

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Gallery 400 (MC 033)
College of Architecture and the Arts
400 South Peoria Street
Chicago, Illinois 60607-7034

Endurance
"Artbreak: Endurance"
by Michael Weinstein
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Artbreak

CUTTING EDGES: Glee Pese sits crosslegged on a tiled floor, bent forward, her head lost in a bouquet of red roses. Pese has pierced her arms with eight thorns and has gashed her hand with a razor blade. Blood from the wound is smeared over her palm, and beautiful crimson peels have formed around the thorns, in Françoise Hossain's formal black-and-white photo documenting Pese's 1970 performance, "Sentimental Artless."

Pese's "action" is typical of the sixty-seven performances documented in "Endurance," a major exhibition of photographs and enlightening explanatory text that captures the golden age of performance art in the seventies. It was a time when some artists rolled naked on shards of glass in front of intent audiences or played with their acrophobia by sitting on chairs bolted to the outside walls of the upper floors of buildings.

Most of those attending the show's opening were art students from the University of Illinois Chicago Circle who gave it thoughtful and prolonged attention. Togy Alex, a sculptor, found the performances to be "a lot more sincere and not as cynical as my work. These people pushed themselves to their limits to see what was there, to find the truth. They were on a spiritual search. Now it's different. My art shows how ridiculous lies are, the falseness of existence."

Prismaker Matt Nepece also encountered a radical generational gulf when he took in the exhibit: "These artists felt they had to be on the edge and do things people couldn't or wouldn't accept. Now the point is to accept everything."

Blake Lewis wondered about "people doing in the name of art what other people are forced to do in uncomfortable situations." He is "into body piercing, but as something private, not as a way of getting attention."

The performance art of the seventies rings naive for today's art students, who are far beyond the moment when the stables counterculture was forced off the streets and into the protected spaces of museums, galleries and art schools, where it flourished as briefly as a betheuse flower.

Yet Lewis connects with what he sees: "It's shock art in a good sense: It appeals to your primal curiosity."

"Endurance," a five-part show, runs through December 21 at University of Illinois at Chicago's Gallery 400, 400 South Peoria. 312.996.6114. The second segment begins November 28. (Michael Weinstein)



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