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• Kendra Jane B

It is hard to believe that yet another Conference is right around the corner. It is always so odd to me that something can feel so far away and yet so close all at the same time.

As you dive into our annual pre-Conference issue I know each of you are excited about a different aspect of Conference. For some of us it is the once a year family reunion. For others it is the endless supply of knowledge at hand. Yet for others it offers a break from the everyday; a week to get away from the everyday humdrum of life and revitalize themselves for another year.

This will be my eighth Conference (I have attended every one since I began piercing) and every year I take away a different and yet equally valuable lesson which often not only applies to piercing, but to life as a whole. This year as I prepare for Conference I am trying to do so in a more mindful way. I am going into it knowing what I want to get out of it. This is what I urge all of you to do as you compose your check-lists and cross off the to do’s as we get closer and closer; think about what it is you want to gain from our week in the desert. I urge all of you to be mindful of the process, the preparation, and the prospects that will all be a part of your conference experience.

This year I hope to find a renewed connection, a connection with the people of our industry. I want to know why you do what you do. The fact that we are highlighting performance art means I can gain a better understanding of others’ connections to the industry. I am beyond thrilled that we have so many great classes as well as the Body Piercing Archive (BPA) exhibit devoted to performance art. To me performance art is the physical embodiment of someone’s connection with their emotions as art. I can’t wait to hear their stories and learn why they do what they do. So turn the page, read on, and get a taste of what this year’s Association of Professional Piercers Conference has to offer.

• Marina Pecorino

As a brand new mom—my son will be less than four months old in mid-July—the decision to attend Conference this year was a difficult one. I absolutely adore my newfound role as a full-time caregiver, but maintaining my work responsibilities while caring for my son is certainly a balancing act. I look forward to the reprieve of Conference, where for a week, my only responsibilities will be to the organization and community that I’ve worked for and been passionate about for over ten years. That said, I have plenty of photos and videos of my Tummy Monster to share with anyone who’s interested.

Again this year, I’m looking forward to experiencing the Body Piercing Archive, delving deeper into our rich history and learning about interconnected art forms that make up the body modification community. Another high point for me is reconnecting with my Conference volunteer family; we stay connected throughout the year online, but it’s different to be able to give and receive hugs and in person support.

Beginning last year, the Alternative To The Bar (ATTB) activities are offered in the evenings; a perfect fit for the more introverted among us and those hoping to avoid drinking and smoking. Unfortunately, my Conference responsibilities often keep me late into the night, but I do my best to participate. Playing board/card/table-top games and watching body mod related movies with fellow piercers is right up my alley, so this is my favorite place to be after classes are over and my work has been completed.

And then there are all the amazing classes to get excited about. My agenda this year includes Photography For the Modern Studio: Crop it like its hot! In the Beginning There Was Gauntlet, Investigating Cross Contamination, Color Theory for Body Piercers, and Women in Leadership. Honestly, the registration process is always a struggle for me. The class offerings are expansive and there are only so many hours in the day. Inevitably, I can’t attend everything that I would like to, so prioritizing is important. This is one of the many ways that the Mentor Program assists new attendees; providing guidance during the class selection process, to tailor fit the needs, skill level, and schedule of participating mentees. Read further into this issue to find out more about the Mentor Program.

For those of you attending Conference this year, I can not wait to see you. If we haven’t met yet, don’t hesitate to stop me in the halls or find me after class to say hi. If we have met, chances are I’ll be too shy and introverted to strike up conversation first, but don’t let that stop you from taking the lead. For those of you who can’t be with us, I encourage you to try for next year. The experience is unforgettable, and the knowledge and networking is unsurpassed.
• Jim Ward

It warms my heart to see this issue of The Point and brings back fond memories of issue 49 of Piercing Fans International Quarterly. Published by Gauntlet in 1996, it featured more than a dozen performance artists active at that time.

In 1996, suspension had not become the popular pastime it is today. Only one photo in the 64 page issue features it, but there were plenty of imaginative ways in which artists found to express themselves with piercings and blood.

The opposite page features the editorial Michaela Grey and I wrote for the issue. The names may have changed, but performance art is as vital today as it was in 1996.
Everything Old Is New Again

Remember grandma’s junk that you couldn’t give away ten years ago and ended up sending to the Salvation Army or the dump? Just look at the prices they’re charging for it now that it’s become “collectable.”

Some of us who are a little older may even have seen a revival in popularity of the fads and fashions of our youth. Anyone for disco, bell bottoms, platform shoes, lava lamps, mood rings? There are a lot of things in life like that somehow come full circle. Assuming you live long enough, it’s bound to happen to you too.

Piercing as a performance medium isn’t anything all that new, come to think of it. Just how many hundreds of years have Indian sadhus been working some dusty street corner, a skewer through their cheeks or hooks in their flesh, begging a few coins from passersby?

While today’s performers may not be doing anything new, there can be no doubt as to the great range and variety of imaginative ways in which they are incorporating piercing into their acts.

Some of this issue’s featured performers use their piercings to perform amazing feats of strength or endurance to entertain and astonish their audience. Take, for instance, the Torture King or Mr. Lifto (shown here). This tradition has roots among traveling circus sideshow acts: human and animal freaks, fire eating (see Chuk’s story in this issue), and sword swallowing, to name a few. In this type of performance, the body and its limits tell the whole story. We are compelled to watch these variations on the human condition, to find bits of ourselves in the “Other.”

Piercing as metaphor is often used in more high-concept performance art. Stelarc, Orlan, and David Wojnarowich are among the many high-profile artists who make statements using temporary piercings and/or body alterations. In this issue Justin Chin explores the notion of immunity and transmissible diseases by “infecting” himself with his own blood. Dave Tavacol gives us a glimpse into an unpleasant but not so far-fetched future, putting a piercing-related twist on cultural disapproval suggestive of The Scarlet Letter.

As many of us know, piercings can project one into an altered state of consciousness. The feats of Amazonian shamans, Indian fakirs and sadhus, and the grand spectacle of a tribal rite of passage all bear historical testimony to this tradition. Mr. Fab is one of a growing number of exponents of the neotribal performance path, using piercings to share these ancient experiences with the audience.

Drag queens are some of the most elaborate performers of all, using familiar paraphernalia to subvert our comfortable understanding of culture, gender roles, and socially acceptable behavior in a theater of the absurd. As Trauma Flintstone, Cirus, Mark Pritchard, and Fennel explain, piercing can be one more theatrical prop. Fennel’s performances play out a particularly astute perspective on a common breed of nihilistic club performance currently much in vogue. In classic drag oneupmanship, he gets even by beating them at their own game.

Many of the performance artists who appear in this issue have been a part of the Ron Athey show. These include Crystal Cross, Julie Tolentino Wood, Marina Vain (Spike), and Paul King. They utilize piercing as metaphor, crude spectacle, punishing absurdity, powerful, bitter humor, and panache to make strong statements about AIDS, gender, homosexuality, religion (especially Christianity), fetishism, and outsider status. Their ever-expanding international audience bears testimony to the fact that piercing and performance are a naturally matched pair, centuries old and yet still fresh, with the power to move the viewer to another state of awareness.

