

Birth of The True: Or, How to Become An Arts Administrator Without Meaning To

by Juen (sounds like "June") Romanoff

"Necessity is the mother of invention"... or something like that. Out of the hearts and minds of two dumpster-divin', junk car-drivin' girls from the rust belt came the multi-media art event of the decade. *Stackers*, you say? I don't think so...

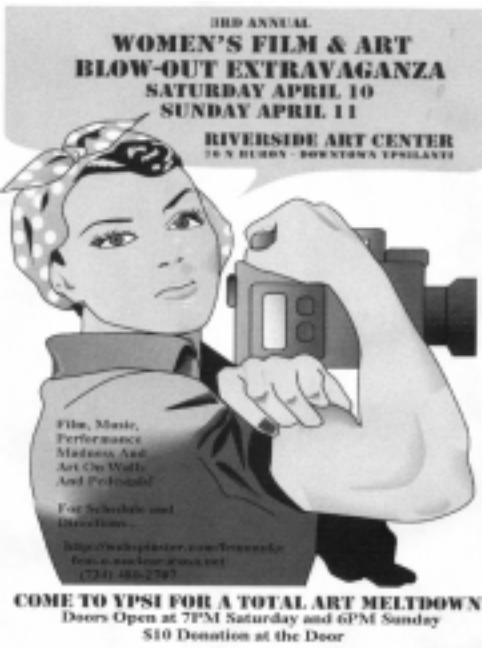
The time, January 1997; the place, a friend's living room in downtown Ypsi. In the beginning, there were two friends (Sherry Holland and yours truly), two cups of coffee, and a catalog from "Women Make Movies". How come we haven't seen any of these films? We spent formative years in the darkened auditoriums on UM's campus, sucking up images and sounds. Why hadn't we heard of most of these women in leafy liberal Ann Arbor? And how come there's nowhere to see movies in Ypsi?! (That google-plex of a movie house that could double as an airport out by Meijer doesn't count.)

Well, we figured that if we'd like to see these films, there had to be others like us. We could rent them, find a room somewhere, and charge enough at the door to cover the cost of the rental. Then we thought, as long as we're gonna show films, let's include some visual art. Most of our friends were producing work that was just hanging out in their hallways... let's put it out there. Maybe some music, that'll break things up a bit. We know some musik-chiks that'd dig this scene, let's ask them. And hey, how

'bout some poets, you gotta have poets. Arts administrators were born....

But what're we gonna call it? We don't want to compete with the other film festival in town. Besides, this was more than just films, this was a multi-media happening! At the time, for reasons that have been lost to me, I was all about Monster Trucks. I was grooving on Michigan, birthplace of the automobile, and full-up with Ypsi pride, home for many of the makers of those cars— the factory workers. I just kept hearing those radio announcers in my head... and that's the genesis of our over-the-top redundant nom de guerre "*Blow-Out! blow-out! Extravaganza!ganza!ganza!*" We numbered it for the future, put in "Women's Film & Art" lest anyone think this was a used-car sale (what with the Michigan Avenue address), and there we were— "branding" on a grass-roots level.

We inadvertently scheduled the 1st Blow-Out the same weekend as the other film festival— okay, so who ever said that being an arts administrator comes easy?— and we'd been sure that our planning snafu would be the death knell for our embryonic Extravaganza. Well, we had obviously come up with something that was needed on the scene. Cuz on opening nite... a line snaked out of The Green Room (a moment of silence, please...) and around the corner. Who had ever heard of such a thing? In downtown Ypsi?! Over 200 people jammed themselves into that tiny little space. Jo Serrapere and Lisa Hunter played that nite. There was a crazy-intense performance piece about Jon Benet Ramsey with a Bulgarian-music soundtrack. And films. Films that celebrated, some quietly and some with vigor, the stories of women's lives. The second nite was more mellow, with poets, a film by Su Friedrich (a flesh-and-blood guest of this year's Blow-Out), and a gem of a band called "Bitch and Animal." A rousing success, we thought.



