, show and give power to women. The photograph of K8 [Hardy], for example, I made after watching her perform at the Muster and recognizing a nod to Valie Export in her performance. It was a compelling, charismatic performance, and the energy of the audience was like nothing I had ever seen from a group of women. People in the audience saw that reference, I’m sure, to Action Pants, though it was subtle. She made me see, appreciate that Valie Export piece again. I think our generation, at a certain point, either digested and forgot about or dismissed that work. There are women artists that we know in their late twenties and early thirties referencing early feminist artists, and they are bringing them back in a way that I think is great.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau wrote that Cindy Sherman would not have been a successful artist if she had called herself a feminist and had aligned herself with the feminist theory that was written about her work. I think we’re still in a place where the market doesn’t recognize feminist artists and all the things that go with it. Do you think this is still true for artists? I am asking you this because we talked about it, and you were saying it didn’t matter what the end result was: you didn’t have a choice—you were just making the work you were interested in. You’re making some amazing pieces. Explain the James Dean piece, Ridykeulous. You’re kicking and screaming from the margins. Do you think you are reaching an audience outside the margins?

A.L.: Yeah, I think there’s a larger issue at play: the problem with identification and movements. Capitalist culture is strongly entrenched in the construct of individual success, yet those successes are accomplished through networks. Privilege is a construct inevitably rendered invisible. So women have been convinced by men that identifying with feminism is outdated, frivolous, unnecessary, lesbionic, man-hating. The specter of emasculation. Lesbian identity allows for women to be defined on their own terms, exclusive of the psychological relationship to heteronormativity. The heteronormative male ego is extremely fragile, and women’s behavior is encouraged to be structured around protecting it, in disregard to their personae. Patriarchal structures haven’t been fair or equal, so I’m not interested in that. Agency is more appealing. Yes—on occasion, institutional structures have potentially tried to correct a devastating and entrenched wrong. But the idea of “giving” people “rights” is absurd.

I want my work to create a wonting desire for what I want. Feminism expanded outward, past academia. Feminism isn’t a historical movement; it’s an ongoing process. The movement, as an artistic revolution, is very powerful. Ginger Brooks Takahashi’s Monique Wittig– and Nancy Holt–inspired pieces and Emily Roysdon’s Wojnarowicz pieces are attempts to delineate queer herstory, to keep it viable. We’re the only ones who have the ability to prevent our erasure, to ensure our viability and importance. At our Ridykeulous panel at P.S. 1, “The Odds Are Against Us,” we attempted to come up with a new word for feminism. A complaint of “not liking the word feminism” notes a resistance to dismantling oppressive structures consciously, while happily reaping the benefits of the past work of others. We came up with “lesbianism,” which we think works well. We’re hoping it’ll catch on. Should we Skype instead?
**EVE**: Your work has really changed since I’ve known you. It seemed to start to change when you collaborated with Chicks on Speed. You’ve always done somewhat collaborative work—photographing Layla [Childs] and friends in the ’90s on—but the James Dean piece [*Swift Path to Glory*] seems like some sort of break-out piece because you were performing in it. You were the observer, and then the performer and the observer at the same time. And then your work with Chicks on Speed evolved to the point where you’re a performer/collaborator. With the James Dean piece, it seems like you were liberated.

**A.L.**: Liberating. Yeah, it actually happened right after I met Chicks on Speed. The work was already planned, and then I met them, believe it or not. Kismet.

**EVE**: I mean, you may have been liberated from being just an observer. I think at that point you also became more interested in taking your clothes off whenever the opportunity presented itself.

**A.L.**: Hay. Yes, okay! So yes, observer: Do you have dreams of breakin’ your role as an observer?

**EVE**: I have dreams of making less conventional art and breaking out of what I know or what I’m supposed to be good at. I think I’m harping on that James Dean piece because it was so unexpected and so outside the realm of what a “photographer” makes—whatever that means. The videos you made of Sonya [Robbins] and Layla at Fritz Haeg’s Sundown Salon were also really impressive to me for that reason. Again, they were very inherently you, but very different from what you had made in the past.

