

IN MEMORIAM: JERRY DREVA

Jerry Dreva never had a gallery in New York or Los Angeles, or anywhere else. Most of his performances and events were street works; a few were sponsored by alternative spaces, mostly in Los Angeles. Like Guglielmo Cavellini, one of his heroes, Dreva in the 1970s was a self-promotion artist, and the great percentage of his work came in multiples through the mails, bearing his image.

Dreva's one foray into New York was a member of the glam-art, transgressive gay activist group, Les Petites Bonbons, which he once described as "artists-in-residence to the glitter scene." Founded by Dreva in 1971 with Bobby Lambert, the Bonbons appeared in the pages of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *People*, and *Interview*, and in the British rock press—*Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, and *Sounds*—with some frequency. They were included in Dan Cameron's 1982 New Museum show, "Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art."

Dreva's works after the Bonbons were situational and fleeting. He performed a series of anonymous graffiti strikes in Milwaukee—tagging buildings with slogans such as "Art only exists beyond the confines of accepted behavior." or with rows of hearts or stars—which he then covered as a reporter for a local newspaper. The full proceedings, with whatever other press was generated, would then become mail work. He moved back to Los Angeles in 1979, and created a series of works around the L.A. Bicentennial, beginning by having himself tattooed with an image celebrating the anniversary. He hosted breakfasts and lunches at the Pantry and Philippe's, and rode every Los Angeles city bus to the end of the line: some of these works were documented in *High Performance*, which published a feature issue on Dreva in the spring of 1980. With the artist Gronk, he

was the subject/impresario of a one-night retrospective at LACE in Los Angeles, entitled "Dreva/Gronk 1968 - 1978: Ten Years of Art/Life."

At some point in the late 1970s or early 1980s, he taught English, contemporary theory, and avant-garde literature at Otis Art Institute, professing a radical and very smart version of Michel Foucault. Across this period, he was heavily involved in both the L.A. punk music and downtown art scenes, and marked an important point of their overlap from his seat at the typesetting machine at LAICA (Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art) on Traction Avenue, and his booth at the Atomic Cafe.

Dreva is actually even more interesting than all of this—which might seem from New York or Bergamot Station rather dated and provincial. He was quite active in the civil rights and liberation movements of the late 1960s. He was a representative of the Gay Liberation Front at the Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention in September 1970, and one of the authors of the GLF's statement of support for Huey Newton's "Letter from Huey to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," published in *The Black Panther* in 1970. In the mid-1980s, he stopped making works and working the music scene and made a number of trips to El Salvador and Guatemala, at once passionately involved with the liberation struggles there and in search of a gay margin, or for a Genetian underworld. At the end of the eighties he moved back to South Milwaukee, where he was born in 1945, and where he died of a heart attack on Tuesday, 25 March 1997.

— Howard Singerman

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