

1. How do you see your practice as an artist has changed over the past 10 years? How has your work progressed and why has it moved in the direction it has?

2. I'm aware of the danger of falling into stereotypes here but I know I'm not alone in perceiving your work as having quite a feminine quality. Are you aware of this perception? What has been your experience of working as a woman in a medium which isn't often associated with these qualities?

3. There's been quite a lot debate and activity regarding archiving recently with the realisation that digital work is actually more vulnerable to being lost than most other forms of artwork due to the rapid obsolescence of file formats etc. Do you have any concerns about this?

4. Robert Coover once wrote, "The constant threat of hypermedia: to suck the substance out of a work of lettered art, reduce it to surface spectacle". What do you feel about the constant suspicion that hypertext and New Media art are somehow superficial?

5. How do you see the state of Electronic Literature/New Media Writing How do you see the future of writing/literature using New Media?

6. How do you deal with the environmental reception of your work? People read on the Internet in many different ways and situations and these can often totally change the original work. How do you write/create for a New Media audience which isn't always a static audience in terms of level? How/where does 'literacy' feature for you?

7. What currently interests you? What do you see as the next area that needs to be worked on? Does it involve New Media?

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aware of this perception? What has been your experience of working as a woman in a medium, which isn't often associated with these qualities?

Christy Sheffield Sanford: I had a tall, dark and handsome biker boy-friend for awhile. We looked sharp together, very yin-yang. He was Polish Sicilian with the Mediterranean predominant. Oh, yes, I'm aware. I'm from Georgia; I wear hats.

Working in any artistic medium as a formalist is lonely. Add to that the femininity and you've a formula for not being invited places--if not outright dismissal. I've presented at MLA, AWP, Pratt, Stevens Tech, Hollins, venues in France and England-- numerous campuses and conferences. But I've also been ignored at prestigious events recognizing the brightest and best--the pioneers.

Why continue? The work itself is highly reinforcing. Seeing a page come to life is its own reward. Letting the image influence the text and the text influence the image is exhilarating. Scripts and layouts influence what I have to say. The freedom to have ideas that can be realized in a new form is bliss. I was breaking new ground, helping define a new medium, participating in a revolution. Moreover, I felt I was advancing literature and art.

Male-run media sections of English Departments network with colleagues and award critical attention through conferences, articles, reviews often of each other's work. Around the turn of the century IMHO for several years I was the best on the web. Women themes, female sexual imagery, sensuality, beauty are part of me like being blue-eyed or 5ft. 5 1/2. It's rare for experimental writers to maintain passion and humanity, although Duras, Scallapino, others managed. That's the sensibility I admire and want to exhibit.

To be a feminine feminist with ideas and initiative is anathema! Oh, I'd get a line here or there, a link. Toward a Theory of Web-Specific Art-Writing is chock full of ideas. They missed it. Water Water Water? The RockGarden of Love? Moving Toward the Light. Bigamy in the Desert. Thirty-five projects. Like some prig confronted with a frontal male nude by Mapplethorpe, poobahs covered their eyes.

Opportunities outside this mafia? Men in touch with their sexuality, their bodies, manly men, aren't afraid of femininity, the prettiness or sliminess. For real men publishers like Codrescu, Lipman, Weinstein, Crumlish femininity is not an issue or they like it. Karl Young at Light and Dust will be doing a retrospective of my work. I don't recall him ever mentioning femininity. He's been a great supporter for years.

There are also many women in positions of power on the web: Sue Thomas was terrific at trAce, very eclectic, energetic and encouraging. Interested in all things new. Sue provided me the opportunity of a lifetime. I could email her anytime night or day and receive a rapid-fire response. Margie Luesebrink: generous of spirit and a pioneer in her own right. . Jennifer Ley. People who are secure in themselves don't.

Why are female-oriented subjects, imagery less serious or important than those of men. A question from the 60s. Yet, I'm having to repeat the question after having produced a body of work. Lump together a preference for male subject matter, social ridicule, good old boy humor and Latinate neologisms related to French theorists; what do you have? A pantheon of excellence? In an online class where I was a guest, an organizing professor entered with a raspberry. Emblematic.

