

'Identity Theft'

Santa Monica Museum of Art Santa Monica

During the rise of feminism in the 1970s, many artists took on the subject of identity and how it is represented. Here curator and *ARTnews* contributor Jori Finkel highlighted three pioneers from that politically charged era: Eleanor Antin, Lynn Hershman, and Suzy Lake. The concise and timely exhibition, consisting mostly of that period's typically unfussy black-and-white photographs, videos, and typewritten texts, thoughtfully placed the artists within the development of Conceptual art.

Antin is well known in contemporary-art circles for dressing up as such characters as the King of Solana Beach;

Eleanora Antinova, the black ballerina who danced with Diaghilev; and a nurse who is at once flirtatious and a version of Florence Nightingale. The artist's commitment to her characters was extreme, as the show's extensive documentation revealed.

Whereas Antin drew from history, Hershman invented an alter ego, Roberta Breitmore, who in a wig, makeup, and special outfits, went about San Francisco getting jobs, dates, an apartment, and even a driver's license. Hershman essentially lived a second life through Breitmore's escapades, which are preserved today in surveillance photographs. The character grew so all-consuming that Hershman contemplated having her commit suicide.

Lake, an American who moved to Canada in the '70s, modified her eye-glasses, hairstyles, and facial traits in sequential photographs until her image was transformed into that of a male friend. Her work has not been exhibited widely in this country, though Cindy Sherman showed it at Buffalo's Hallwalls in 1975.

All three women were included in last year's feminist art exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, "WACK!" But this smaller show allowed viewers to absorb and digest the significance and dedication of the artists.

—Hunter Drohojowska-Philp



Eleanor Antin, *The Nurse and the Hijackers* (detail), 1977, video installation, dimensions variable. Santa Monica Museum of Art.