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EDELSON COMMENTS ON THE *LAST SUPPER*

My intentions in publishing this poster was to identify and commemorate women artists, who were getting little recognition at the time, by presenting them as the grand subject – while spoofing the patriarchy for cutting women out of positions of power and authority. Even though the *Last Supper* is a Christian image, the point was to challenge all organized religion to prove that they are no longer a major cultural force that subordinates women.

In the poster, *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper* by cutting out the male heads from Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* and replacing them with the heads of women artists, sacred male territory was invaded and a challenge was delivered to the established assumption that, because of their gender women do not have direct access to the sacred. The poster raises multiple issues and questions including the repercussive ways in which men and women are signified in patriarchal religions: the story of Eve, denying ordination to women as priests, rabbis, mullahs (in Islam) and general control of their bodies and sexuality, limitations that are not inflicted on men.

The interest in this poster that continues today arises, I believe, from the lack of real power and position for women in organized religion. While this position has not changed substantially, there is considerable pressure to make these changes and this tension is most likely the underlying cause of resurgent interest, a quarter of a century after the poster was created. In spite of resistance in some Christian denominations, *Last Supper* has been favorably featured in *Witness*, a publication of the Episco-

← *Some Living American Artists/Last Supper*, original layout for poster production, photographs, pencil, ink, china marker, reproductions. 1971

Lynda Benglis, Helen Frankenthaler, June Wayne, Alma Thomas, Lee Krasner, Nancy Graves, Georgia O'Keeffe, Elaine DeKooning, Louise Nevelson, M.C. Richards, Louise Bourgeois, Lila Katzen, Yoko Ono, Agnes Martin, Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan, Yayoi Kusoma, Marisol, Alice Neel, Jane Wilson, Judy Chicago, Gladys Nilsson, Betty Parsons, Miriam Schapiro, Lee Bontecou, Sylvia Stone, Chrissy, Suellen Rocca, Carolee Schneemann, Lisetta Model, Audrey Flack, Buffie Johnson, Vera Simmons, Helen Pashgian, Susan Lewis Williams, Rachelle Strick, Ann McCoy, J.L. Knight, Enid Sanford, Joan Balou, Marta Minujin, Rosemary Wright, Cynthia Bickley, Lawra Gregory, Agnes Denes, Mary Beth Edelson, Irene Siegel, Nancy Grossman, Hannah Wilke, Jennifer Bartlett, Mary Corse, Eleanor Antin, Jane Kaufman, Muriel Casteras, Susan Crile, Anne Ryan, Sue Ann Childress, Patricia Mainardi, Dindga McCannon, Alice Shaddie, Arden Scott, Faith Ringgold, Sharon Brant Daria Dorosh, Nina Yankowitz, Rachel bas-Cohain, Loretta Dunkelmann, Kay Brown, Ce Roser, Noma Copley, Martha Edelheit, Jackie Skyles, Barbara Zucker, Susan Williams, Judith Bernstein, Rosemary Mayer, Maud Boltz, Patsy Norvell, Joan Danziger, Minna Citron.

pal Church, and has been purchased to hang in other churches on their bulletin boards and in their offices.

Because I did not personally know these women in 1971, my selections for the central panel were fairly arbitrary. That is, they were not political choices based on personal associations, but were instead focused on diversity of race and artistic mediums. The border included every photograph of a woman artist that I could find, with most of the 82 photographs coming directly from the artists themselves. The composition of *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper*, with its central image surrounded by a strong border, and the subject matter a dinner party and role-reversal influenced art projects both in and out of the feminist art movement.

People have asked me how Georgia O'Keeffe reacted to being pictured as Christ, if she was flattered or appalled. The *Last Supper* poster became a favorite gift to her by visitors to her Abiquiu, NM studio and they tell me that she was amused and delighted with it.

Complimentary posters from the first edition were mailed to the artists who were pictured, distributed to various women's centers and conferences and reproduced in early feminist underground publications. As it gained in popularity it could be found in periodicals worldwide as well as women's studies, art history, psychology and theology texts.

