

THE ALPHADELPHIAN

NEWSLETTER OF ALFRED UNIVERSITY'S WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

RASMUSSEN DELIVERS RILEY '01

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2
SPRING 2001

People of the United States need to put corporations back into their rightful place, subordinate to the people, according to Virginia Rasmussen, presenter of Alfred University's sixth annual Elizabeth Hallenbeck Riley and Charles P. Riley Lecture in Women's Studies.

"Everyone has experiences with and opinions of corporations," she said. These experiences can be radically different. Citizens need language for discussing problems with corporations, and they need to specifically recognize the problems. Corporations "are the latest manifestations of patriarchal control in which divisions are made between subordinates and their rulers. Corporate dominance is the most pervasive and destructive system today," Rasmussen said.

Rasmussen's lecture, titled "An Environmentalist Comes of Age: the Patriarchal Corporation's Assault on Every Good Thing Under the Sun," was delivered April 2 at AU to more than 200 academics, students and townspeople. Rasmussen, a former Alfred mayor and AU professor who helped develop AU's Environmental Studies Program, is



Virginia Rasmussen
Photograph by Catherine Kevett

currently co-administrator of the Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy (POCLAD), a project to examine the fundamental relationship between self-governing people and corporate bodies. Corporations were granted personhood and thereby

civil rights by the Supreme Court in 1886. Since then, they have taken a dominant role over citizens, who once created and controlled them. Now people die at the mercy of corporate politics that profit at any cost, Rasmussen said.

continued on page 6

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Don't Blame Me	3
Inscribing the Female Body	4
Abigail Allen Award Winners	7
Faculty News	8
Poetry by C.B.	9
Bush and Reproductive Rights	9
Into the Past	10

CIRCLES OF BINDING:

FEMALE EXPLOITATION, REPRESENTATION, AND IDENTITY IN *KABUKI*

"I believed in our cause...our lies. Until I saw...the Emperor has no clothes."

- Kabuki, from *Metamorphosis*

If one were to read a simple plot summary of *Kabuki: Circle of Blood*, by David Mack, one could come away with the impression that it is a typical comic book. It could be described as a sci-fi action

thriller, in which scantily clad women leap about in their underwear assassinating bad guys with swords. I have to admit this would be a true statement; however, anyone who has read the book can tell you that to call *Kabuki* 'typical' is to do it a great disservice.

Kabuki takes place in a Japan of the not-too-distant future,

a cyberpunk world where technology and humanity grow closer together, blurring the line between person and product. The State controls a group of eight female assassins called the Noh, whose task is to maintain the balance of power between government and organized crime.

continued on page 3

DON'T BLAME ME – I VOTED FOR NADER

In the wake of the election that has brought George W Bush into the forefront of American politics, I find myself struggling to gather the few splintered shards of respect I have left in our country to create a little bit of hope for the next four years. As a young woman concerned with women's issues, the environment and social justice, I feel I have a lot at stake with a Republican, anti-choice, anti-environment president holding the reins of our country.

It is chilling for me to think that the progress we have made in the last eight years on issues such as women's rights and the environment may be jeopardized by the resurgence of rightwing conservatism.

However, regardless of how opposed to this change I am, I have come to the conclusion that mere dislike alone will do nothing. Instead, I believe that the most constructive way to deal with dissatisfaction with politics is to fight back on a grass-roots level. Yes, folks, I'm talking about good, old-fashioned activism.

There is nothing more empowering, in my opinion, than writing one's senator and telling her or him that you, a voting citizen empowered with the ability to decide whether she or he will get re-elected, oppose or support a certain issue.

What makes this even better is that it is so easy, thanks to activist web sites, such as plannedparenthood.org, that will automatically email a letter to your senator. I took advantage of this service during the Ashcroft confirmation, letting Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton know that I opposed him becoming attorney general.

continued on page 7

CIRCLES OF BINDING

continued from page 1

Each of these assassins has a code name, a costume, and a mask to hide her identity. The protagonist of the story, Ukiko, is one of these women, and her given identity is "Kabuki," a reverential allusion to both her mother and the theatrical tradition she practiced.