**A.L.**: It was easier to make things quicker, and more malleable. And the idea that they didn’t have to be “finished,” or rather, the state they were in by presentation time made them finished, etc. You know the Chicks on Speed thing is about the time it takes to finish things. Having collaborators and having sex with them changes things.

**EVE**: I don’t think that’s what happened. I think you widened your circle of friends and responded to them in a way that seemed to fit them.

**A.L.**: Performance is happening even when I don’t expect or plan it. I fell madly deep in love with performance because of Layla.

**EVE**: You’re a performer, don’t you think?

**A.L.**: Maybe an exhibitionist. I don’t think I’m a particularly good performer. It took a while for it to emerge within my relationship with Layla because she was the performer. I learned a lot from her and others like Alex [Auder], and seeing tons of time-based work.

**EVE**: I think it’s something that happens after a long relationship—even a really good one. You just feel set free. I think I started to make work I liked after a long relationship ended, and there was a strong sense of liberation there. I see it in that work and I see it in your work. We often have parallel experiences on different coasts.

**A.L.**: Yeah, we totally do have this parallel thing, which is why it was amazing that everything seemed to launch from *Wimmin by Womyn who love Wymin* [WBWWLW].

**EVE**: *WBWWLW* was like a culmination and a new beginning. It was so much fun to have a solo show, but not alone. And we were so supportive of each other.

**A.L.**: Your statements are really powerful. You’re a great director, which I’ve always admired.

**EVE**: I am pretty loose about “directing.” I like to give the subject an idea of what I’m thinking about, and then let them do what they want to do. It’s always a collaboration of sorts—if it’s good. If it’s not a collaboration, it’s not usually a very good picture.

**A.L.**: You appropriate a lot, but it’s always so subverted. I feel like you’re the best appropriator.

**EVE**: Really? That’s funny. I don’t think Richard Prince would agree. Everyone who makes art appropriates. Don’t they?

**A.L.**: No. Richard Prince just flat out reproduces. You synthesize iconic imagery. They’re not visible as other images. And Richard Prince isn’t a lesbian.

**EVE**: He wishes he was a lesbian. I’m just looking at the boot-sniffing pic—yes, I guess you’re right. Everything around me is rooted in a nod to some other artist. This one references Robert Mapplethorpe.
A.L.: I feel like I should be like you. I felt that when we did WBWWLW. There are so many things I see in your work that I’m inspired by, totally jealous of. We realized this when we did WBWWLW—that jealousy functions as a compliment, a form of inspiration.

EVE: That’s what I meant about the supportive feeling. I think most male artists wish they were as brave as a lesbian. It probably motivates a lot of their work subconsciously. I liked your work better than mine. We figured that into the press release.

A.L.: I know, but it’s still so funny to me.

EVE: It is funny. Men keep Skyping me and wanting to talk. You didn’t tell me about this aspect of Skype. Someone kill me. Where did you go?

A.L.: Sorry, my mom called. You have to block strangers. I gotta go eat with the parents.

EVE: Okay. Have fun with them, if you can. XO Eve. Nice tits, by the way.

EVE: So about “Shared Women” and WBWWLW?

A.L.: You mean the crossovers, topically, or curating/making those shows?

EVE: One led to the other.

A.L.: Yeah, they did. How, again?

EVE: Well, we decided to do WBWWLW because we were photographing the same people, and because we photographed each other’s girlfriends, and Amy Adler asked you a question—what it was like sharing our women for art, I guess. I thought that would be a great title for a show.

A.L.: Oh, right! But you forgot about our show title, “Provocations,” somehow! I liked what you said last time we talked about breaking out of conventionality. But “Shared Women” also came from a place where you think women artists are disenfranchised, or at least, from being conscious about that.

EVE: When you were curating Ridyleulous with Nicole, I thought it was really apparent how different generations were approaching making content-driven work—or work with lesbian content. The flippant (us forty-somethings) versus the very serious feminist with a nod to the ’70s (the twenty-somethings). I thought that would make an interesting show: “Provocations.”