In addition to the posters and collages themselves, documentation exists in the form of letters from artists, letters to the editor (including attempts at censorship), and articles from around the world about the posters.



Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper is in its third printing, and was recently featured in the Tate London exhibition and catalogue, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, 2001.

"Linking art with religion and picturing women in a male context, Edelson challenged the historical hierarchies of two powerful narratives." John Ewing, on Edelson, *Blue Star Art Space*, review, *Artlies*. Summer 2001.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE A BOY?

Always to be a cowboy
To be free and roam
and not feel bad about
being lonesome.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE A BOY?

Pure living hell when you were
tall, skinny, gawky, uncoordinated
and lacking social graces.

Add the aspects of people doubt
you're heterosexual (I am).

The maddening thing is that
changed. The more it
the more it stays the same
people, unfortunately, don't

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE A GIRL?

It meant being told that my parents wouldn't
get divorced if I had only been a boy.

It meant hearing boys be allowed to ask questions
having them praised as smart, while being told
I should be quiet and not ask questions.

It meant wearing uncomfortable clothes.

It meant not being free to go exploring.

It meant having to live with "the curse."

And it meant having to learn to survive
a strong woman.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE A GIRL?

I love being
a girl.

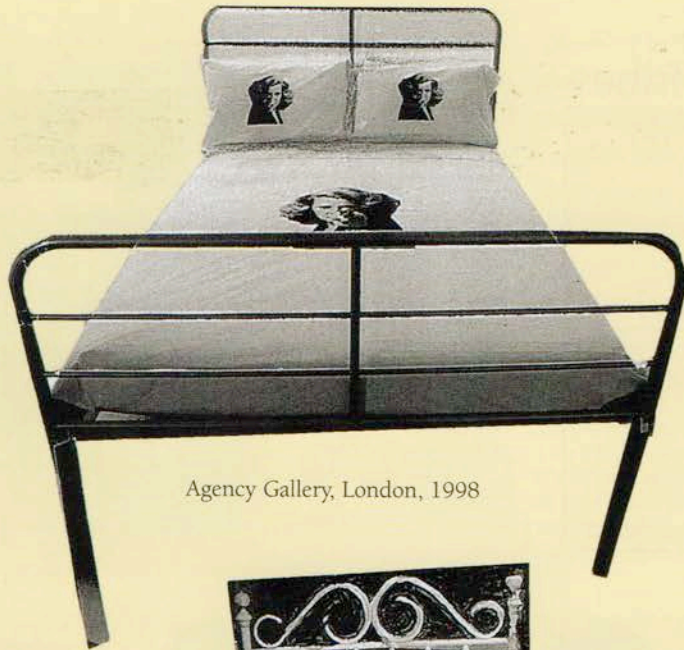
From
Britt

Childhood:
What was it like to be a girl?
What was it like to be a boy?
Begun in 1995, on-going

"Whether reading the stories of others or writing one's own, this piece provokes a jarring encounter with collective notions about gendered sex roles." John Ewing review of Edelson's work, Blue Star Art Space, Artlies, summer 2001.



Proposed bed design for an installation



Agency Gallery, London, 1998



Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX, 2001

“Though compelling for women, Edelson’s bed sculpture with an appropriated image of Gena Rowlands is perhaps even stronger for men.

Aligning a pointed gun with Rowlands’ magnetic gaze, the stylized image speaks directly to the male unconscious...”

-John Ewing (p.32e)

Each venue is invited to choose a different bed from their locale for the installation. *Get it?* was originally installed in the PPOW gallery, NYC, in an exhibition titled *Between the Sheets*, 1992. It was also included in the traveling exhibition *Re-scripting the Story: The Art of Mary Beth Edelson* as well as being featured in the exhibition *Trickster: Proposition for a Retrospective* at the Agency Gallery, London, in 1998.

Get It? Implies a threat to anyone who would violate or abuse this bed – with a subtext that suggests rape or domestic violence, but removed from the realm of victimization.

