



Untitled thesis [slide]  
by Marni Sipora Leikin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
Montana State University  
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Abstract:  
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UNTITLED THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
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of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Bozeman, Montana

June 1998

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L5337

APPROVAL

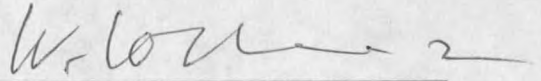
of a thesis submitted by

Marni Sipora Leikin

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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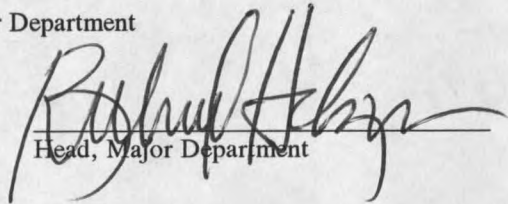
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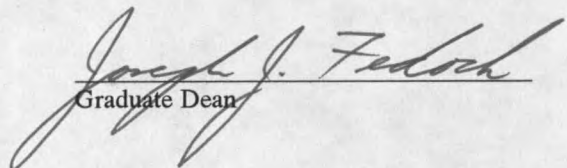


Head, Major Department

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7/1/98

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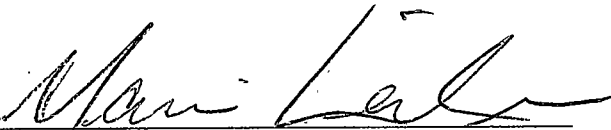
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## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I make art as a way of communicating, telling stories. Having the opportunity to set up four installations at once for my thesis has been a process of collecting and choosing stories to tell, binding them as an exhibition rather than into a book format. This volume is about sex. Sex and me. It is about how I have been affected by it and how it has affected my relationships. Each installation is a section within the volume, all inter-related but each regarding the topic differently.

Obviously this is not a new topic for discussion or to focus upon. As performance artist, Sandra Bernhard and Ann Magnuson have delved into the topic of sex often. They have both looked at the subject from personal and political angles. Their performances have been provocative and sometimes erotic, while including narratives that send messages of sadness, loss, power, and confusion. Sex has been used as a sensationalist topic and medium in much contemporary art, trying to attract the viewer in our overstimulated times. I have chosen to consider those aspects of sex which have affected me most drastically. Most instances that stand out are negative. Sometimes they are "double edged," in a way that makes me question what my level of tolerance toward negativity and disrespect is, and how dangerously close uncomfortable feelings intermingle with pleasure.

Telling sexual stories, discussing sexual memories, is something usually done among friends, casually and confidentially. Three pieces in this show that use imagery and/or narrative to tell some of my personal history also utilize contemporary elements: Viewmasters, a telephone and a peepshow guide the viewer to experience the stories one to one. The pieces are set up in a linear arrangement within the space so that their collective content will help build the expectations that I intend. By the time the audience enters the final installation, set up at the end of the hall, their expectations should be heightened.

I use installation and performance as formats that can tell stories as well as create nonverbal situations that "flesh out" the audience's experience of the narratives. For example, I have set up a childhood space and used a recognizable toy to be juxtaposed with the content of the images in the Viewmaster reels. Installation and performance are artistic formats that are time based, 3-dimensional, and transitory — all aspects I find compelling. These aspects work to make the expression of my ideas direct and confrontational. The elements of space and time contribute to the expectations created through the visual imagery and the audience's participation. They work to create an all encompassing experience for the viewer.

I use pornography and other paraphernalia from the sex industry as elements in my installations because they invoke specific responses from viewers — they are hard to ignore. They are fraught with sociological meaning and act as aides to set up the viewer for the personal narrative presented in the work. I use the sexual imagery as

tools to guide the responses of viewers, and induce expectations that serve to strengthen the work's meaning and impact, by being contradictory to the pieces' content.

STRINGS is a formal visual representation of my awareness of the connectedness and inescapable effects that stem from sexual experiences. The lines created by the string represent lives crossing and forming a web of relationships. Caught in and created by this web is my image, portrayed as a sexual object, being crisscrossed and altered by other intersecting lives.

