

**LIVE AT THE END OF THE
CENTURY: ASPECTS OF
PERFORMANCE ART IN
VANCOUVER**

edited by Brice Canyon

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184 pp., b&w illus.

During October 1999 a performance art festival under the rubric of *Live at the End of the Century* was presented at eleven Vancouver venues—the most recent manifestation of an art genre that traces its origins to the legendary ‘happenings’ of the 1960s. Now, thanks to Millennium funding, grunt gallery has published a compilation of essays, commentaries, narratives and whimsical scripts that offer a insider’s look at performance art in Vancouver, along with chronological marginalia identifying performances and performers from 1965 to the present.

As someone who views performance art with askance (if not downright avoidance), I wasn’t prepared for the enjoyment of reading *Live at the End of the Century*. Among the book’s highlights is Tanya Mars’s instruction manual, Performance Art Starter Kit™, which recommends, among other handy tips, that performers use alienating or intimidating body language, sound tracks that imply impending disaster, and the use of bodily fluids. “Urine continues to be shocking, despite our daily familiarity with it,” she notes.

Other of the book’s texts, such as those by artists Margaret Dragu, Aiyyana Maracle, and

Judy Radul focus on the many motivations behind performance; among them, the desire to shock audiences and to use one’s own body as a vehicle for rage.

Authors Ivan E. Coyote and Kiss & Tell offer self-deprecatory and humorous insights into the developmental process of individual performance pieces. More sober, analytical views of performance art’s relationship to artist-run centres come from curators Karen Henry, Todd A. Davis, and Glenn Alteen.

Aside from gathering a few friends together to read aloud Glenn Lewis’s punning Mondo Artie radio script, perhaps the best summary of experiencing performance art is found in a few sample lines from the poetic dialogue in Paul Wong’s Various Definitions of Performance Art, Oct. 13, 1999:

It was great.
It could have been shorter.
Everyone loved it.
You were really good.
How long have you been doing
this?
How many years?
Really, this was the first time?
Done without rehearsal?

available from:

grunt gallery

116 - 350 East 2 Ave.

Vancouver BC V5T 4R8

www.grunt.bc.ca