In our culture, we are experiencing a last ditch effort to regain control over women. Jimmy Carter left the Southern Baptist Convention when they decreed Women Must Submit to their Husbands! Some liberals, having become more adroit at hiding their misogyny in language, are enjoying riding the coattails of the conservative backlash. If you prefer equality and refuse to play the daughter, lover, mother roles look-out.

I'll keep on my taboo path, buoyed by the courage of Kathy Acker, Henry Miller, others unafraid of the charged, messy arena of sex, where you have the greatest chance for the survival of our civilization. We may look different, but those differences are merely in the battle garb and fighting styles.

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do you feel about the constant suspicion that hypertext and New Media art are somehow superficial.

What do I feel? Nervous. Little stomach tightening. Same as listening to a speech by George Bush. Do it my way. Paternal. Lettered arts sucked up/off. Hmmm. I'm always suspicious when people are suckered into creating an out-group. Phrases from childhood: Don't make a spectacle of yourself! Don't act up! Don't show off!

I think people should lead to their strengths. "Lettered Arts" can't be pasted onto the screen of a movie house, video or computer. And no amount of choices or paths will solve that problem of presenting text on a monitor. The computer is a medium for image and text--a crucial feature of its uniqueness. I should add motion to that duo. The web has further unique capabilities. To describe that I coined the term Web-Specific Art-Writing.

Spectacle. I used to hear that complaint about theatre. Anyone who wanted to use costumes, lights, imagery: impure. Barebones was de rigueur. Think Beckett. Imagine cinema, how bleak without Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, Jane Campion's *Piano*, Sally Potter's *Yes*. Chris Marker's *Level Five*. It's one thing to say, I have this aesthetic; it's another to say walk-like-me. We have a puritanical history that seeps out in various ways.

English professors protect the canon and/or canonical values. That's part of their job, which is fine as long as everyone knows that. True, the cogent characteristics of a discipline are important. What is poetry? What is fiction? In *Lectures in America*, Gertrude Stein clearly expressed some of these distinctions. For a new medium, we need the formation of a new aesthetic. Not just one, however, a plethora. Beware of groups in which there's an unspoken decree that everyone wear black.

"Spectacle" often indicates whatever the critic feels uncomfortable with at the moment: something too bright, too big, too colorful, too hyper--too much. If you're from the third world, however, all bets are off. [So starved for color are some that the exotic flower is given carte blanche.] These requisites have nothing to do with

art. The out-group can stretch from Virginia Woolf (Orlando) to Cecily Brown or, could it be, noooo, yikes, me. Sometimes the critic means too commercial or entertaining. Another point of exclusion.

Spectacle doesn't indicate whether a work is shallow or deep. Some of the most glamorous ocean spots stretch fathoms under the surface. Put on your diving suit and jump in. Austerity is not a guarantee of depth. Nor is purity. I'm always shocked that people are afraid of seduction by beauty. I'm fearful of spinelessness, sterility, fascism. Lack of tension, death. One of my fathers is Baudelaire.

There is a certain excitement in cutting a path through the jungle. The occasional loss of control as the machete strikes an orchid is inevitable. Oh, Pioneer.

Whenever this occurs, I'm sure literature will stand its own, recover and push forward. Real letters have duende.

In some disciplines, academe encourages taste-makers and followers. This is not to be confused with art and the revolution. Look at all those coteries who were so hooked into little tree diagrams they couldn't grasp the elegant show hide scripts with mouse overs that allow text to unfold in gorgeous patterns. Layout is thinking.

I don't think many writers avidly appreciate visual arts. This isn't a sin. If a writer wants to work on the web and isn't artistically inclined, find a collaborator in graphic or fine arts. I prefer art/graphics that are not merely illustrative but rather possess their own integrity and add substantively to the project. Such expressions might act as counterpoint or be described as tangential, oblique, complementary. And the reverse is true.

Those who are really great at visual art should flaunt it. Let those jealous bastards eat their heart out.

Simon Mills: Can you outline your background as an artist/writer?

Christy Sheffield Sanford: First let me reassure you that some of this can be cut; otherwise, we might have a book. I won't ramble, but there may be detours.