Kabuki's spiritual connection with her mother is extremely important. More than anything, perhaps, *Kabuki* is a story about personal history, memory, and the persistence of the legacy of exploitation. During WWII, the Japanese military invaded farmlands of racially "inferior" peoples and captured young women to serve as sex slaves to Japanese soldiers. Kabuki's mother was one of these "comfort women."

However, she was rescued from her fate by an officer known simply as "the General," who ordered his girls to perform traditional Kabuki dramas instead of sex acts. Most of the comfort women were not so fortunate.

As Kabuki explains, "These girls were expected to perform their duty just as the soldiers accept their call to fight for their country." The comfort women, like the soldiers, were expected to sacrifice themselves in order to further the goals of the State.

The women hired as Noh

agents are exploited for both their sex appeal and their deadly abilities. The typical Noh agent costume, weapons included, seems to fit somewhere on a fetishistic spectrum between tight-fitting dance leotards and S&M gear. Kabuki and her cohorts appear regularly on Noh TV, giving weather reports, news updates, and nationalistic propaganda. They appear on billboards, posters, t-shirts, advertisements and almost anything else that sells. The Noh agents become omnipresent fashion goddesses, and lose some of their basic status as humans. Most people simply assume that the Noh agents don't exist except as high-end computer-animated propaganda devices.

The styles worn by the Noh agents are so popular they are reproduced in the street fashion of the day. One caption, describing Kyoto's red-light district, notes that "The citizen's [sic] browse past the live dancers as casually as they pass mannequins modeling their wares behind walls of glass in streetside boutiques." Directly below this caption, we see a storefront full of female figures. It is unclear whether they are mannequins, or stiffly posed performers with shaved heads. In their midst is a "model" wearing an imitation of Kabuki's costume, hinting at the way both the fashion and sex industries have co-opted the Noh personas to sell their particular "products." In this seedy underground, it is unclear

whether women are, literally, objects or human beings.

Even the most modest Noh costume is "revealing" in its own way. Butoh, whose name is similar to the Japanese word for "dance," wears a pure white bodysuit with a large bar code printed across the chest. Along the bottom of the bar code is a serial number, which on one page is replaced with the word "soul." How ironic that a character named for an art as expressive and soulful as dance is identified by a symbol that basically means "commodity." Her secret identity reduces her to a number in a computer, as devoid of a real soul as any product on a retailer's shelf. As a propaganda machine, as a war machine, her soul is robotic.

Just as frightening as the physical commodification of women, perhaps, are the video games and virtual reality programs of Kabuki that allow the consumer to rape and kill anyone he wants to, including the women of the Noh. In this nightmarish future (which stinks suspiciously of the present), technology is abused to harbor and propagate the most harmful of fantasies, without any moral consequences. Although physically harmless, on a psychological level this is the ultimate exploitation.

continued on page 6

INSCRIBING THE BODY

I nodded in recognition at the safety precaution. If the appropriate sterilization process had not been followed the arrows on the white paper packaging would have been pink.

Skully put the needles down on his table and set out a paper plate. With gloved fingers, he ripped open a package of A&D ointment and dabbed piles on its surface. In these he settled little red caps, which he began to fill with black, white, purple, blue, red, orange, yellow and green ink from his assortment of colorful bottles.

I leaned back in the white chair that was not unlike a dentist's chair, but which was splattered with tiny specks of ink in every imaginable color. Skully finished capping the ink and turned back to me. He picked up my arm and settled it on the plastic covered stand next to the chair.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"I am," I said carefully, feeling the gravity of permanence sink through my body.