—Michaela Grey & Jim Ward
On May 4th, 2018, Fakir Musafar posted a farewell message on his Facebook account: “The time has come for me to inform you that Fakir’s shelf life is running out. I have been fighting stage 4 lung cancer since last October, and I am near my expiration date...” While I have known about Fakir’s diagnosis for months, witnessing Fakir make his short time remaining public really hit home. The outpouring of emotion, thanks, and support from all over the world has been quite a thing to behold. I’m confident the letters, cards, and photos you send are deeply appreciated by both Fakir and his wife Cleo, and may provide an air of closure.

My journey with Fakir began over 20 years ago, the way it has for so many others: through reading Modern Primitives. I was struck by the audacity it took to modify one’s body in so many different ways, all of it done long before body modification was an accepted element of Western culture. He seemed larger-than-life, brilliant, and enigmatic beyond description. Who was this man, and how had he developed this devotion to piercing, corsetry, and suspension?

It wasn’t long before I met him in person, in the spring of 1999. I remember thinking to myself, “I hope I look as good as this guy does when I’m in my fifties,” not realizing I was taking a class from a man in his late sixties. Fakir’s apparent defiance of his age turned out to be nothing compared to the impact his Basic Piercing Workshop had on my life. I learned directly from Fakir about the cultures he admired and about what compelled him to modify his own body. I was exposed firsthand to the ritual and spiritual experience that piercing and body art could be, and I was awakened to a perspective on body play that came from the immersive experience of the workshop. Fakir and his Intensives changed me forever.

I felt compelled to revisit the magic in the Fakir classes. Within eighteen months I had attended his Basic, Branding, and Advanced Intensives. Five years later I was visiting regularly, at times even driving from Rhode Island to San Francisco, just to experience a class. In 2005 I started teaching for Fakir, and I’ve grown...
I’ve had the good fortune to grow close to Fakir, first as a student, and then as an instructor, but more significantly, as a friend.

increasingly devoted to the unique quality of the workshops the Fakir Intensives deliver. For Fakir, however, teaching the body arts is really only half the story.

It’s difficult to explain the amazing life he has led. You may be aware that Fakir has been an advertising executive, a military demolitions expert, and a lifelong photographer. You might not know that he was a magician, a ballroom dancer, and a pioneering corset designer. There’s a unicycle in his garage, surrounded by shelves of piercing supplies, rigging for human rituals, and Body Play magazines. The man has lived that kind of life.

I’ve had the good fortune to grow close to Fakir, first as a student, and then as an instructor, but more significantly, as a friend. He is the patriarch of my chosen family, and I can say without hyperbole that the most important relationships in my life all trace back to Fakir, the Fakir Family, and the Fakir Intensives in some way.

So, although I write this column with a heavy heart. I’m thankful that Fakir chose to inform the broad piercing community about his condition, providing anyone who has felt his substantial impact the opportunity to reach out to him by sending a card, a photo, or a letter before he moves on to the unseen world. Through this considerate gesture, Fakir is showing us once again the type of person he is, and the extraordinary value he places on human connections. I truly hope you’ll take him up on it.

My journey with Fakir resonates as one of the greatest joys of my life. Thank you, Fakir. Your contributions to body art will be celebrated by our community for all time, and I, personally, have been forever blessed by your influence in my life. Your example and guidance have led me not only to evolve into the piercer I am today, but more importantly, the person I have become.

Merry Meet, Merry Part, and Merry Meet Again!

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**Piercing in Performance:**
Recollections from Five Artists

The artists will discuss some highlights of their careers and look back at thematic arcs and motivations for their use of the body in performance. This evening’s event is in three parts: Allen Falkner, Steve Joyner, Lukas Zpira and then Ron Athey with Darryl Carlton. (Open to All)

**Speakers:**

Ron Athey was born in 1961. Self-educated (not to mention schooled) in the West coast punk and experimental music scenes, he started making noise and body-based performance work with his partner Rozz Williams in 1980, under the name PE. Ron Athey & Co.’s ‘90s work is known as the torture trilogy; it was often a direct or esoteric response to the AIDS pandemic, bodMod, the queer body, the polemics of blood. Solo work and operatic collaborations include Solar Anus, The Judas Cradle, Sebastiane, and the automatism opera, Gifts of the Spirit. Athey is a visiting lecturer at Roski School/USC, teaching a seminar on the history of California-centric countercultures, and periodically facilitates immersive performance art workshops.

Lukas Zpira is a body modification artist, nomadic performer, documentor of the contemporary fringes, and one of the major figures of the contemporary underground.

His works, closely related to nouveau realism, differed in style to his writing and photography, which were far more influenced by surrealism and Dadaism, notably Duchamps and Man Ray’s rayographs. It was in 1993 that he took on the name Lukas Zpira, an anagram inspired from the surrealists. Multiple experiences and various exhibitions still left him unsatisfied, and he felt he had quickly reached the limits of his medium. He left the collective in 1995 to turn towards body art.

Soon after, Lukas opened Body Art/Weird Faktory in Avignon, the first studio in France dedicated to body modification.

In early 2004, in Japan, Lukas Zpira developed and wrote the body hacktivism manifesto, an artistic and political movement that asseverates the corporal biodiversity facing beauty standards imposed by Hollywood. More inspired by the bestial extra-terrestrials of Star Trek than the tribal references of the modern primitive movement, this activism of a new genre asserts the heritage of science fiction in the battle for body autonomy.

**Additional Speakers:**
Darryl Carlton, Allen Falkner, and Steve Joyner

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**Body Probe:**
A History & Theory of Piercing in Performance Art

Since the late 1960s, performance artists have challenged the limits of art—and frequently courted controversy—through practices of strategic wounding or self-injury. Piercing the skin has been a core technique for testing the performing body’s capacity for pain, pleasure, or endurance—alongside controlled cutting or scarification, repetitive, or sustained action over prolonger durations, sadomasochistic techniques, or the appropriation of medical technologies, including surgery. This lecture will survey a range of uses of piercing in performance; and situate the use of piercing among a broader range of uses of pain, endurance, and body modification in art and performance. I will then proceed to distinguish piercing as a distinct technique or technology in performance art, by teasing out what might be uniquely meaningful in the probing and puncturing of skin, and the spectacle of the permeability of bodies. (Open to All)

**Speaker:**

Dominic Johnson is Reader (Associate Professor) in Performance and Visual Culture in the School of English and Drama, at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of Glorious Catastrophe: Jack Smith, Performance and Visual Culture (2012); Theatre & the Visual (2012); and The Art of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art (2015). He is the editor of five books, including most recently Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey (2013); and (with Deirdre Heddon) It’s All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells (2016). From 2005 to 2012, his frequently bloody performances (solo and in collaboration with Ron Athey) were shown around the world, including at festivals of performance and live art in Copenhagen, Ljubljana, Rome, Toronto, Vienna, Zagreb, and elsewhere, and throughout the United Kingdom, including most notably at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow, and at the National Portrait Gallery in London as part of ‘Gay Icons’.

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This year, the Body Piercing Archive (BPA) is celebrating performance artists that have pierced their bodies from the past to present. In our exhibit we examine the methods and motivations which utilize perforation as an element of powerful performance. See the Conference schedule for free guided tours led by artists and scholars.