VIEWMASTER refers to the experience of being watched. Knowing that someone watches me, produces in me a combination of disgust, fascination, curiosity, pleasure and power. Using the Viewmaster as the means for viewing the images keeps the watching experience private and makes it voyeuristic. I have done this to keep the experience true to the experiences that have inspired it. All photos on the reel are fantasies, staged scenarios or simply manipulated imagery that could accompany the thoughts of those who watch. I wanted to create images that were very likely more exciting than reality.

PHONE SEX includes narratives of several sexual experiences that have shaped how I feel about my sexuality. Using the construct of a phone sex-line guides the callers' expectations toward thinking about sexiness, sleaziness and the promise of arousal. It prepares them for stories that are neither sexy nor sexually titillating, even though they are still about sex.

A STORY MY GRANDMOTHER TOLD ME describes an experience from the

life of a woman my grandmother believed that I had been in a past life. At my grandfather's birthday party this past October, my grandmother, my grandpa's sister and I were sitting together at a table. A woman came up to the table and marveled at the similarities between my grandmother and myself. After the woman left, we talked about how funny and interesting her comment was in light of the fact that my grandmother and I are not biologically related. My grandfather's sister, Helen, interjected that she had always thought that I was my grandpa's first wife reincarnated. Helen's idea made sense to her when she considered how close my grandmother and I are and the nature of my relationship with my mother. My grandmother then told us that she had dreams and visions that confirmed for her who she thought I had been in a past life. This performance piece is an audio and visual representation of her dream. As a performance, the piece invokes physical responses that enhance the audience's understanding of the experience that woman in my grandmother's dream had. I also manipulate the audience's expectations and use elements from the sex industry to bring about conflicting responses.

Our culture encourages the objectification of women. This objectification has a pronounced effect on human behavior. I have chosen to explore and express some of the different types of behavior that I have experienced as the result of being objectified myself. This installation is the manifestation of a range of responses to this fundamental aspect of human existence. That range includes the extremes of the Nazi commandant and the seemingly harmless comments of my great-uncle. I included



stories that are not overtly erotic and which would not be automatically condemned in our culture as being abusive. Through the pieces in this show I am illuminating the pervasiveness and complexity of the abuse that is the result of the objectification of women.

## LIST OF SLIDES

1. "Strings" installation view, Marni Leikin 1998; cotton wrapping string, slide projection.
2. "Viewmaster" installation view, Marni Leikin 1998; sheets, bed frame and mattress, flashlights, Viewmasters, Photoshop manipulated images mounted in Viewmaster reels.
3. "Phone Sex" installation view, Marni Leikin 1998; telephone, menu routing telephone system, recorded stories, "Lust in Space," video commercial, beer posters, porn magazines.
4. "A Story My Grandmother Told Me" exterior view, Marni Leikin 1998; x-mas lights spelling out: "live."
5. "A Story My Grandmother Told Me" exterior view, Marni Leikin 1998; x-mas lights spelling out: "sex", beaded curtain.
6. "A Story My Grandmother Told Me" exterior view, Marni Leikin 1998; x-mas lights spelling out "show."
7. "A Story My Grandmother Told Me" performance close up, Marni Leikin 1998; wood, plexiglass, fabric, vintage clothing, string, make-up, recorded narration, performed and narrated by Marni Leikin.

## VIDEO

1. Installation walk through.
2. "A Story My Grandmother Told Me"
3. Segment from "Lust in Space" edited with video commercial advertising "Phone Sex."

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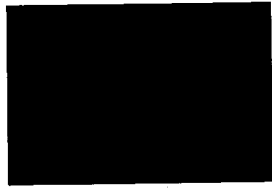
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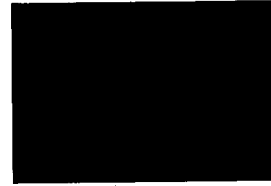
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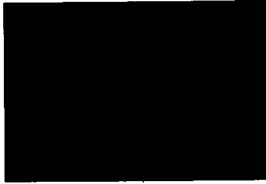
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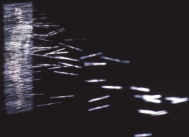


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same call number as book.