Skully picked up the translucent paper with the purple lines of my design on it. He held it up to my shoulder, hovering a breath away from my flesh, positioning it perfectly with the curves of my arm. Then, he gently pressed the paper to me and smoothed it flat around my upper arm, the heat of his hand passing through me. Carefully, he pulled the paper away and there on my shoulder was the outline of a tangle of full orchids, looping in casual beauty around my arm and mingling with the stems and petals, a trail of flame leading back the wings of a Phoenix.

"How does that look to you?"

Skully asked me, staring at the design.

I regarded the markings in the mirror. It was difficult, I found, to look

both at the orchids, my tattoo to be, and myself. I could not observe myself fully and see the orchids as a part of me at the same time.

Skully pressed the foot pedal and the needle hummed. He dipped it into the cap of black ink.

I looked in the mirror again, trying to see the whole picture. I could not.

"Ready?" asked Skully.



Photograph by Amy Garbark

I looked once more and for a moment I saw it, but then it was gone. Panic grabbed me. Maybe this was a bad idea. The purple lines stamped on my body were just what they were, lines stamped on me, they were not a part of me. But when the ink was delivered, it would be within me. The images would be underneath my skin, always hovering near the surface, irremovable and omnipresent. I could hide it if I wished from other people, but never from myself.

When women who have lost a breast to cancer fill the empty space with tattoo, they reclaim their bodies from disease. When women get tattoos after a rape or abuse, they take back their bodies from people who have tried to control them and who have changed their bodies without permission.

These are profound acts of self-preservation, but there is a danger in them too. We claim our bodies, inscribing them with a text of images, but these images do not simply contain the story of our strength. They can contain the story of our pain. They keep it near the surface, a constant reminder of the layers of our body's history and the meanings that we give to events that have shaped us.

I could have stopped it. I could have said that I was sorry to have wasted his time and had him spray the purple ink with water and wipe the images away. I could have left the story inside of me instead of having it stitched onto my skin, but I didn't. I wanted it there. I needed to take hold of meaning and make it a part of me. "Ready," I said to Skully.

He fluttered his foot on the peddle, making the needle hum a harsh tune with a too quick tempo. With his left hand, Skully gripped my arm just above my elbow and held tight, pulling my flesh taut. He leaned in and I closed my eyes to the first burn of the needle stinging my shoulder.

He started slow and I felt the little bursts of pain flare on my shoulder. Then he moved to longer lines and the vibrations of the needle sinking in and pulling out of the midpoint of my skin moved the energy of the orchids taking shape through invisible lines on my body. The heat of pain spread over my shoulder and down my arm. My stomach was acid and my head was spinning. I wanted to smile and I wanted to cry as each mark of the needle inscribed my body with orchids and flame.

-Emilie Hardman

ABIGAIL ALLEN AWARD RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

The spirit and life's work of Abigail Allen, one of AU's founding mothers, is honored through the annual presentation of the Abigail Allen Awards in Women's Studies. This year's awards will be given to Dr. Sharon Hoover and senior Emilie Hardman on April 6 at AU's Honors Convocation and to Pamela Strother, AU alumna, '91, on April 20 at the Women's Studies Roundtable.

"It's quite an honor. To think that people in Women's Studies appreciate what I've been able to bring to the department is satisfying," said Hoover, who is retiring after the Spring 2001 semester. She has been part of the Women's Studies faculty since the founding of the program in 1985. She teaches both English and Women's Studies courses, such as International Women Writers. Hoover has also supervised several Women's Studies minors during their independent study projects. About Women's Studies Hoover says, "It is a benefit to both the school and the students to introduce more disparate points of view."

Hardman, a graduating Women's Studies minor, has edited the Women's Studies newsletter, *The Al- phadelphian*, since Fall 1999. She has completed several projects on gender and sexuality issues, including a two year ARGUS project titled "Oh Bondage, Up Yours!," which focuses on issues of gender, class and political activism in Punk produced cultural artifacts. She has presented at several conferences, including the Re-Presenting Women Conference in Valdosta, GA and both the 2000 and 2001 New York State Sociology Association Conferences. She was one of three students nationally selected to work on the National Public Radio Project at the National Gay and Lesbian Journalism Conference in San Francisco.