**EXHIBIT HOURS:**
Tuesday 10 am–6 pm
Wednesday 10 am–6 pm
Thursday 10 am–6 pm
Friday 10 am–1 pm

**RECOMMENDED TOURS:**

**TUESDAY**
10:00 am–10:30 am Tour Guide: Paul King
12:00 pm–12:30 pm Tour Guide: Steve Joyner
2:00 pm–2:30 pm Tour Guide: Dr. Dominic Johnson
4:00 pm–4:30 pm Tour Guide: Lukas Zpíra

**WEDNESDAY**
10:00 am–10:30 am Tour Guide: Dr. Julian Carter
12:00 pm–12:30 pm Tour Guide: Allen Falkner
2:00 pm–2:30 pm Tour Guide: Lukas Zpíra
4:00 pm–4:30 pm Tour Guide: Ron Athey & Darryl Carlton

**THURSDAY**
10:00 am–10:30 am Tour Guide: Ron Athey & Darryl Carlton
12:00 pm–12:30 pm Tour Guide: Dr. Dominic Johnson
2:00 pm–2:30 pm Tour Guide: Allen Falkner
4:00 pm–4:30 pm Tour Guide: Steve Joyner

**FRIDAY**
10:00 am–10:30 am Tour Guide: Paul King

*Above left, Kris-Canavan and Manuel Vason Collaboration, London, 2003; left, Tolentino and Fila It Will All End in (Ultra Red) Tears 2013*
An Intimate History of the Modern Body Piercing Movement by Jim Ward

In this revealing autobiography, Jim Ward, considered by many to be the father of the modern piercing industry, tells the engaging and candid story of discovering his own fascination with body piercing, his founding of Gauntlet, the world’s first body piercing studio, and how he transformed a personal fetish and backroom, amateur pursuit into a respected profession and spearheaded a world-wide social phenomenon.

Essential reading for everyone with an interest in body piercing; you, your shop staff, and your customers will treasure this book.

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“Essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how modern body piercing arrived at the place it currently occupies.”

James Weber, Former President Association of Professional Piercers
THE MENTOR PROGRAM

CALE BELFORD
APP Mentor Program Coordinator

Well it’s that time of year again, and the Mentor Program is in full effect! If you are attending the annual APP Conference for the first time, then you are probably feeling overwhelmed and a little lost. Don’t fear! We have this amazing program in place to help you with your Conference experience!

So what exactly is the Mentor Program? It’s an incredible outreach system created by Ryan Ouellette in 2009; the idea was to essentially build small families that can work together as a group and lean on each other for support during the APP Conference. We have seen amazing progress with new attendees and have had wonderful feedback when it comes to the program. We look forward to continuing this process for years to come.

Our mentors are experienced conference goers and seasoned piercers who want to ensure that the new attendees have an outstanding time. To pair mentors and mentees, we use a survey system conducted by the program coordinator to create Mentor Teams based on similar interests, areas of knowledge, and class schedule needs. These small groups consisting of a mentor and two to three mentees will help to assist and encourage each other and provide beneficial headway to the conference experience as a whole. Mentors are here to support you if you become overwhelmed or require a little reassurance, if you want assistance with your class schedule, or perhaps just give you advice on where to find the best tacos or the most delicious vegan burger. It is essential to take full advantage of this opportunity! Many mentors and mentees develop connections with each other that last for years!

If you plan on attending Conference for the first time and have questions that you would like answered, need help selecting your classes, or you would simply like to have a friend before arriving in Vegas, then the APP Mentor Program is here to help! If you are a first or second year attendee and would like assistance from a mentor chosen specifically for you, please email mentors@safepiercing.org with MENTEE in the subject line. Be sure to include your name, telephone number, and other contact information in the email. There is technically no deadline to sign up as a mentee, but the earlier you enroll the more you will get out of the program. We cannot wait to meet you!

We genuinely want each and every one of our new attendees to get the most out of their conference experience and hope what the Mentor Program offers makes this possible. If you have any questions about the Mentor Program, becoming a mentor, or being a mentee at Conference, please do not hesitate to contact Cale at mentors@safepiercing.org.
Johnny Velez—Veteran Mentor

I have been part of the mentor program since the inception. I’ve had mentees from all over the world, and enjoy helping make their conference experience one to remember. I’ve helped from beginning to end of Conference helping them pick classes, introducing them to other piercers, as well as follow up with them when Conference ends. I still keep in contact with some of the mentees and have worked side by side with a couple of them. I really enjoy seeing people who have been mentees step up and mentor others knowing they are a little overwhelmed their first year with so many people. If anyone sees myself or others walking around with Mentor Badges feel free to ask any questions you may have. I’m looking forward to seeing all the old faces as well as meeting a bunch of new ones.

Kelly Carvara—Two Year Mentor

Even before I went to my first Conference, I thought the Mentor Program was such a wonderful idea. I remember the very thought of being in such a huge city and only having a few people out of hundreds there that I knew filling me with panic. I asked a friend about the Mentor Program and if I should sign up to get a mentor. They convinced me not to saying, “you’ll know plenty of people there, you’ll have a blast!” While they were mostly right on both counts, I still wish I’d taken the opportunity to sign up with the program. Not only would I have had a greater feeling of security, but also had the chance to make one more friend who I might not have made otherwise.

I knew being a conference mentor was something I would want to do in the future when I, myself, had become more comfortable at the event. Being able to be a conference mentor to a new attendee is an extension of our ability to help others in a very meaningful way. I’m extremely grateful other like-minded piercers took the initiative to create such a wonderful program.

Pablo Perelmutter—Four Year Mentor

I have been involved with the Mentor Program for a few years and I love it! Spanish is my first language, and my ability to also speak Portuguese and English has allowed me to become a much needed mentor to international attendees. It makes me happy to help attendees break the language barrier, and provide them with a more authentic experience at Conference.

This platform for mentorship is fantastic for building a strong relationship with attendees who need guidance. I have built friendships over the years with my mentees and plenty of them still contact me with piercing questions, membership questions, or just a place to crash while they’re in town.
Why was I obsessed to modify my body? Why would I abandon the comfort of the status quo for the unknowns of body modification and ritual? I did it primarily because I was curious and bored with the status quo. In retrospect, probably for the same reasons early explorers risked the hazards of sailing uncharted seas. And like explorers of the past, present and future seeking rewards of some kind: treasure or knowledge. In my journey I sought to explore the seas of consciousness, my own inner self. The most personal and accessible vehicle was my own body. During my 50 plus years of sailing via body ritual, I have found some of the same reasons I set sail in the body rituals of other cultures.”

“EPILOGUE,” Body Play: My Journey
—Fakir Musafar
Sean Dowdell: Let’s start with your age, where you were born, and the city you live in now.

Fakir Musafar: I am presently 83, born in 1930 in Aberdeen, South Dakota (which was then on the Sisseton Sioux Indian reservation). I have lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1955.

SD: Can you tell us where you came up with the name, “Fakir Musafar” and why?

