



Momenta Art  
Alternatives  
1987

an essay by Katy  
Schimert

*Red Body Parts*. created for *Machinations* held at Momenta in 1987, photographed on the artist's roof before being exhibited.

In 1987 I received a phone call from Eric Heist in Philadelphia, where he began Momenta Art Alternatives (which later moved to Williamsburg in 1995). Eric was curating a show, titled *Machinations*, of kinetic sculpture and asked if I would like to participate. He had heard about my mechanical sculptures - I had recently graduated from the Philadelphia College of Art, where I received a BFA.

At the time, I was living in New York and had a studio on the little water street in lower Manhattan that I rented from a carpenter. I was part of the Performance Art group Bricolage, worked at Sculpture Associates and was a studio assistant to Alan McCollum.

On the phone Eric and I spoke about what I might do and he sounded like an interesting guy. My plan was to make a stack of red body parts that moved slowly around a pole and opened and closed like a flower. I wanted the piece to be made well and look perfect.

I took slides of the shadow of my body, projected them and traced the parts. The carpenter that I rented from gave me some nice wood, and I cut out twelve shapes on his band saw. Then I went to Canal Street and picked up a plate of 3/4 inch steel and a 5/8 inch diameter pole. I drilled a hole in the center of the plate to set the pole, and then I took it to Chinatown where guys welded on the street and had them stick weld it for about 2 dollars.

I went to Bond Street where they still sold machine parts and bought some really nice ball bearings (about 2 inch in diameter). They were expensive: maybe \$60, and my check bounced; I had to go back and pay them in cash. I used a hole saw to drill the perfect diameter into the ends of the body parts and then epoxied in the ball bearings.

I went to the west-side highway to a paint shop, stuck between sex shops and nowhere and bought flat red oil paint that was still made with lead. I painted the pieces and sanded them between each coat, using a tack cloth to remove the dust.

Back on Canal Street, I bought a tube of steel that fit snugly onto the 5/8" pole from a guy wearing an open fur vest with nothing underneath - perfect for displaying his flinching arm and chest muscles as he showed how to get the two pieces to fit. Back at my studio, I cut the tube into two-inch sections that slipped with oil onto the pole. I alternated the body parts between. The body parts moved very slowly and smoothly - with the wind or as people walked by.

I packed up the piece, took the local train to Philadelphia and bolted it with a socket wrench onto the wooden floor of the gallery. I never picked it up. It ended up in and boyfriend's brother's house and I like to think it is still there...

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For many years I taught undergraduate and graduate students in California, at NYU and other places. In the mid 90's, I started to become well known and students would ask me, "how does it work? how do you get a show? how do you contact a gallery? who should I call?"

My first suggestion was to have and keep friends, to be a part of artists groups and spaces. I was fortunate to have a group of friends from PCA, Yale, and LA, to have a PS1 studio in the Clocktower, to show with Janice Guy on King Street and be a part of AC project room and have the early support of Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson. These experiences led me to have shows with Paul Schimmel, curator of the 1995 Bienal de São Paulo, Susanne Ghez and Hamza Walker at the Renaissance Society in Chicago (1997), Lisa Phillips and Louise Neri curators of the Whitney Biennial (1997) and finally with David Zwirner where I still show today.

My other piece of advice was to begin and maintain relationships with curators and artists who run alternative spaces and small museums. These are people who care about art and will participate in the art world for the long haul. It's better to start there: with some pain in the ass friends, than alone with an over-under-dressed gallery owner in it only for as long as the lifestyle lasts. Some curators will move on to more established museums and spaces while others will stay and keep their galleries going in good times and bad.

And they will also remember you. Like the kid who grew up down the street, who you would lay out with on summer nights in the grass after games of ghost - looking up at the stars. You meet again at your father's funeral, and he finally looks at you and says, "you were always beautiful."

I am so thankful and fortunate to have this early experience with Momenta Art Alternatives. They have given many artists their first shows and have supported them throughout their careers. I hope you will join me; be generous and support them in any way you can.

Katy Schimert  
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Katy Schimert was one of the first Momenta Alumni to be included in a Whitney Biennial. If you haven't done so already, please go see the work of other Momenta alumni who are represented in the current biennial through the end of this month: Huma Bhabha, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Lorraine O'Grady, and R.H. Quaytman. Other alumni who have been represented in previous Whitney Biennials include Vito Acconci, Rita Ackerman, Slater Bradley, Tony Cokes, Sue DeBeer, Cheryl Donegan, Roe Ethridge, Omer Fast, Glen Fogel, James Fotopoulos, Kurt Kauper, Jim Hodges, Yael Kanarek, Karen Kilimnik, Kristin Lucas, Virgil Marti, Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, Roxy Paine, Laura Parnes, Carl Pope, Tim Rollins + K.O.S, Aida Rulova, Judith Schaechter, Katy Schimert, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Lisa Sigal, Michael Smith, Agathe Snow, Deborah Stratman, Banks Violette, and Sue Williams.