Strother came to Alfred as a transfer student from George Washington University and graduated *cum laude* with a Women's Studies minor and Track II major in "Women, Politics, and

the Media" in 1991. She is currently the Executive Director of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, located in Washington, D.C. She has also worked for The Feminist Majority and Zero Population Growth.

The Abigail Allen Awards were first proposed to former AU president Edward Coll in December 1998 as a means to recognize outstanding individual effort on behalf of the Women's Studies community and to draw attention to AU's past as the first coeducational college in New York. Originally, the Women's Studies Program had two awards in mind: one for a faculty or staff member, and another for a student or alumna. This year a third award was added to allow for a student recipient as well as an alumna recipient each year. The first recipients in 1999 were Professor Carol Burdick and Megan Allen; in 2000, the awards were given to Dr. Karen Porter and alumna Patricia Riley (class of '65), who also delivered that year's Riley Lecture.

Nominations for the Abigail Allen Award are solicited from the AU campus each fall and given to a selec-

tion committee, which consists of one sophomore or junior Women's Studies minor and the two previous award recipients. The committee makes its decision in January based on faculty, staff and student recommendations. Student nominees must be senior Women's Studies minors in good academic standing. The award seeks to honor those who have made an exceptional contribution to the AU Women's Studies community.

Abigail Ann Allen is remembered for her efforts on behalf of women's rights as the wife of AU's second president, Jonathan Allen. She was active not only in the university community, where she served as a role model and advocate of coeducation, but also in the areas of women's suffrage, temperance, and reform. After her death in 1902, she was memorialized in the 1902-03 yearbook with the following statement: "She was a woman of rare ability and charming character, and her influence will be felt and esteemed in Alfred University for many generations to come."

- Sarah Guariglia

DON'T BLAME ME: I VOTED FOR NADER

continued from page 3

Even though Ashcraft was confirmed, I felt better knowing that at least Hillary and Charles voted against him.

It is also important to stay on top of the issues and legislative changes that are taking place in Washington D.C., because a lot of the decisions our new president is making impact on women and the environment. For example, Bush's first legislative decision once accepted into office was to ban U.S. aid to family planning organizations abroad that provide abortions or abortion counseling. This was significant because it followed through on his anti-choice stance and could quite possibly be a harbinger for future plans. Therefore, we must keep tabs on what the issues are.

There are a variety of ways to do this, but I recommend reading the article highlights posted at watchdog organizations online, such as www.roevbush.com, a Planned Parenthood sponsored site paying close attention to Bush's decisions regarding choice issues. Also, www.sierraclub.org, updated regularly, provides information on Bush and his cabinet's plans for the environment (a lot of which is quite scary).

If we pay attention and stay active we will be able to cope with our new President and cabinet. This is going to be a rough four years for women and the environment, among other things, and we are going to need all the help we can to make sure our leaders in Washington D.C. don't forget the interests of the Left.

-Angela Young

"Nothing remains for you except to drag your
crime behind you all your life."

The Flies: Sartre

1

The gaze of Zesus
(that god our fear created)
drains mortal will. Hypnotized
by our reflections, we limp
whimpering and penitent
through time, apologetic
for the sin of being born,
disordered beings,
in his ordered universe.

2

Electra's dancing intuition
(any woman's role)
sings a brief sweet song
to guilt-stopped ears; then
her shocking joy retreats
to babbling fantasies, small
twitches of desire, despairing
grace notes for some minor chords.

3

Always some few heroes
(committed
to their birthright myth)
murder old crimes,
drive gleaming swords
into the wicked past—
and exit,
mouthing classic syllables.