FM: In 1977, Doug Malloy and then icons in the tattoo industry (like Ed Hardy and Sailor Jerry) decided to hold the FIRST international tattoo convention in Reno, Nevada. There was no piercing industry then as such, only Jim Ward and me. We were invited to participate and bring a spectacular show for the closing event. Doug asked me to do all the practices I had adopted from other cultures: bed of nails, bed of swords, etc. for the show. But he felt my regular given name was not memorable enough for the event. Not good for publicity. So he asked me if I had a special pet name I could use. I respected and honored a 12th century Sufi called Fakir Musafar who said to get close to the divine, you should pierce yourself. I adopted that name for the show; after the event the name was remembered and stuck.

SD: Fakir, you are known to a lot of us fellow body piercers as the Father of the Industry, what are your thoughts regarding that statement?

FM: Jim Ward is actually the Father of the Modern Piercing Industry (he commercialized it) and Doug Malloy is the Grandfather (he championed it). My job has been to educate. I am widely known as the “Father of the Modern Primitive Movement.” Piercing and a whole lot more, espousing a whole different attitude about “body.”

SD: How do you feel about the fact that many people think of you as a role model or icon?

FM: Because I was a pioneer and brought something new into our Western Culture, I became an icon. I was #1 in this regard and my teaching was by example not proselytizing. I was driven by an urge to share, not ego driven.

SD: What specifically in other cultures prompted you to want to learn more about your body and at what age did you start the exploration?

FM: I grew up surrounded by Native American culture, friends, customs and vibes. This was more comfortable for me than Western Christian Culture of the white settlers in South Dakota where I lived. Later, I found that Lakota Sioux and Mandan customs and beliefs were much the same as Hindu and Sufi customs and beliefs. My early explorations began at age 12. See attached my story from “Bodies Under Siege.” I had my first out-of-body experience at age 17 trying the bondage trancing ritual of Eskimo shaman.
SD: When or how did you discover that through pain, one can connect with inner self and conscience?

FM: At age 12 to 16 by trying some of the practices like Sun Dance of the Lakota and Ball Dance of Hindu devotees. Later in life when I visited other cultures, especially Hindu culture in Malaysia, and tried their body rituals with hook pulls, Kavadi and suspensions. However, PAIN is NOT my God! The notion of “pain” only exists in Western Culture.

SD: Who specifically would you consider to have had a large influence on your life direction in regards to body enhancement and manipulation and why?

FM: My own inner self, then by examples of other seekers via body ritual, the inner understandings of other cultures.

SD: I read in another interview with you in which was mentioned that “you had befriended some of your local Indian tribesmen and started to learn about them as people and their culture.” What was it that prompted you to participate in your first ceremony with them, and what was it?

FM: I was bored and wanted to experience something outside the limited dimensions of the culture I was living in. I did my first permanent body piercing at age 14, my first mini Sun Dance ritual and out-of-body experience at age 17, my first tattoo at age 19 (self-made).

SD: Were you accepted entirely by the Indians that you were around or were there some that didn’t want the outside influence from you?
**FM:** Yes, I have always been understood and accepted by the Native American tribes where I lived. Later by other Native Americans and Tamil Hindus in Malaysia and some Sufis. I connect with them all on an energetic level. They can usually “read” energy.

**SD:** How would you describe pain? How are you able to overcome it so easily?

**FM:** Again, PAIN is NOT my God. The idea and emotions behind the word “pain” are strictly a Western, Christian and modern notion. Pain is merely intense physical sensation. Proper mindset and training, as in some other cultures, allows one to accept ever increasing sensation and convert it into an ecstatic state. There are physical changes, like release of endorphins, followed by trance and freedom of consciousness from the material world. What is called “pain” can open doors to “bliss”. One can only learn this through personal experiences. In my case, body rituals including those of body piercing, tattooing, suspensions and pulls.

**SD:** Do you wrestle with the fact that most people want their piercings for simply aesthetic reasons and miss some of the important ritualistic meanings in them?

**FM:** Yes, I have a problem with this. These people lack the education, training and guidance to understand tattoos as “magic marks,” piercings as movers of energy and body rituals involving intense physical sensation as doorways to spirit.

**SD:** When, why and how did you decide to start your piercing school?
FAKIR MUSAFAR
FM: After we launched the modern body piercing movement in the 1970’s, the sexual and spiritual aspects stayed pretty much intact until the mid 1980s. Then body piercing became popularized, commercial, and mainstream. By 1990, the beauty and intent of the practices got somewhat lost, as well as the skills and practical knowledge to do safe and reasonable piercing. I started Fakir Intensives in 1991 as an educational enterprise to counter this trend.

SD: Were there many obstacles to overcome in doing so? If so, what were they?

FM: Everyone who could get a clamp and needle thought they were a piercer. Many mistakes were being made with BAD outcomes. The energy movement and spiritual aspects of body piercing were being mostly ignored. Out of conscience, I felt I had to do something to counteract the mad rush to “mutilate” and “decorate.”

SD: What piercers are you most proud of teaching and seeing their success?

FM: At Fakir Intensives, we have trained and educated some 1200 piercers since 1991. Many of them are now captains of the industry with some of the the best long term successes in the industry. Fakir trained piercers are in studios all over the U.S. and the world. We set the standards which others try to match. I am especially proud to have been a part of the establishment of the APP and of the Fakir Intensives instructors who are now on the APP Board of Directors.

SD: Is the piercing school successful?

FM: Of course. We have become a de facto standard in the industry.

SD: Are you surprised at the immense popularity of piercing today?

FM: Yes, never thought contemporary culture was ready for it. But a bit disappointed by some of the results.

SD: What advice would you say to someone who wants to get into piercing but isn’t quite sure how?

FM: Get educated on the skills, health, safety, energy movement and spirit of the craft. Yes, it is a craft with a little bit of magic thrown in.

SD: What are your thoughts on some of the heavy body modification that is going on today?

FM: Yuck! Much of it was misappropriated from other cultures and has gone “off the rails.” Respect for the originators and Mother Nature is very much needed or there will be a lot of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual damage.

SD: What are your ideas for your future in the next 5-10 years; what would you like to be doing or accomplishing?

FM: I only hope I have been a positive influence on something newly brought in contemporary culture.

SD: Is there anything that you would like readers to know about you that isn’t common knowledge?

FM: I am an ordinary man who simply heard the sound of a different drummer.