A.L.: And the forever-emerging underrepresented artist—that was an important part of that show.

EVE: Women need to help each other more.

A.L.: Yes. What does mid-career mean? Like, you’re halfway dead?

EVE: Back to breaking out of conventionality. You’re really good at that: making work with other people and outside your primary art form, etc.

A.L.: Well, that’s what I mean about networks in that rant. I think one is more free to experiment—conceptually and with materials—when encouraged by and observing other artists. Instead of being threatened and competitive, I’m more comfortable co-mingling. There’s this idea of being “fair,” not skewed. But we have to be skewed to even come close to a representative fairness.

EVE: Yes, well, we were more up front about our nepotism, etc., than other curators are.

A.L.: Yeah, nepotism. Isn’t that the way the entire world works?

EVE: Yes. But it’s hidden. Yeah, we try to use that, too.

A.L.: Is it hidden or just denied?

EVE: I think people feel guilty when they help people they know. Or maybe they feel better when they lie about it.

A.L.: Curating’s a way to help people and ourselves, defining and presenting works/shows that are important.

EVE: Do you think “Shared Women” at LACE worked the way we wanted it to?

A.L.: It seems it did. I was unsure about it on a conscious level, but things seemed like they were happening. I think because we brought a bunch of people to LA, there were a lot of surprise elements. It seemed all three of us—me, you, Emily—didn’t like some of the things each other did, but then together they created a great recipe. You put the
three of us together because of Ridykeulous and LTTR, I think. What did you think?

**EVE:** I think it’s still working. Bringing people to LA and giving them a chance to show was one of the best things about it. But the trickle-down effect is also great. The spinoff shows from “WACK!,” “Shared Women,” and other shows is pretty interesting.

**A.L.**: Yeah, but does an artist-curated show have a different impact or have a different energy?

**EVE:** It was great—three artists with similar concerns and a lot of friend/lover crossover, but different opinions about how to get the idea across. The artist-curated show isn’t market-driven. I think we took some chances. I think there’s a tendency for curators to want to pick the “right people”; we just wanted to get a point across, and we didn’t need to sell anything, so we were able to take more risks. Lucas [Michael] and I are doing the same thing with Artist Curated Projects [ACP], where we ask artists to curate shows. Many have been in my apartment and other domestic spaces. We don’t feel the need to prove anything with this project.

**A.L.**: Yeah, it’s interesting because we both never focused on if or how our work would sell, and so maybe we’re open to these other formats of making and showing. The selling thing probably also led to the formation of W.A.G.E. [Working Artists and the Greater Economy], because as artists, we’re left out of our own economic equation when dealing with art institutions. I’m constantly put in the position of declaring the end of my thirteen-year art-world “internship” to the people working for these institutions. I wasn’t interested in working for more “exposure” while having to pay my bills. It’s more than a bum deal—it’s criminal, especially when they have nonprofit status as “educational” institutions; they use our work as the educational material and then refuse to implement a system of artists fees. I’m glad you made your own structure of curating and showing through ACP. On another note—what lead to *Gloria Hole*. Math Bass, with whom I collaborated on *Gloria Hole*, got right to the point in that case. I was reading *Outlaw Representation* by Richard Meyer yesterday, and at the end of the book, he writes about worrying that he won’t be taken seriously by colleagues because he writes about gay art, which could be reduced to writing about sex. He also writes about artists who make very gay work facing the same problem. Not being taken seriously because the work is just dismissed as “too gay” or about sex.

**A.L.**: Well, all us homos are defined by having sex, whereas the straight visibility of sex is generally cordoned off to porn, or a binary, procreative, marriage-based state. I think often queers relate to each other on a loving, sexual level when we meet someone we connect with, whether we have sex with them or not. And that’s very different than the heterosexist world’s dynamics.