4

Wearing ragged remorseful habits,
women scrub the bloodstained floor,
tidy up the bloodstained floor,
leftover limbs, torsos, heads—
then tie the bundles
to their wrists and start to drag
them round and round and round
the stage

while Zeus looks on, applauding.

- Carol Burdick

RESPONDING TO G.W., REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOMS

President Bush has been in office for only a short time, and already he has launched several attacks on a woman's reproductive freedom. First, he reinstated the global gag rule, which stops funding to international organizations that may provide abortion services. Second, he confirmed an ultra-conservative, John Ashcroft, as the new Attorney General. He not only opposes abortion, but also believes that contraceptives aren't a good idea.

When I was at the Family Planning Advocates Conference in late January as an advocate for choice, New York State Attorney General Elliot Spitzer told us that he is afraid of the "gravity of harm that will flow" from the Bush administration concerning a woman's choice.

On the 28th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, President Bush launched his first official attack against a woman's reproductive rights by issuing a memorandum that denies U.S. aid to any foreign non-governmental organization that uses its own money to support abortion. The director of the national Right to Life Committee responded that he was glad our government would no longer use "taxpayer dollars" to promote abortions. Wake up everyone. Current law already prohibits using taxpayer money for abortions.

On the same day, Bush launched the global gag rule, he released a statement to pro-lifers telling them he would build a culture in which "every person at every stage and season of life is created equal in God's image." It seems Bush feels it's appropriate to let his God come between a woman and her healthcare provider. When a fertilized egg becomes a person is a question religious beliefs. Is Bush then suggesting that his religious beliefs are superior to my own?

Perhaps he is, since he has also initiated faith-based programs that will provide tax relief to religious organizations that provide social services to the disadvantaged. The next logical step will be including unborn fetuses as disadvantaged persons.

And now John Ashcroft, our new attorney general, joins Secretary of Human Health and Services, Tommy Thompson, as one more cabinet member who will challenge women's reproductive freedom.

continued page 10

THE LIFE OF MARY K.

continued from page 10

Because of this, Mary chose not to attend school at Alfred as she had planned, her father being a friend of William C. Kenyon. Instead, Mary began a course of learning at Little Gene-see's Select School so she could help her parents recover from their financial crisis. She later left that school at her father's (a school trustee) advice, when a scandal arose over her rejection of the marriage proposition of one of her instructors.

Continuing her studies at home, she helped re-build the family businesses. Her parents and some of her siblings had moved further west by 1857, but Mary had already met and married her future husband, Martin W. Babcock. Mary held considerable pride that, even in her last years, her eyes were good enough to do hand-sewing, and she had made clothes and braided rugs to supplement the family income. My own son, now almost five years old, is of the sixth successive generation of our family to have lived, although only briefly, in the house that Mary's husband and their son-in-law built together to house both of their families, so many years ago.

-G. Douglas Clarke

FACULTY NEWS

continued from page 8

Karen Porter has returned to teaching after her fall semester sabbatical. She recently had a paper accepted for presentation, with Bill Hall, at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems to be held in Anaheim this August. Their paper, "Keeping Collaboration Alive in the Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence," examines the process of forging alliances between law enforcement representatives and victims' advocates in a community collaboration project. For the past several semesters, Porter has also been working with Enilie Hardman on her honors thesis, learning more about Punk than she ever thought possible!