See BODY OF GOD: www.hulu.com/watch/531912

Opposite, Annie Sprinkle with Fakir as photographed by Charles Gatewood for his book Forbidden Photographs; above, Jim Ward rigs Fakir into the cage-like Kavandi for a ritual, Valhalla Ranch, California, 1983. Photo by Mark I. Chester.
Collaborative installation
by Stelarc & Hâvve Fjell Hâvve Fjell
*Shadow Suspension*, Dallas Suscon, 2013.
Photo: Luna Duran
There is a movement of suspensions being used as a contemporary art form, but it’s definitely not a new concept. A Cyprus-born, Australian performance artist named Stelarc was creating artwork with suspension since the ‘70s before the modern suspension movement was really even a thing. Stelarc had some breathtaking work. For me, his 1980 installation of “sitting/swaying” at the Tamura Gallery in Tokyo, Japan will always have a place in my heart for its pure beauty. Stelarc began with 18 rocks equalling his weight attached to a circle of eyebolts in the ceiling, using ropes with slip knots. The other end of each rock was attached to a hook in Stelarc’s skin. As the performance began with Stelarc sitting in the center of the circle, each slip knot was released and he was lifted, slowly swaying until his body was completely counterbalanced in a seated position.
I have been fortunate enough to be involved in the creation of many of my visions for suspension and the visions of my dearest friends. One of my first real experiences with exhibiting suspension to the public as an art form was in early 2014. I had just moved to Christchurch, New Zealand - a city of around 375,000 people. Christchurch had been hit with a series of earthquakes that demolished the majority of their city. It was obvious that one of the coping strategies the city used was making art. The suspension team I was a member of, Skindependent, was asked to install a suspension inside a shipping container that had been converted into a downtown art gallery. We suspended one of our team members in a horizontal position facing down with lines filling the entirety of the container. The suspension was carefully designed and mapped out by our team leader, Eden Thomson. I was quite nervous about being involved in this because of the possible reactions. There were definitely some ruffled feathers from this creation, but the majority of the people were receptive and full of questions about what suspension was. I remember being uplifted by all the beautiful conversations with complete strangers about why we choose to suspend, and subsequently, we even inspired a few people to be suspended by the team later that year. I didn’t really think much of this; I just put it down to the people of Christchurch being more open-minded, and maybe because the Skindependent team had already been creating beautiful suspensions for many years prior.
Harcors Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
Suspension facilitated by Daniel Thomas and Steel Kiss Suspension
Photographer unknown
Each time that I was involved in a public demonstration with artistic suspension, this pattern continued, no matter where in the world we were. I would get a bout of anxiety about possible negative reactions, but they would never materialize. People were always so curious and open-minded. I only truly realized the effect that artistic suspensions could have after designing, and helping to create, a suspension at the Skin Project in New York City. Skin is an annual event, hosted by the Anchors Aweigh team, bringing practitioners from around the world together to create a gallery-style production. This event has done a great deal for the development of artistic suspension and continues to push boundaries each year for what is possible within this art form, but for me, this pushed boundaries in my own family. I come from a loving and supportive family, but they have made it clear that suspension is something that they would rather I was not involved in. After the event, I posted some photos online of this suspension and I received messages I never expected to see. My mother, father, and grandmother had all individually sent me messages of praise that meant so much to me. It wasn’t the praise that meant a lot; it was the beginning of acceptance of my involvement in something that I love so much.

I believe artistic suspension has a very special purpose and that is to create a form of wider acceptance for what we do. To me, suspension is a beautiful, empowering act. I see it in an entirely different light than the general public. People tend to see it as a form that is tortuous and is linked to a purely sadistic/masochistic motive. Often just the idea of suspension evokes emotions that will turn people’s stomachs and set boundaries that will prevent them from ever wanting to see this act. I believe that art itself encourages us to challenge our own boundaries. People view art, not only for its ability to be visually pleasing, but also its thought-provoking nature, allowing us to act differently when something confronts us.

For those who suspend, regardless of the reason, it becomes more than just an act you do. It is something that becomes a crucial part of your identity, so finding a way to bridge that gap is exceptionally important. Ask a suspension practitioner what their favourite part of suspending a first-timer is and often their response will be, “that first suspension smile”, the look on the suspendee’s face when their feet first leave the ground and the realization that they have done something that moments ago, they were more than likely telling themselves was entirely impossible. I can’t even count the number of times that I have facilitated a suspension for someone and later heard that their elation of self-empowerment had been crushed by some degree of strain within the relationship between them and their family, even though they found it to be a positive, uplifting experience.

I don’t think suspension will ever be something that is completely off the taboo list, particularly in a society that is constantly seeking comfort, and rejecting the idea of pain having any positive connotations. Regardless, I love the idea that working with beautiful lines can create a piece of art that attaches to the hooks, facilitating the ability for people to see suspension for the beauty it has behind the eyes of the suspendee.
Skin Project, New York City 2015
Suspension facilitated by myself, Misty Forsberg, and skin attendees
Photo by Lipple mfg
SUSPENSIONS
by Håvve Fjell
Twisted Bodies, 2018
Photos by Helene Fjell
EDEN THOMSON/SKINDEPENDENT

photos by Martin Booth

Left, Installation, 2015; below, Art Box Suspension, two views
These amazing innovative European tools and products developed by TRUST in Mannheim / Germany are now available in the United States from HOUSE OF HAWORTH.

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www.trust-wholesale.de
am a professional body piercer from Calgary, Alberta, Canada and have been piercing for 16 years. My job is my passion and my life. As a little girl I always enjoyed performing and my heart was set on becoming a singer. Even though this is not the path my life took, the opportunity to be on stage presented itself later on in life for me, and in a slightly different manner than I had originally planned.

When I was given the chance to perform in Calgary with a variety show I knew I didn’t want it to be just another burlesque performance, so I started thinking about what else I could do. Having taken baton lessons as a girl I realized I could hone my skills and put together a fire spinning routine. I rigged up some homemade torches, taught myself to breathe fire and went from there.

Once I had enough experience with the batons I ordered some fire fans and incorporated those into my sets. I did shows using these and decided I needed to up my game even further. I had performance art fever. I was familiar with play piercing and had pierced myself many times throughout my life. I began brainstorming how I could incorporate fire and piercing; this is when the “Titty Torches” were born!

The idea was to pierce my chest with needles that were threaded at the end to allow mini torches to be attached. I would pierce each side of my chest, light the torches on fire and breathe fire off of them. It took some trial and error and I realized that the fire proved to be a little too close to my face to breathe off of. After some adjustments the idea worked beautifully.

With seven inch long, threaded 14g needles, I pierced my chest three inches deep (I found that any less tissue wouldn’t hold the weight of the torches) on either side, this was always the big finale to my show. These were the last piercings I did after doing three smaller play piercings on either side. Everything was choreographed to music that would fit the theme of the show.

I had opportunities to perform many times in a few years and I never liked to do the same thing, so once again I decided I needed to add a little something else to my sets. This is when I came up with my “Pucifer Piercing Set”. This included three different sets of play piercing and fire that were performed to three different Pucifer songs. It started with seven needles inserted into my arm to the song “Queen B”. It ended when I would pierce each of my thighs four times, then corset them together to the song “V is for Vagina”. This took a lot of precise measuring as I was doing it on myself and being a perfectionist, everything needed to look perfect when the ribbon was tied. The visual was beautiful.

I was proud to perform and, although I no longer perform, it was one of the best times in my life. I’ll always have the marks to remember it by.
Santa Sangre Body Rituals
by Darkam & Beto

Santa Sangre Body Rituals Manifesto

Let us be quiet for a second and listen to the Gods sleeping. They sleep through the daylight madness and the hidden obligations. Their yawns loud enough to open canyons and generate stars. Dreams made of sticky pollen, bees embroidering eternal paths.
There, the bedtime stories are made of ancient ropes, each knot its own tale.
There, blood is the most precious gift, and it’s used to write ancient stories.