**EVE:** I don’t think it’s uncommon in any world to hang out with friends who you find sexually attractive, though. Did we talk about desexualizing lesbians (by the general public) and how it is a form of taking power away from women? Because I think the *Gloria Hole* pictures function on that level.

**A.L.**: I don’t think the hetero world is open to having those feelings for multiple genders. There are always limitations and power dynamics that define how people interact.

**EVE:** Yes, our world is more sexualized. Is that what you mean?

**A.L.**: There’s an artificiality to heteronormative relationships because of the power dynamics and the fragility of masculinity.

**EVE:** Yeah.

**A.L.**: Non-heterosexist interactions are apt to acknowledge the dynamics of sexuality, but not limit them to power and procreation. More to creation and experimentation. Anyone can be queer, of course. The *Gloria Hole* functions on what level? I want to know what you mean.

**EVE:** I had to put socks on—it’s getting cold.

**A.L.**: I need a valium.

**EVE:** Oh my.
**EVE:** I think the Gloria Holes are adamantly sexy.

**A.L.:** Yes! How does that differ from other “sexy”?

**EVE:** It’s sex in a very queer realm. It’s like performance fantasy.

**A.L.:** Like David Hamilton? [laughing emoticon] Math and Edie are so sexually transgressive in their personalities, they’re interesting as archetypes for those photos.

**EVE:** Yeah, it’s more queer than lesbian, which is the direction in which things seem to be headed.

**A.L.:** You wanna end for tonight? Rollin’ on over and out. X UnkAL
A.L.: But you remade Blow Job with a straight woman. There’s something else you’re chasing—not sure what.

EVE: With the hustlers, I think they were working things out with sex and money.

A.L.: What about you, what were you working out?

EVE: It might have something to do with being socialized by a man. I might think more like a man or identify more with men. But I don’t look like one. I’ve made pictures based on impulse in which I identify with men through the pictures.

A.L.: Yeah. I ask because I think we have similar impulses in our work, and I don’t know what, in the end, I want. I think in the end we both consciously want to represent something transgressive, but we don’t always know how we’re going to get there.

EVE: It’s about trying to get something I want on a lot of different levels.

A.L.: Okay, let’s talk about those levels; let’s try and delineate them.

EVE: Yes, I do think we are both interested in the transgressive. Once you’re gay, there’s no reason not to be.

A.L.: Right. (1) We’re angry. (2) We love sex. What else?

EVE: I’m not out to shock, though. It’s about power. I had a talk with the curator at the Yerba Buena, Berin [Golonu]. She thought I had an interest in shocking. I was saying that the Gloria Hole pictures were a queer performance in which lesbians or trans people were able to take over a formerly gay male fetish. And that is a kind of power grab—an assertion of raw sexuality.

A.L.: Not a mimicking of, or making fun of, or playing with.

EVE: No, it’s more of a fantasy. A performative sculptural fantasy.

A.L.: Yes, yes. Hear, hear. Fantasy is very powerful. I realized a fantasy recently when I arranged for four women with sledgehammers to destroy the space I was given before I installed. I don’t think you were out to shock, honestly. Like, Mapplethorpe wasn’t either. It was sex fantasy and expression that’s very real.

EVE: Berin was interested in what it meant, and I think more interested when she understood how we felt the work should function. I’m not interested in shocking people, but I am interested in making the viewer see what I see.

A.L.: But others find it shocking, and she probably does to some degree. Queer sexuality is very shocking, even on a very basic level.

EVE: You don’t think Mapplethorpe was out to shock? I do.

A.L.: I think he was provocative and knew he was breaking normative representational boundaries. But it wasn’t shocking for him, you know? It was his life.

EVE: The curators at New Langton in SF made this really great speech at the opening of the feminist show there in January. They said a lot of the work in the show was queer because that was where the need for this work was—in that community—and they didn’t find it elsewhere. They’re both straight. Very smart women. So feminist activist art is coming mostly from the queer community right now.

