



Rachel Rosenthal (PAJ Books: Art + Performance)

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"I take aspects of my life that I feel were useless and worthless, and through performance redeem them. It's a means of understanding and re-creation." -- Rachel Rosenthal

In Rachel Rosenthal, editor Moira Roth brings together a powerful portrait of the woman the Village Voice calls "one of America's most intelligent, politically committed, and challenging performance artists." Featuring reviews and photographs of Rosenthal's performance events, and collecting for the first time a selection of her writings (including the script of Rachel's Brain), the book captures the unique voice of a great American artist -- one whose career reads like a history of performance art and avant-garde theater in America from the early 1950s to the present.

Rosenthal's work has always been deeply autobiographical, drawing on a life that was eventful and unconventional from the start. After a privileged childhood in pre-War Paris, Rosenthal and her family fled Hitler's Europe, first to Brazil, then to New York. She returned to study in the postwar Paris of Artaud, existentialism, and the theater of the absurd. (These two experiences of Paris have defined much of her work.) Back in New York as the art scene exploded in the early 1950s, Rosenthal danced with Merce Cunningham, struggled as an artist, and included John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg among her friends. She moved to California shortly thereafter and started her famed improvisational company "Instant Theatre." By the 1970s, she had become one of the leading figures in feminist performance in California, helping to found Womanspace and other feminist galleries.

Inspired by theatrical writings of Antonin Artaud, Rosenthal's performance art blends music, words, images, and dance into ferociously moving works -- a theater of cruelty tempered by love, fiercely intense yet unsentimentally hopeful. Her autobiographical performances -- works such as Charm, The Head of Olga K., and My Brazil -- draw from childhood experiences that range from enchanting to deeply disturbing. In recent works like Pangaeon Dreams, Zone, and Filename: FUTURFAX, Rosenthal's themes have broadened to include concerns about the environment, animal rights, and the future of Western civilization.

Today, Rosenthal continues to perform in galleries, museums, universities, and theaters throughout the world. With her shaved head, elegant stature, and distinctive style, Rosenthal has become an icon of the American avant garde. Her commanding, strangely androgynous image has enhanced the increasingly shamanistic role she plays for her audience.

"This old prophet is not a figure who appeared from nowhere. We had known her (either witnessed in reality or from hearsay) in an earlier, younger, and more personal incarnation -- in Rosenthal's autobiographical pieces (and indeed, she continues to use, on occasion, autobiographical references in her current work). Thus, she is, so to speak, a prophet with a past, a prophet with known human frailties." -- from the Introduction

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