Santa Sangre Body Rituals

Darkam and Beto (Kukulcan Rituals) make the two pillars of Santa Sangre Body Rituals. Their different backgrounds and perspectives join to create a parallel world in which their art, performances, rituals, and music yield something that is larger than life.

Beto has Mexican roots, and is deeply connected to his pre-Hispanic heritage. He started experimenting with body suspensions 14 years ago and has worked in 38 different countries as a performer, private body suspender, and lecturer. He also does hand poked tattoos and scarifications.

Darkam started as a piercer 15 years ago in Italy while conducting her research in visual arts, where she studied drawing and illustration. She currently works as an illustrator, comic artist, and tattooist. Hermetic magic, alchemic symbolism, and the ancient pagan rituals have always been a great source of learning and inspiration for her.

In 2015 the Santa Sangre Body Rituals project sprang to life. Mixing symbolism from different backgrounds, they reinterpret ancient legends and folklore. Old tales reflect our archetypes, thus bringing us to the very foundation of human perception.

Through their thorough narrative structure, detailed research, and accurate cultural and anthropological stories, they turn their performances into an enchanting moment for the audience.

But all this works as a trigger; a way to achieve the contact within oneself, to our deepest emotions, those that are part of our human and individual history. These emotions are ingrained in us, central to our body, written in the blood, and bring with them an evocative force.
Photo by Tattoo Nysa
Each performance is unique and is never repeated the same way. Everything, from the costumes to the music, is carefully chosen to support the narrative.

When an audience is new to body modification practices, body suspension may be perceived as something brutal. This is why Santa Sangre Body Rituals like to play with opposites; to show that suspension is not only related to pain and suffering but that it can be a path to spiritual elevation:

- That blood can be a powerful offering, as it used to be in ancient times.
- That beauty can be found in the most unexpected places.
- That the red string that Japanese believe to connect souls, can be made of blood.

Santa Sangre Body Rituals mix visual arts as live paintings that extend beyond the given canvas such as during their unique collaboration with body suspending opera singer Joa Helgesson. They hope to continue bringing the shows to unfamiliar and academic contexts in the future.

www.santasangrebodyrituals.com
PERFORMANCE ART
by Hika K.

Photo: Iwlig Haghjaj by Artkor Sultan Kaiser
I have always been drawn to the magic of storytelling. Like most of us the creation of adventures was a big part of my childhood. I was able to see something magical in the smallest and most mundane of things. There was always an adventure waiting to happen, threads weaved together only waiting to be discovered, waiting to be unraveled by our own interpretations. So for a long time I lived in ideas, written words and moving pictures, letting my soul be touched by the creations of others. When the ideas became too plentiful, mine spilled onto paper, whenever I felt there where words that needed to be spoken. But as it is with everything in life, there exist limits to everything, and my expression found its limits with those things that I could not use words to aptly describe. Other forms of art fascinated me, the ways melodies and its accompanying dance, or a photograph can touch ones soul. Art has the ability to break open the seal of emotions that may have been buried. I became fascinated with everything seemingly abstract, with its deeper meaning hidden and only visible to those who strive to see.

Many years later, after becoming a body piercer and long gone through the process of growing up and then subsequently mended myself did I realize the effect of society’s expectations, limits, taboos and having those things ingrained in me. Although I was always questioning, fighting and in turn chose my profession because of this struggle for empowerment, drawn towards making my body my own and choosing my own outer shape. This is how I became fascinated by another form of art: Body Performances, using pain, blood and the strong energy that comes with it to make a point. I had so many stories to tell in this way but I was silent for a long time because the invisible scars of trying to conform were too deep. Until one day, when the time was right, I asked somebody I trusted to help me pour my anger, feelings, the criticisms of society’s standards and the damage they did onto the stage.

And here the adventure started, here catharsis happened, over and over again. And with time I understood how performing on stage although scary, was also exciting, beautiful, and god-damn badass to look at, but it gives you something back, something bigger than all the rest of it. It heals the wounds you have no word for. It gives you another way to feel your body. It lets you physically release the things that keep your anger burning and leaves you in tears, it allows you to let them out. But more important than anything; it allows you to connect, you can touch the soul of others. Understanding this meant understanding that my profession as a body piercer is not so different to my cherished performance work. Because both circle around empowerment, reclaiming your body and healing the unspoken-of, maybe deeply-buried wound festering inside.
Hika’s Interview with Noema:

Because of the power that is held in performance art I knew had to write about it. Noema Pasquali is a body piercer, performance artist, healer and yoga-teacher from Italy currently living in Berlin. Her work encompasses many topics and styles, and she regularly performs and teaches at BmxNet Conference.

Hika: Hello Noema! First of all thank you for doing this interview with me. Maybe we can start with you introducing yourself?”

Noema: My name is Noema but as an artist I have choosen the stage name Tiger Orchid (based on two elements really close to me). The tiger is the most important symbolic animal to me, since it is the animal of Durga, one of the gods I worship. Secondly I chose the orchid because is a really interesting plant, as it is delicate and with this not really easy to grow and yet astoundingly resilient.

H: Can you tell us how you got into performance in the first place? Was there a certain initial point that you can think about?

N: I think there is not really a definitive point where I started with my performances. Since I was a child I showed an aptitude for every kind of art and it was very clear that I was in need of some communication and expression. So during my studies and while growing up I was very drawn to anthropology, literature, semiotics and visual sociology. Basically all things to do with the research of humans and their history. Obviously I was more into rites of passages. When I was around twenty—so twenty years ago—I started my career as a fakir and every kind of emotion and relation close to pain and close to devotion has been really interesting for me. So when I discovered suspension I wanted to try. To have that feeling of trance and that moment when you pass into another dimension, when you feel nothing. Although I would say you are close to the God that is inside of you. That was one of the most powerful moments of my life - I totally felt the power of that kind of rite and I planned my career into two different kind of directions. One was very devotional and the other a crazy one, more in the direction of freakshows, sideshows...though we can’t really say there is a difference to me, since those sideshows also had my devotion. Performing in a freakshow is the same as bakhti in yoga to me. It’s another kind of devotion.

H: I would also like to know what is your motivation to do performances, to keep you performing longterm? What kind of performances are the most important to you?
Clockwise from top left (nun photo), Hika photographed by House of Rough Arts; Koma Suspension photographed by Le Vinee; Infirmitas Sexus; fire eating photographed by Marta Petrucci.
Rituals have been really important for me in my career as a performer since I use them to talk about some influences which are really strong in contemporary society—I am talking about the struggle in situations around things like gender and other controversial social situations. One of the most important performances in which I use hooks is a homage to my grandfather’s death. Since he committed suicide I decided to create this kind of performance as a reply to his death. This was an amazing performance for which I used a passage from Shakespeare’s Hamlet. I used the part in which Ophelia’s body should be buried and two clowns are sitting there talking about death and the reason people are committing suicide, as well as how they cannot enter heaven if they are responsible for their own death. This performance is directed towards people’s judgements and the social stigma surrounding suicide. We can basically say that my work is based on elements that are important on my journey as a student, or as a fakir or as a yoga teacher.

H: Which also is another thing—you are spreading into a lot of directions profession wise. Does this sometimes feel contradictory?