**Alizarin Crimson**

**Turpentine**

**Spinach Crepes**

I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, daughter of two commercial artists, who were also fine artists. My father was my mother's art teacher, and they eloped to the North Georgia Mountains. During the Depression, they traveled to Chicago where my father studied at the Art Institute. There they met my godfather, another artist. Both men adored my mother though I think the love of my godfather was unrequited. Over the years, on weekends and holidays they painted hundreds of pictures of my mother: ballerina, dance hall girl, shuffleboard player.

That trio occasioned one of the great themes of my life: the *ménage à trois*. The world of work and subliminal sex was a heady magnet. I remember the coils of oil paint on palettes: alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow, thallo green. The little pots of turpentine and linseed oil. Unctuous, poisonous, beautiful. Studios with the light odor of smoking. The end of a day with the taste of ice from a glass of scotch.

Once a year, we'd vacation at St. Simons on the coast of Georgia. On the trip down, we'd pass pine forests and see the trees being tapped for turpentine, smell the pulp mills around the marshes of Glenn. The beachside sulfur water made me gag. Nothing was expected of me.

My first artistic expressions were crayon additions to Audrey Beardsley's illustrated *Salome*. The first movie I remember was *The Third Man*. My father enjoyed *Song of the South*. I liked the tour of the Paris sewers. I won an Easter Bonnet contest but my

mother made the hat. My mother was a fashion illustrator with a dramatic flare. In my teens, I designed clothes and thought I would enter that world.

My father died of a heart attack when I was 11. As my mother couldn't take the gossip, she banished my godfather. He was married. In close approximation, I lost two fathers. My mother, weighted with responsibility, became melancholy--yet always functioning and beautiful. Remnants of aristocracy clung to us. A tragic Tennessee Williams aura hung over our apartment. The absence of a man meant a type of ruin unknown today.

My time is the cusp. Post WWII-- romance, optimism, idealism, repression--and Vietnam--disillusionment, cynicism, social activism and Aquarius. As with many of my contemporaries Carolee Schneemann, Kathy Acker, Laurie Anderson, one task was to slay romanticism. Yet the job is not merely to destroy but to create anew. What to put in its place. And for me, how to be truthful yet not eliminate beauty. How to be more than a social critic, how to create a new form.

Key phrase: nothing was expected of me. Growing up in Atlanta, "Heavenly Shades of Night Are Falling," going to Northside High, the *ne plus ultra* of public high schools, I was expected to marry, have babies, shop and give dinner parties. This despite parents who were working, poor and democrats. That was the south. What's that Ginsberg line, I saw the best minds of my generation.... Well, I saw the best women of my generation lose their minds through zero expectations.

I studied art in college but was distracted. By virginity, by confusion, by a sense of drift. I lost a boyfriend, my best girlfriend fell off a horse and died and I felt miserable. I dropped out, came home and went to psychotherapy for about three years, a radical thing at the time. A good twenty years of my life were spent freeing myself emotionally and sexually and developing strength of character: resilience, depth, interests. It was a matter of survival and then finding a calling.

In freeing myself from my mother, I turned away from the art world for many years. I tried the peripheral route: the art of French Cooking. I studied at the London Cordon Bleu and taught privately and through adult ed. at Univ. of Georgia.

The first prize I won for my writing, a Florida Arts Grant, was based on my experiences at Chez la Mere Madeleine, a French restaurant on the outskirts of Boston. A disastrous blessing! The piece was about Ceiling Painting in the Middle Ages. I was able to push my nemesis teacher into a vat of blue dye. I was 42.

#### **Viridian Green**

#### **Cigarette Smoke**

#### **Orange Sections**

In the late 70's, I took an adult ed poetry workshop through a branch of the Columbus Library. Miriam Flock read my poem from the first assignment. Her simple act of encouragement sustained me for a year until I reached Gainesville, Florida, in 1981.

Strangely enough, after I left Ohio, I found some of my greatest supporters and colleagues were in Ohio: Poets Joel Lipman, George Myers, Jr., Brian Richards. Also key was a Writers Workshop in Gainesville. I've been a member for 25 years.