A.L.: I mean, I think that’s very important. Lorraine O’Grady made this great distinction at a feminist panel at “WACK!” about the “enabling” audience and the “consuming” audience. The enabling audience allows and inspires one to make work; the consuming audience are consumers, and who knows how they’ll feel? “Shocked” is one feeling, an audience reaction that has nothing to do with art making. It may have to do with art showing or selling, or problems that lie therein.

EVE: I’m starting to think that selling may not be a good thing. That’s why artist-curated shows are great, because it’s an enabling audience.

A.L.: You think people feel that, even those who aren’t the enabling audience?

EVE: People get really excited by those shows.

A.L.: Because they have a genuine energy to them. In Frieze, Christy Lange wrote about our Chicks on Speed exhibit, “Shoe Fuck,” in Vilnius, and wholly dismissed us as artists. I mean, she didn’t want to fuck us obviously, but shouldn’t she at least thoughtfully and carefully dissect us?

EVE: As we all know, women aren’t socialized to help other women; they’re socialized to tear them down. That’s the insidious way that men stay in control.
Women have to be reminded to help each other. Men help each other, but they are really secretive about it. There doesn’t appear to be an absence of powerful female gallerists and curators in the art world. Lange’s dismissal of “Shoe Fuck” is so related to Richard Meyer’s afterword. It’s hard for straight people.

A.L.: Hard as a cock in my ass! Lange wrote “Chicks’ feminist pretensions....” How ironic—feminism as a useful pretension! Oh, how I long for that day. This is all very real, as if she didn’t notice or something.

EVE: Well, there’s an assertion of sexuality that bothers her in some way, perhaps.

A.L.: She also wrote: “Though none of them appears to have any particular musical or vocal talent, they do have an infectious energy.” Men purport that all the time about women. Um, like, do you have a “talented” scale? If we infect you, we are talented.

EVE: No one says that about other art bands, like Los Super Elegantes.

A.L.: Ken Johnson/John Kenson wrote that about Frida Kahlo in The New York Times: “While not a great colorist, she had a colorful personality…”

EVE: Oy.

A.L.: I know. But why do these women follow that lead? Because men do it?

EVE: Because women are socialized to help men stay in control.

A.L.: Right, right. Back to the merits of lesbianism.

EVE: Like you said at dinner to the book agent of Joni Mitchell’s biographer, who said, “Only a man could understand Joni Mitchell,” and you said, “It doesn’t take a man to do anything.” You scared that guy.

A.L.: And Grayson Perry wins the Turner Prize doing vagina art!

EVE: When men do it, it’s transgressive. Like Rosey Grier knitting in the ’70s. Like RISD kids having a sewing circle.

tioning and ignorant about its privileges and hierarchies? Not always necessarily wanting to exist inside a political framework, but having no choice. It’s constant extra work—but we have to do it!

**EVE:** Remember when we were at a cafe and the waiter asked me if my kids played soccer because I was wearing a T-shirt that said “I heart Soccer Moms”? You just said, “She’s a lesbian,” and continued to read your menu. It was hilarious. He was uncomfortable as all hell and apologized.

**A.L.:** Oh yeah! Our minds are completely autonomous from most people’s “reality.” T-shirts so often help with our work! Or how bout when you mistakenly ordered a “cunty,” instead of “country,” breakfast? VERY spontaneous politicization of breakfast.

**EVE:** That was a Freudian slip. The waiter pretended not to hear it. That’s why I had to ask you if I really said “cunty breakfast.”

**A.L.:** I want a cunty breakfast right now. We are a good gay tag team.

**EVE:** I’m laughing.

**A.L.:** He found it hard to laugh. Like maybe he shouldn’t, because it would be rude. Cunts are confusing to people. I’m guilty of sexism—promoting sex. I gotta go to lunch. Should we continue later?

**EVE:** Yes. [cash]

**A.L.:** [handshake] Congrats on fingering out the emoticon thing. Okay, bye.

**EVE:** Thanks. I will try not to overuse them.

**A.L.:** It’s okay if you do; I’ll tell you when it’s too much.

**EVE:** [wave]

**A.L.:** Bye. 😍