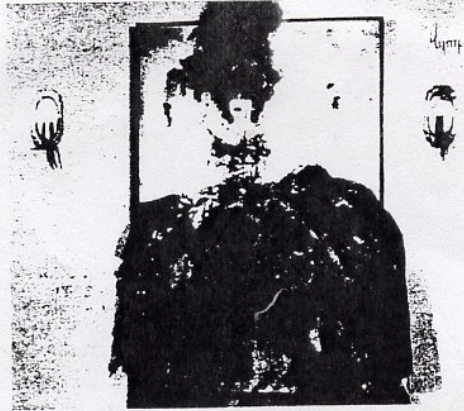


Reminisce Colette



Colette. Courtesy of the artist.

Colette has taken the liberty and angelic spirit of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham into art. Colette died in the '70s and went to heaven as Justine seeking justice, then descended again among us as Olympia. Colette freezes the mirror with photographs and drapes it with Victorian or punk or 18th century finery. She fights cynicism with her shirt off and her skirt hiked. This lady knows.

She creates installations -- more in the spirit of Paul Thek than Edward Kienholz -- then inhabits them. In 1974, at the bequest of *ARTnews*, I wandered into a Colette installation at Robert Stefanotty's gallery on 57th Street. This was Colette sleeping in a boudoir of the fantastic. Like only Chris Burden and Joseph Beuys, she stayed there in that one place for the duration: like Burden, she becomes the art; like Beuys, she's not afraid of pedagogy.

The pedagogy paradoxically keeps her mysterious. I've interviewed and chatted with Colette and, for example, Marisol many times over the years, but whereas I think I could contribute helpful information to a biography of Marisol Escobar, I know little about Colette, except: she was born in Tunis, French is her first language, she's now a citizen of the United States, and the House of Olympia can be reached by telephone at (212) 825-0482.

Her opinions and her salons are alike places to relax and meet interesting people from varied professions. At times I think of her as queen of the downtown artworld.

Man had to create beauty because Woman was born beautiful. I disagree with Camille Paglia when she declares Man has created everything worthwhile and Woman has just watched. No, men spend so much time watching women that it would be physically impossible for them to have the time to create everything. What are body aesthetics? One thinks of Auguste Rodin's sculpture of a withered crone titled *She who was once the beautiful helmet-maker's wife*. Or there are the frightening photographs of Colette's peer Hannah Wilke, naked before and after lymphoma. And Robert Mapplethorpe, and the ancient Greeks themselves, thought a man's body beautiful.

But I'll take Colette. --Michael Andre