N: I can’t really say that there is a separation in the things I do. All I’ve done has been leading me to be the kind of performer I am now. This has been just a natural process for me. I still have to say I want to do this because performing has become a way for me to communicate and is to me the most important medium to empathize with other humans to let them recognize the issues at hand and try to educate them. I consider art the most powerful and also the most peaceful weapon ever. My heart has been my way to contribute to society, and to also give something to my community. We are growing into a society that has no idea what community is. We don’t share our hopes and dreams. There are no real connections. But I see that in this kind of underground art, there is a little community of people that are trying to bring something special, a kind of new communication. It’s amazing to see how we want to be part of this society in the most active way.

H: There is something I want to get into. You say there is not really a difference in the things you do—but I noticed you do very different things, one can say a split in your types of performance art. Some is more theatre like, where even the sideshow tells a story. Yet some is more serious, and dark. Do you see a difference with how the audience reacts? Because everytime you tell a story you approach it differently. I would expect that the audience reacts differently to you suturing your genitals together than you eating glass and spitting fire.

N: It is true that you always have different audiences and this may affect what you are doing on the stage. I am booked because I use different stories, but I can tell you that it’s mostly your attitude that makes the difference. When you are really good in communicating what you are doing, even blood is not scary, and usually I use a lot of blood in my performances. I use a lot of things that could be seen as scary, for example stitching my genitals for my last art performance. Even though I use more hardcore elements in my sideshows, people are more scared of what I am doing with my art performances. But the point of why they are scared is that during those performances solely for art there is the absence of “entertainment”. During my performance art I tell other kinds of stories. They are based on empathy and maybe some socialities, they are more sensitive. They are more connected to soul things. It’s not about what I do, it’s about what people see. It’s more based on their own story and their interpretation of my art performance. I just work with the kinds of archetypes I learned about in my studies of anthropology (which is really easy for me since this was one of my favorite subjects as a student). So everything is really connected to things deep inside of us, we are linked more to a kind of tribe—a community—than to a society. This is where I base my work on and people get scared because I just bring them back to their own soul. Blood is the first element of life.
So they get scared—but again, it is not about me, it is about them. They recognize all those ideas and spirits.

H: I noticed from my own performances for example that some people take the story in a little bit better if they laugh before, if you offer them some fun. They open up to think and don’t get so scared. Do you ever think about making living solely, this means taking more bookings that would be for entertainment purposes rather than for art per se. For example when you work in fetish parties to spit fire there. Do you still tell those kind of stories or is it only entertainment? How do you feel about that, if there even is any difference?

N: For fetish parties I can say that it is not so far away from who I am. I am forty, don’t forget this (laughs). When I started all my performance art it was way easier to do it in the underground scene which BDSM was part of. Ritual—The Club in Rome, where I have been the main performer for at least six years, was also host to Ron Athey twice, and was one of the first to have fetish parties using performance art back in the 90s. Having a field to express yourself in underground parties was easier back then. In the past I was the kind of woman that one didn’t easily meet, I was somehow “the different one” so it was easier to go there to express myself, to dress as I liked, to feel free and to meet normal people also expressing their desires, their individuality. There was no judgement. Now I can say that it is true that as BDSM changed so did those parties. Now I like when I can interact with the people, I know what to do. Now at parties where I am entertaining (versus performing) I don’t work with needles on those people but I work with fire and let them try warm wax. There is a kind of communication based on the acknowledgement of another aspect of your body, another kind of feeling. How things work. I let them play, they trust me and they are always grateful because they discovered and tried something new.

H: Also you are working as a yoga-teacher and a healer. Do you want to tell us something about that aspect of your life?

N: This actually also started when I was really young. Most of the artists I know work as a healer—actually, trying to communicate and empathize is integral for being a healer. Being a healer is a nature, we can say. I always had that call from the universe, I always had that kind of gift and of course as all the people in the healing scene I was feeling always connected to all kind of energies. Working with them makes you also understand people’s problems and you realize you are not the only one living on this planet. Everybody is the same as you, maybe in a different body, but the problems are always the same. Always the same. So basically my career as a healer is one that is part of all of my other careers—as I told you in the start, everything is connected, I don’t see a difference in anything I do. It is all part of my big project in being an evolved woman.

H: Last but not least, do you see something in common with being a piercer and being a performer? Do you see a connection in performing and body piercing in itself, apart from you using needles on stage obviously.

N: My performance career started from being a body piercer. It actually started when I began piercing myself. This was my way of becoming closer to my own body, to the perception of it. I felt when the needles went through the skin as well as all its consequences. In my work, there is a big part that I really love to focus on is the expression of the body, the pain and the feelings which has been possible to me through piercing and being a piercer.

For me it is not only a strong connection but a natural evolution as a first step to enter into body art. We have an idea of what people are scared of and what the social implications of modifications due to societal pressures. The judgement that society has about the piercing world. As a piercer this is an interesting kind of approach. It is not only about the skin and the jewelry. It’s talking to people that are sometimes far from your way of life. They are a kind of audience for you as a piercer. It is like being on a stage, there is nothing different. You have to interact with people and to know people and take interest in what they say. So as you can see once again I can tell you that nothing of what I do is really divided. It is always in your approach, and my approach is always the same, the attitude is always the same. So I am just a good traveller—let’s say it that way. I am really interested in knowledge and research and discovery and of all things the most important thing now is to evolve, to be in contact with people around me.

H: Thank you so much Noema! This was really interesting and eye-opening!

N: Thanks for having the interview!
PERFORMANCE ARTIST

LOUIS FLEISCHAUER

Interviewed by Hika K.
PERFORMANCE ARTIST
LOUIS FLEISCHAUER
Louis Fleischauer is a performance artist currently residing in Berlin, after 12 years in Los Angeles. He directs and creates conceptual ritual performance art all over the world, including having his actors play the role of human sculptures and instruments. He also does wearable art in the form of conceptualized corset collections that he uses within his shows.

**Hika:** First of all, thank you for allowing me to do this interview with you. You have been doing body performances for quite a while now. How did you get into performing? Was there any particular moment or situation that you would call integral, that led you into it; a moment where the spark started?

**Louis:** Sound/music has always been a big part of my life and a way of how I define myself. In my late teens I started out experimenting with sound and various projects. Around this time I saw a concert of a band I really liked on CD, but the concert was so boring. At that moment I swore to myself there would be life on my stage. Using my body came naturally. Since I was a child, I had this fascination with blood. I used to get random nosebleeds. One night (I was five or six years old) I woke up covered in my own blood, there was this mix of fear and fascination. This might have been my first conscious high and the spark that triggered my desire for using my body to explore my mind.

**H:** In case our international readers aren’t as familiar with your works as we are in the German piercing scene, can you tell them about performances? Your work seems divided in two directions, that at the same time are connected, can you elaborate on both of those directions for us?

**L:** The two main projects of mine are Aesthetic Meat Front and AMF Korsets (Fleischauer Creations).

Aesthetic Meat Front combines Body Art Rituals with sounds created with the help of the human body (amplified heartbeats taken during breath control, microphones that are attached to metal coils which are connected to the skin with the help of hooks, brain waves captured whilst getting pierced/suspended). The intention of this project is to create a raw primal energy that awakens your instincts, to stimulate parts of your brain that have been castrated by that hyper digital, consumer friendly reality we live in. We, as a species, can only evolve if we put as much focus on the health and expansion on our minds as we focus on the health and growth of the economy.

