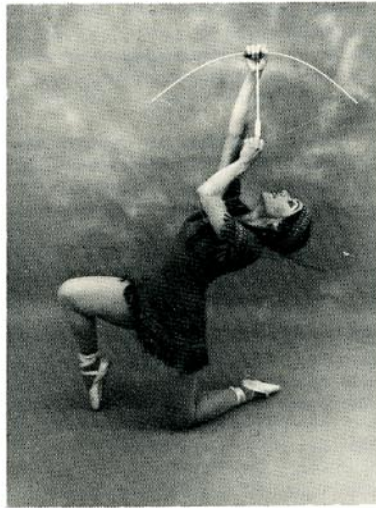


ELEANORA ANTINOVA

Ronald Feldman

Since the early seventies, when Eleanor Antin began reinventing herself as a 17th-century king, a Russian ballerina, and a Victorian nurse, she has insisted in her work that history is fiction and personal identity nothing more than historical fantasy or illusion. Her "performance selves," displaced persons in the modern world, are also portraits of the artist in disguise, for each of her personas documents his or her existence not only with performances but with mock-historical autobiographical memoirs, amateur sketches in period styles, or faded sepia photographs.

Last year she became the Black Ballerina, an



Eleanor Antinova, *Pocahontas*. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Photo Jennifer Kotter.

incongruous American in the Ballets Russes of the 1920s, and concocted a home-made ballet called *Before the Revolution* that she performed at the Kitchen. It was a fiction within a fiction. This year she arrived in 1980 New York as that same prima donna sixty years older in sedate black crepe to play the role of the aging ballerina fallen on hard times, selling her own history with public reminiscences. Potted palms filled the gallery. A simple turn-of-the-century Parisian salon tableau set the scene. And on the walls: sepia photos of the costumed Antinova in her heyday playing roles in five imaginary ballets; descriptions of the choreography; pages from a folio—"Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev"—illustrated by ink sketches in early twentieth-century style.

Sitting primly amidst the potted palms in black-face makeup and sipping champagne, she gave a performance that mingled pathos and comedy. She read from her recollections, showed slides of the photos on the wall, and interspersed comments awash in self-pity, skirting the edges of the impossible and risking discomfiting confusions between Antin the artist and Antinova the ballerina. Acting out art as an absurd relic of the past, a ludicrous but convincing fantasy, she is playing with notions of amateurism and bad taste, and daring to offend everyone. Her work originated as a California critique of conceptualism that shifted the arena from facts to narrative fictions, but she's really dealing with behavior instead of information. Modern self-awareness is her postmodern subject matter. It's a high risk art and very timely.

Kim Levin