

Pam Hall & Margaret Dragu

by velveeta krip



Marginalia... Velveeta Krip interviews Pam Hall and Margaret Dragu.

Marginalia is a cross-country collaborative investigation into the politics of place, power, and position as experienced by Pam Hall and Margaret Dragu: two self proclaimed "middle-aged hot broads". Hall, an installation artist from St. John's, and Dragu, a performance artist from Vancouver, have been creating **Marginalia** together since February of 2004.

The physical manifestation of their work takes the form of 12"x12" textile squares, but the heart of their collaborative process lies in the daily email exchanges where they inspire each other by sharing the intimacies of their daily lives. Their relationship reminds me of lovers. The level of understanding and honesty, trust and respect, for each other is profound.

PH: Came from the obvious place... Both on the margins physically, geographically, etc. etc. etc.... But for me, what holds in the title is the female "sound" of it... It sounds not only like genitalia, labia, but for some reason like a mysterious sexual part of the female body that perhaps we have not discovered yet... Very weird perhaps, but I love the sound of the word in my mouth...

VK: The F word?

PH: Do you mean Fuck? Fun? Feminist? Frenzy? I like all those words... Yes — we talk about sex a lot... Doesn't everybody? Perhaps the difference in sexual dialogue/discourse/gossip/conversation when one is "middle-aged" is that it takes place within a context of history and deep knowledge about one's body, which is

often absent in younger women... Or perhaps M. and I are simply more reflective and interrogative than many other women our age... Though in my experience, many women reaching middle-age and "freed" from reproductive responsibilities, re-engage their sexuality and sexual identity with new interest, new insight, and new sense of both what they desire/want/need coupled with the knowledge and experience of how to "get it"... The other side of that, of course, is the notion that as women age they become sexually "invisible", so perhaps this also fuels some of our conversation around this topic, especially since we are both "in the business" of making meaning "visible"...

PH: I tend to talk about sexuality with all kinds of folks... With M. though, I suspect I have been gifted with an opportunity to share my own experience of sex, the erotic, etc.... That was not present in other work I made around this subject... So this is more personal, more tied to the questions I am asking myself at this particular historical moment in my life, as a single woman who is more rather than less "sexual" as I age... In that context, this conversation with M. is deeply important in ways that have little to do with "art" or whatever public performance we might make... Like all art practice, the best "stuff" is that which transforms the Artist... This project has been a magnificent "gift" to me... As a woman and an artist... Who knew???

VK: Since February 2004 you have made this commitment, there is something almost religious in nature about it . . .

PH: Ritualistic, spiritual in a way... I worry about the word religious... But I suspect you are on the right track seeing those elements of ritual, repetition, deep committed practice... It holds this ground of choice and decision, which reminds me of other deep





relationships... Love is after all both a feeling and a decision... The decision that M. and I have made to make work together seems also like a decision to make a friendship together... To build some history together... To be present to one another over time and distances... As witness, as ally, as correspondent... Very powerful responsibility, and I am constantly amazed and still curious about why this friendship in art seems so "easy" when friendships in life can be so difficult to sustain...

VK: Is there something highly overrated about being physically close to someone?

PH: ABSOLUTELY.

VK: What kind of physicality are you experiencing in the process?

PH: The touch of fabric, the sewing and ironing, and "making" of squares which has become my way of "speaking" or writing letters to her... The reaching and grasping for a beach detritus to "send" to M. embedded in a square... The occasional sound of her voice on the phone, our rare moments of real presence together in the same place... Montreal, St. John's... The cooking, the walking together, the small touches exchanged...

VK: Do you also "confess your dependency/addiction/need for this medium"?

MD: The squares/carres are an oasis or meditation or grounding to me. I often feel overpowered by daily responsibilities and actions (verbing, biking, teaching, personal training, meeting, filing, phoning, scheduling, shopping, cooking, emailing) and rush towards a session of square-making as a place I can let it out or let it in or just spend precious alone time or find my emotional centre by articulating something to Pam through the medium of squares/carres.

VK: Clarify verbing please.

MD: Love verbs. In Spanish, verbs do a major workload of communication as speakers often drop personal pronouns. In the '70's, in modern dance, we employed word and action games

(a chance device) as a device to find fresh movement, sources, and to escape "classic modern dance". This came from a zeitgeist of "art as thinking" and responded to experimenters/leaders, like Mere Cunningham working with John Cage, choreographer Anna Halprin, Yvone Rainier, & other choreographers/artists like Carolee Schneeman, and choreographers working closely with visual artists in the time of conceptual artists i.e. Sol Lewitt and the line drawings, spiral jetty, etc. I am not nostalgic for that era but I see/feel it grounds/ informs me. Anyways, the verbing (listing/documenting) everyday kinetics is an action I return to as a starting point, not frequently but regularly returning to it as a source for something...

MD: Pam and I are logging verbs for ourselves and for each other, and every once in awhile we send each other a verb log in an email/rant of what we are doing. It is perhaps these verb logs that helped us see we both share a love of labour (ours, each others, and other women's labour — see the embroidery and lace on the found serviettes/pillowcases/hankies that we employ in our squares/carres)...

VK: What if you both decide to not sew the squares together! But to throw them from the highest building? Do you think of these possibilities? Or does the activity itself ground you in the moment?

MD: I do sometimes wonder what it would be like to not make squares but it seems sad and far away — like death/taxes/ dentist bills/rrsps and all that jazz — a far away someday kinda thing in the future so I ostrich and try not to worry...

VK: What do you not know about this piece, *Marginalia*?

PH: Where it will lead? What else I will learn from it? What the performance will "look like"? Who else might find meaning or resonance from our process and how we determine to render it visible?