AMF Korsets focuses on my wearable art, sculpted organic materials, mostly leather. Sometimes I present them on stage in conceptual fashion shows that also include some elements of performance/body art.

**H:** Do you feel that growing up in Germany still divided had any influence on your art? If so, to what extent is it still visible in the art that you are doing now?

**L:** Most definitely, it shaped me as a person and with this as an artist. Living behind the Iron Curtain and being constantly harassed by the police and Stasi for the way I choose to dress made me a strong believer in the right of self expression and the right to have control over your own body. Also the fact that it was impossible to buy any counter culture related clothing forced me to create my own, which was the first step towards AMF Korsets.

**H:** You are using suspension and pulling with hooks for your performances. Usually this is something seen from artists who have a background as piercers, but to my knowledge you have not worked as a piercer, have you?

**L:** I have way too much fun with needles to make it my profession. My background is experimental music and ritualistic performance art. Public suspension for me is a tool to show not only what can be done with the body, but which mental states can be reached with the help of the body. Over the years I did train with some very professional piercers. I’m grateful to have had Steve Joyner on my side while I lived in California.

**H:** As you probably know *The Point* is a publication from the Association of Professional Piercers, so it is very piercing-related. The reason why this edition is strongly focused around performance art is because this artform has certain crossovers with the body modification world, even if no needles or tools from our industry are used. What do you think about this, do you agree, do you disagree and regardless: how so?

**L:** Performance has its origin in the dramatization of ritual. Body modification also has its root in ritual. So it’s only natural that they are intertwined.
PERFORMANCE ARTIST

LOUIS FLEISCHAUER
THE BODY PIERCING ARCHIVE

JONATHAN ARIAS, 1983–2017

by Paul King
This year’s APP Conference in Las Vegas provides a unique opportunity to view materials from Jon John’s performances. After the exhibition, his archive relocates to the Queen Mary University in London as part of their permanent collection.

It is with sadness that we share the news of Jon John’s passing. Publicly, he was known for his performance art as well as his gallery-tattoo shops, AKA Berlin and AKA London.

AKA Berlin was opened in November of 2009, with a partner Valentin Plessy. Jon’s driving concept behind AKA was to create a supportive nexus for artistic talent. Resident artists became co-creators and family.

Riding the success of AKA Berlin, Jon John opened AKA London in January of 2013. Unfortunately, it was one year later that he received his cancer diagnosis and began scaling back. Eventually, AKA London had to be closed. Today, the vision of AKA Berlin carries on under the very capable and talented hands of tattooist Philippe Fernandez, with Gabriel Meister as the lead piercer.

Although Jon John was an adept tattooist, body piercer, and jeweler, it was his performance art that gave him the greatest pleasure and purpose. Perhaps Jon John’s own words, best describe the significance of his art (please read his Artist’s Manifesto on page 57). In addition to his solo work, he collaborated with artists such as Ron Athey, Joey Arias, Marilyn Manson, Nick Knight, Paul King, Rancinan, Kiril Bikov, Juano Diaz, David Harrow, and others.

Against the strong warnings of his doctors, Jon John insisted on a farewell performance. He had been working on a performance piece for over a year that was delving into emotional and physical complexities of illness, medical treatment, love, life, and death. This performance, Love On Me: The Finest Hour, offered closure for family and friends:

My heart bursts with gratitude from our shared ritual. My family, friends, artists, and lovers, free from the artificial constraints of this body, this place, and this time, you have healed my spirit - we are together, always.

Less than one month after this final performance, at the age of 33, Jon John passed away with family and friends by his side. He had no regrets, no resentments, and nothing left unsaid. He remained an inspiration of love, his guiding principle, throughout his death as he had throughout his life.

—Paul King, friend and co-creator

For more information about Jon John:
www.akaberlin.com
www.jonjohn.net

To view performances:
https://vimeo.com/jonjohn
• I believe that the action of love remains one of the few accessible ecstatic rituals in our disposable society.

• My invocations of love are not static. The rituals and aesthetics of my childhood experiences continue to transform through research and personal connection.

• My ritual is communal alchemy. I don’t perform for audiences but rather engaged witnesses that become co-creators. My lovers.

• From my veins flow Basque, Argentinean and Gypo. “Gypo” is a derogatory term I own for Gitano, which is the Spanish-Roma ethnicity.

• The complexity of my ethnicities gave dimensionality to my religious upbringing. We are a catholic family that practices magic. My people gave me the gifts of healing bodies and conjuring spirits.

• My queerness is not in a typical narrative of exclusion, but rather a celebration of my otherness.

• It is not a longing of something missing, but a quest with an open heart.

• Through altered state of consciousness I transcend my spoken vocabulary, to share my hidden secrets of love, life, and loss.

• I utilize video, photography, installation, and most notably performance.

• Flesh, skin, and blood are my palette to take you on a journey from tenderness to brutality via beauty and decay.
I have cancer.

I was given a slim chance of surviving. My first reaction was fear and self-blame; somehow I caused this sickness. My experience with this life-threatening disease is the inspiration for this work.

This new performance Love on Me draws strength from conversations with the performance artist Ron Athey and readings from Illness as Metaphor, by Susan Sontag. Susan Sontag prevailed over the harsh treatments of two cancer diagnoses. She denied the fatalness of her final cancer and treatment until her last breath. Ron Athey, self-describe as “living corpse” has survived decades with HIV. From Ron I have learned how to live with this dying body.

Every person gets sick.

Every person will wonder why he or she is the one to get sick, no matter if that illness is a bad cold or a terminal cancer. Metaphors help us understand the world. Metaphors for illness can comfort the anxiety of not knowing. Many are tempted to make sense of illness metaphorically, as a punishment, a sign, an opportunity, or a war raging in one’s body.

When referring to cancer and its treatment, medical professionals and patients use phrases such as “bolstering” the body’s “defenses” and “battling” the “invasive” tumor. Blood cells get “counts,” like surviving soldiers at the end of each day of war. With treatments, we use words such as “bombard,” “neutralize,” and “kill.” People whose diseases go into remission are “survivors.” Sontag notes obscure facts about chemotherapy and warfare, explaining how the earliest cancer drugs share lineage with mustard gas, just as an early syphilis treatment used arsenic—a dark irony being that the treatments, when approached with warfare mentality, are believed to cause a whole set of new health problems.

For Sontag, cancer was associated with certain inhibited personality types. The metaphor attached to cancer is repression of a desire. This suppressed longing gets, literally, “balled up” as a voracious tumor.

If cancer is a disease of passion, will love aid my struggle with this disease?

Following some the modern myths that my disease is rooted in: sexual repression, inability to express emotions, failure, punishment, or an inhibited personality type—as oblation, I offer this performance and installation.
LOVE ON ME

Une exposition / exhibition et installation de Jon John.

Verdisage : 19h30- 22h
Installation « Mon heure de Gloire / The Finest hour »
Live Stream facebook :
19h30-21h

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