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HOME



SPACE FOR FANTASY:

by Lillian Gordon

COLETTE'S SATIN GROTTO ON PEARL STREET

(This is the epilogue to an eight-part series on loft living.)

My life is my art," says the enigmatic Colette. She has confirmed it in her street pieces, installations, performances, fashion designs and especially in her environments.

To step through the door of Colette's loft on Pearl Street is to be wrenched a time warp away from a world of chaos into a voluptuous grotto fantasy. This cave, this womb, this secret place, this emotionally safe space is draped and festooned with recycled silk parachute cloth, satin, bits of veiling, mirrors and ropes which descend from the fabric-shrouded ceiling like stalactites in a prehistoric cave. The space is bathed in what Colette describes as "mysterious fluorescent back lighting that becomes part of the color so the furniture disappears within the environment or else is covered." The rose-beige ceiling is secreted in the fabric-swaddled walls and ceiling. Pale beige pile carpeting covers every inch underfoot.

Colette's voice, that of a gentle young French girl, assures the visitor that it is not necessary to take off one's boots unless one wishes. One wishes. Why mar the pristine appearance of the carpeting? Besides, the tactile sensation is pleasant. Even more, how can one—in good conscience—step with boots onto the satin-covered mattress sunk into the center of the raised platform that defines the cavernous living room? The mattress is the couch, strewn with satin pillows. Smaller sunken mattresses flanking one side of the area serve as chairs. Colette was born in Tunis, Tunisia in 1947 and its oriental exoticism admittedly is evident in her environment even though she has only vague recollections of this land, having lived as a child in Nice, France and, from age 12, in the United States.

Part of the Landscape

Colette perches on the rim of the green-tinged, veiled bathtub at the foot of the living area and says:

"I create a landscape and I become part of it. When people enter my space, their first reaction is shock, maybe delight. Maybe some people get scared. But given a moment, they become part of or feel one with the space which is something that in our culture people



Photos: Sandy Katz

have lost. They have lost the ability to be one with nature. Since you cannot, in New York, be one with the earth or nature, I substitute my own environment which is a womb, a retreat. Sure, this is a far cry from nature, but so is New York. So this is Colette's fantasy. It answers a need to go back to the earth. We all seek that comfort. It's very organic. I totally live my environment. I use exaggeration to communicate this."

Framed compositions placed on the floor lean against the long wall of the living room. Visitors have to kneel to inspect them. Colette meshes various fabrics, actually all the materials of the room, with paint, constructions and photographs which may be of her nude body. The effect, as she puts it, is "very retinal." These objects, she says, are "fragments of big rooms. I've done so many pieces that have lasted just a few