

SI

MANON
APRIL 29 – JUNE 30 2009
ARTFORUM
MAY 2009

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Manon

SWISS INSTITUTE
495 Broadway, 3rd floor
April 29–June 30

Since the 1970s, Manon's performance-based work has earned her comparisons to contemporaries such as Cindy Sherman and Hannah Wilke. Like these practitioners, the Swiss artist deals with the personal and political nature of sexuality and gender, calling long-established norms for such paradigms into question through a combination of self-presentation and masquerade. The current exhibition, which debuts her work in the United States, includes a reconstruction of the set for *The End of Lola Montez*, a 1975 performance in which Manon, clad as a dominatrix, was chained and exhibited in a large cage for an audience. Inspired by historical accounts of the mistress of King Ludwig I of Bavaria—a dancer who was similarly exhibited as an object of derision and spectacle after she fell out of favor—the performance acknowledges the duality of female identity by juxtaposing passive and active roles and reevaluating the power relations implicit in self-display.

Manon's extensive body of photographic work, much of which serves to document her installation and performance practice, is also on view. Twenty-three of the original forty-eight photographs that compose "*La Dame au crâne rasé*" (The Woman with the Shaved Head), 1977–78, for instance, depict the artist engaged in activities—varying from bathing to posing dramatically—while sporting a shaved head. In several of the images, Manon is nude, and her obviously feminine figure contrasts sharply with the androgyny of complete baldness. The dramatic physical change documented clearly manifests the artist's continued interest in personal redefinition, through taking up her own body as both medium and metaphor.



Manon, "*La Dame au crâne rasé*" (The Woman with the Shaved Head) (detail), 1977, black-and-white photograph, 20 x 26".

— Britany Salsbury