MARKED: WOMEN AND TATTOO

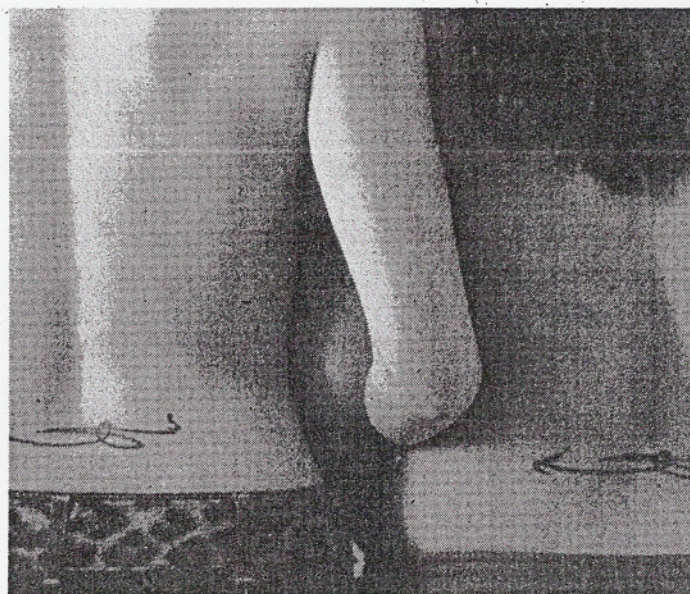
My interest in the practice of tattooing, and more specifically with women who are tattooed, originates in my fascination with counter-culture, or the "other." When a practice falls outside of the mainstream culture, it is usually difficult for it to achieve acceptance and recognition. Cultural norms, beauty ideals, and gender issues negatively affect the way tattooed people are viewed by society. "Choosing to be a physical deviant symbolically demonstrates one's disregard for the prevailing norms," says Clinton Sanders in *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattoo*. I am fascinated by one's choice to deviate from appearance norms. This decision to permanently alter one's body seems powerful to me.

I am specifically interested in researching women's motivations for being tattooed and how it has affected them. I want to know if they feel empowered by this marking, and I am interested in comparing their experiences of being tattooed. I am currently working on a project that is a combination of research, interviews, and photography. I am researching the history of women and tattoo, and I plan to incorporate personal stories, insights, and photographs of tattooed women as a collection, most likely in the form of a book.

Another reason that I am specifically interested in researching and

photographing tattooed women is because of my dissatisfaction with the way that women are commonly presented in the tattoo industry. For instance, three of the most popular tat-

too magazines, all owned by Larry Flynt, who also owns *Hustler*, show scantily clad women as center-folds and pictures them revealing an unnecessary amount of untattooed skin



Photograph by Amy Garbark

in every issue. I think it would be refreshing to see tattooed women in a more real way.

Throughout tattoo history, the tattoo mark has always signified something different, or someone who was special in some way. Women have been involved in tattooing in the United States from the beginning, but not always in the most powerful ways. In the 1880s, women were entering the world of circus sideshow attractions. They saw it as an opportunity to earn a comfortable living independently and were encouraged by the post-war infiltration of women into non-domestic jobs. Betty Broadbent is one of the most well-known tattooed circus women. She joined the circus in 1927 at age 17 to make her own living. However, many of the circus women during this time were married to tattooists, so they served as free advertisement for their husbands' work.

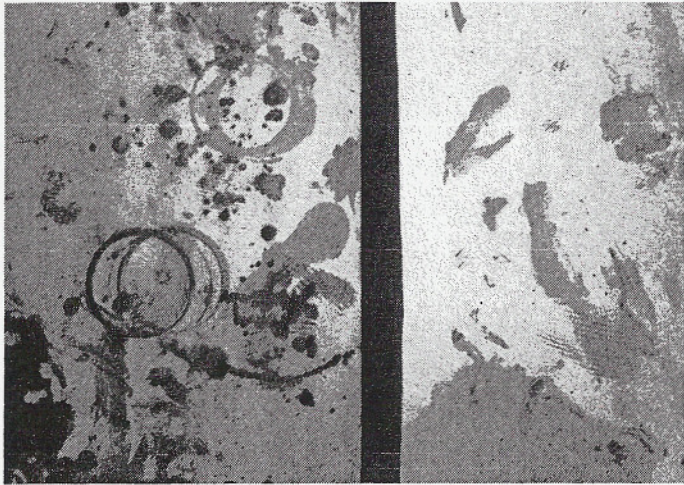
There has been a growing popularity of tattooing among women

