

Myths of Rape (1977/2012) at the L.A. Art Show

By Diane Calder
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Visitors stepping up to the bar at the entrance to L. A. Art Show's gala opening, probably weren't expecting to run into a young woman bearing a sign proclaiming, "MYTH: WE WERE DRUNK, SO IT WASN'T RAPE." The performer, who had positioned herself where she would most likely have an impact, was one of a core of thirty men and women engaged in a re-examination of Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy's late 70's survey of rape in Los Angeles. Each member of the group carried a sign proclaiming a myth or fact about rape, blending performance with protest and activism in Elana Mann and Audrey Chan's fresh interpretation of the earlier feminist response to social injustice.

An examination of excerpts from Lacy and Labowitz-Starus iconic work, (featured in the LACE booth at the L. A. Art Show), underscores changes Mann and Chan made to the original. Performers, both male and female, no longer wore uniform costumes or blindfolds, allowing them to interact more directly with audience members. Signs were held at body level rather than carried on high, directing attention to the body as the site where sexual violence takes place and the potential carrier of strength and change. New topics involving male victims as well as rape in prison and in the military were addressed. Viewers no longer were expected to keep their distance and remain mute. Instead they could elect to participate in a call-and-response element of the performance, a strategy inspired by Occupy Movement protesters.

Among the 30 myths examined in the revived performance were naïve statements such as “Rape statistics tell the full story,” or “I don’t know anyone who has been raped.” Actually, rape is still the most underreported crime in the world. But Elana Mann, Audrey Chan, the 30 performers dedicated to “Myths of Rape” and their choreographer Mecca Vazie Andrews, deserve applause for actively encouraging individuals to join their wholehearted chorus of dissent.