So what do you do to top that? First, you get a home-grown mascot— Rosie the Videographer! Then you form the Ypsilanti Video & Filmmakers' Guild, get a mini-grant from the Washtenaw Council for the Arts, and rent the Riverside Arts Center, of course! The inimitable Joe Tiboni was our lead man there, and Barry LaRue provided invaluable services as our back-up stage crew. We wanted more visual art this time, so we hired Connie McKinney, artist and gallery director extraordinaire. At least 30 women submitted their work. We got bands from Detroit and Kalamazoo (Broadzilla and Stella, respectively). Dyann Logwood, co-founder of HUES Magazine, read a poem she'd written as an intro for one of the films. Carol Jacobsen, filmmaker and activist, presented "Clemency", a film about women serving life sentences for killing their abusive husbands or boyfriends. We got backing from Common Language Bookstore, and Liberty Street Video, and the Women's Studies Department at EMU. If it seems like I'm name-dropping, I am— it's bad juju to forget the movers and shakers, both behind the scenes and on the stage. We had a Jane Campion retrospective, laughed with some Jodie Foster-worshippers, and got inspired by Sarah Ogan Gunning, an early protest singer and an inspiration for the burgeoning American folk scene. Dissemination of information by any means necessary! This is guerrilla arts organizing, after all.

And so, the tradition continues. This year, a loose theme has been established: Women Who Kick Butt For Justice! Art and activism, a lively duo. Susan Ruma, a fan of the first two shows, joined the posse to head up an effort to get teenage girls participating in the gallery. Jennifer Reeder will come from Chicago, bringing White Trash Girl into our midst, and Su Friedrich heads in from NYC to show a collection of her films. Congresswoman Lynn Rivers, Michigan Senator Alma Wheeler-Smith, and City of Ypsilanti Mayor Cheryl Farmer contribute words of wisdom and encouragement. Jo Serrapere joins us again, and Lisa Travis performs in her first Blow-Out. Dancers, poets, and of course, tons of art and films. Check out the schedule here, or visit our website (<http://webspinster.com/femonuke>).

I left Ypsi for Brooklyn, but many women have stepped forward to pick up the slack, and I thank them for sharing the vision, the blood, sweat and tears... oh, the drama of an arts administrator lives on! Come to Ypsi, April 10th and 11th, for a total art meltdown! ☑

Women's Film & Art Blow-Out Extravaganza SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Saturday April 10th

- 7:00 Introductions
- 7:15 Ypsilanti Mayor Cheryl Farmer
Michigan Senator Alma Wheeler-Smith
- 7:30 Five Sweaty Women
- 7:45 "Guerrillas In Our Midst" (35 minutes)
"Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter" (58 minutes)

Intermission

- 9:30 Lisa Travis
- 9:50 Su Friedrich retrospective
"The Ties That Bind" (55 minutes)
"Rules of the Road" (31 minutes)
Q&A with Su Friedrich
Deckie Alexander

Sunday April 11th

- 6:00 U.S. Congressman Lynn Rivers
- 6:20 Sandy Lawson's one-woman show
Sara Clarissa MCs The Poetry
7:00 Dyann Logwood, co-founder of HUES magazine
"As I Remember It: A Portrait of Dorothy West" (56 minutes)
"Evelyn Williams" (28 minutes)
- 8:45 Patrice Maurer
- 9:00 Indie films- "Pom",
"Til Death Do Us Part"

Intermission

- 10:00 Jennifer Reeder
"White Trash Girl"
Q&A with Jennifer Reeder
- 11:00 Jo Serrapere

			Washtenaw	
			Pearl	Park
			Michigan Ave.	RAC
Hamilton	Adams	Washington	Huron	US-12
I-94 Exit 183				

The Riverside Arts Center (RAC) is located at 76 N. Huron St. in downtown Ypsilanti, one block North of Michigan Ave.