LITTLE THINGS: A VIDEO INSTALLATION

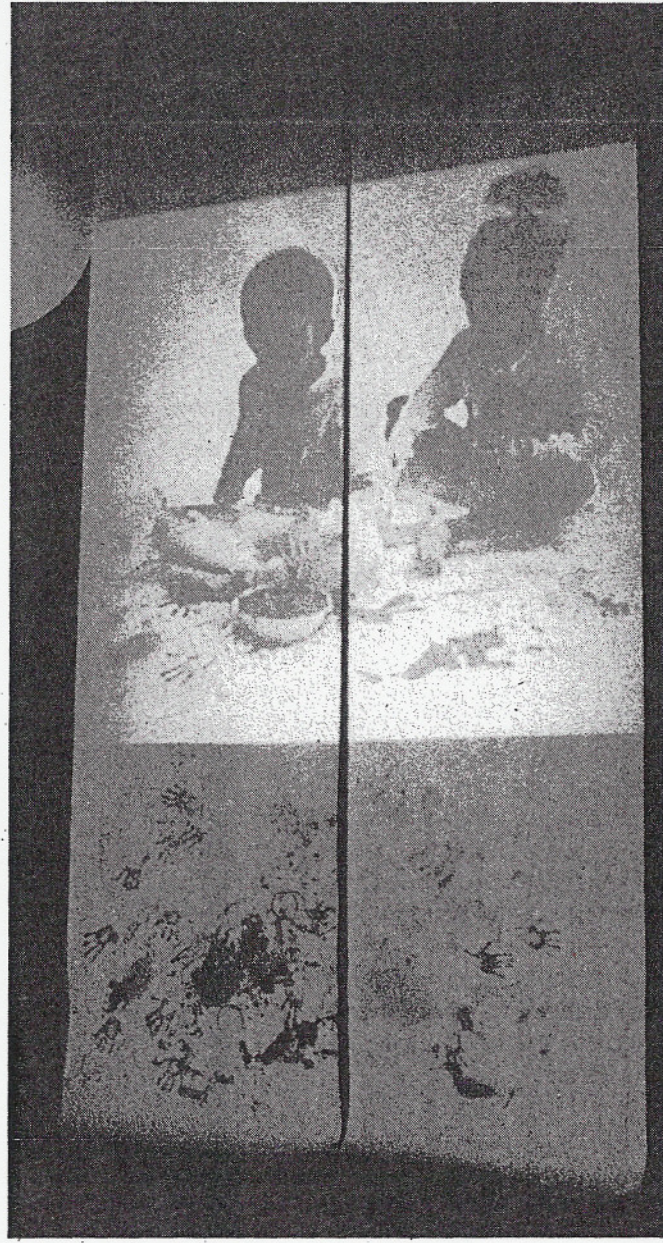
"What the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity you have by virtue of being persons, not males or females. One might as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender."

- *Rose is a Rose is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography*, by Jennifer Blessing

Images and Artist Statement by Cindy DeFelice



Little Things (10/2000) was a public video installation made to be accessible to a mass audience, specifically the people in the small town of Wellsville. It was also designed to offer diverse readings to an audience that was familiar with the context of the studio, the issues at hand, and visual language.



Although gender "issues" have become part of a regular discourse, it has been my experience that people outside of academia rarely apply these ideas to themselves in any significant way. The function of this piece was to make the public aware, in a bodily sense, of things they have read and talked about in order to make gender questions relevant to them and their children. To this audience I was making a fundamental statement about the idea of gender in that it is very literally in *Little Things* applied, not inherent. The voyeuristic experience they encounter while viewing this piece, through the vulgar scratchings on the window's pink film and in examining the video on a banner of bodily waste, emulates a conscientious and physical experience of what gender might look and feel like if we could decontextualize it.