

LET IT FLOAT

By Steve Seid

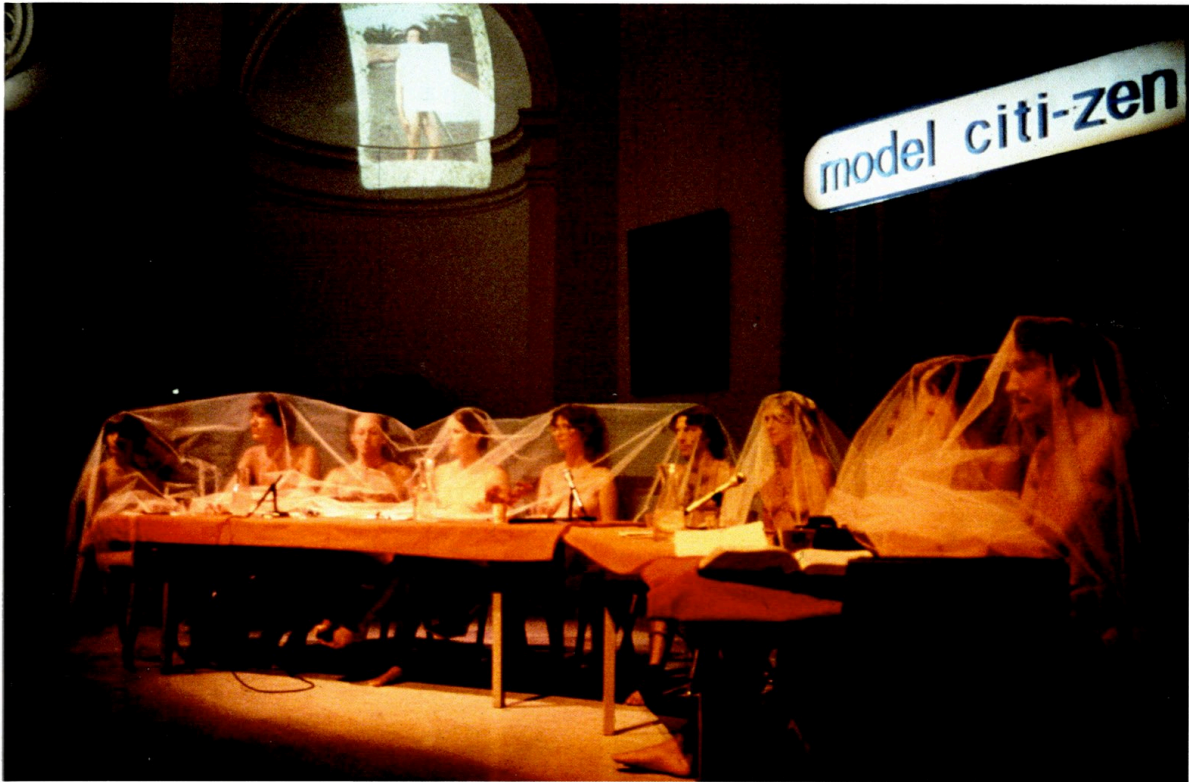
In the mid-seventies, Lynn Hershman Leeson emerged from the notorious Dante Hotel with her own divine comedy. Hers were the rings not of hell, but of a more corporeal locale, the things of one's self. In that low-rent SRO, Lynn, repurposed as Roberta Breitmore, staged not just the artifactual presence of the aforementioned Roberta B, but in this fluidic masquerade saw that art thrived on context and disruption. The walls of institutional art, the museums', too often spoke of their own stifling power that could be exclusionary, discriminatory, or just indifferent. So art as an agent of change might fare better in unexpected settings, mundane intrusions of the everyday with informal obligations on participants and viewers alike.

Thus was launched a provisional curatorial platform called The Floating Museum in which by the-seat-of-her-pants, the-sparest-of-resources, and the-tenacity-of-radical-vision, Lynn harnessed the energy of literally hundreds of artists and bespattered the Bay Area with every conceivable form of artistic intervention. Bannered installations on Angel Island, chalk drawings dappling the cityscape, levitating artists in Adler Alley, a landmark mural at San Quentin, even an artist replicated through electronic transmission—the "invasions," as Lynn called them, were multitudinously strange and wonderful. The obligatory sampling of artists: Eleanor Antin, Suzanne Lacy, Peter d'Agostino, Bonnie Sherk, Douglas Davis, Cindy Sherman, Darryl Sapien, Barbara Hammer, Paul Cotton, Nina Wise, Michael Asher, Judith Barry, Teresa Cha, Terry Fox, and dozens more.

As is expected of such radical ventures, its success determined its cessation. By the fourth year of its existence (1978), The Floating Museum was collaborating with mainstream museums, so Hershman Leeson, following her astute instincts, let it float no more.

All of the above is elaborated on in Lynn's new book "The Floating Museum: 1974-1978." It's the kind of volume I adore—184 pages of ephemera (flyers, proposals, manifestos, correspondence, photographs etc), so that the historical moment wells forth as text, mood, and appearance. There are a few eloquent introductory essays (Gabriella Giannachi and Kyle Stephan) and explanatory notes by Lynn.

The 1970s Bay Area was bursting with new venues for performative and conceptual art, the de Saisset, the Museum of Conceptual Art, the Richmond Art Center, 80 Langton and La Mabelle, but above them all was The Floating Museum. You can get a copy of Hershman Leeson's book by contacting: Becky@altmansiegelgallery.com, or Lynn's own Hotwire Productions: hotwirelh@aol.com



Paul Cotton, *model citi-zen*, performance for *Global Space Invasion (Phase II)* at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1978