At a writers festival, I found Enid Shomer who wanted to return to writing after a child-rearing hiatus. For years, we attended workshops, wrote interviews together, spoke nearly everyday on the phone talking mostly about our work and poetry. She was brilliant, talented and Wellesley-educated; I essentially had a private tutor. Eventually, Enid had quite a bit of success in publishing, and I followed suit usually a year or two behind in accomplishments.

I sent out "The Romance of Citrus" to 34 places and it was suddenly taken by three editors at once. Fortunately, Andrei Codrescu's *Exquisite Corpse* with its wide

readership began a process that never ceased. For about 10 years I was joining fiction and poetry based on my sense of the essence of the disciplines. I called what I was doing Genre Fusion.

No, I wasn't a smoker but my parents smokes, Enid smoked and so does Margie Luesebrink (I assume she still does.).

**Cobalt Blue**

**Mildew**

**Bagels**

Margie Luesebrink from California was a great connection for me. A terrific person, enthusiastic and inventive and a pioneer in electronic media. Margie is unfailingly productive and generous of spirit. She encouraged me from afar through emails. Later we began to meet at conferences.

I first heard of trAce when I was in Aix-en-Provence.

Fighting with an old Spanish Mediterranean house, trying to keep it from crumbling from the Florida rains and humidity. My room had been a guest bedroom gradually transformed into "my room." A la Virginia Wolfe.

I accidentally triggered a menu popup on my Mac and found I could download an image into Photoshop. The rest is history. I taught myself Photoshop, not that I really KNOW it in the biblical sense.

If you mean the language , I would say from my first html tutorial around 1995. If you mean the act of linking a number of options, I would say never. Or seldom ever. What intrigued me about the web was its possibility as a new medium for art-writing. Something on a par with video or the book. Though we may deny it, there is an economic element in transmitting art--the book, the ticket, the DVD--and if something can't be commodified, it is difficult to have that measure of worth. One can argue that

this measure is often faulty and my answer is, of course. On the other hand, much of the medium's charm. involves freedom and cheap availability.

For myself I wanted to exploit the dramatic potential in the codified page. In a sense, it was a rebellion against all the wonderful techniques available to the browser that were being used for commerce, education, government. To use them for art had, still has, a subversive edge. Also, I thought that many people were using the web for the Art of Social Satire, which it is easily suited to as a contemporary medium. However, for an art to be alive, it seemed essential that it could prove its metal in the arena of drama. I am somewhat ill-suited to this task as humor, intellect and sexuality tend to undercut the power of drama. Nevertheless, it's clear to me that the web as a medium is available for the development of art-writing in the fullest sense, in the sense of range. It can, emotionally, involve anyone to the degree that a film or canvas could.

So while others were occupied making stories with multiple choices, I was much more interested in the latest code advances from the simplest tables to the most complex frames. I was intrigued with the idea that you could compartmentalize the screen and have dialogues, multiple scenarios, changing relationships amongst the parts. To animations, to rollovers, pop ups and then dhmtl with the more sophisticated show hide and matrix type of layering. And eventually to the scripts that would allow scrolling up, down, and in a circumference.

My first online project was Red Mona, a blithe erotic ménage a trois collaged onto French Flash cards that come up randomly on a CGI script and with sound files attached so that you can have simultaneously a French lesson or experience and the drama and art. Cool and hot. I would argue that this type of story has more tangential possibilities than many of the deliberate hypertextual experiments.

The man who coded Red Mona grew weary of changing my pages. I wanted to add more and more to my website; he insisted I learn html. That was it. Necessity. To this

day, I'm taken by the dramatic possibilities of coding the page. Much as I imagine the first filmmakers were with the close-up, jumpcut, pan, fade. The various cinematic techniques have become a type of language. You have a repertoire. That's what has been happening with the web as a medium. The show hide script has become part of a battery of . If a formal invention furthers the expression of a medium and proves flexible in many circumstances it passes into the realm of technique.

Many of us were experimenting with inventions that would carry, would feed the development of a medium. The one of a kind script like the one of a kind installation in an art gallery may be exciting and riveting but does it further experimentation. Is it somehow replicable or expansive. This is not to say that novelty scripts and unique presentations are less important. But the spirit in which many of us were working was expansive, generous. A shared script was common.

True, an artist often works in the dark and hasn't articulated what his/her trust is! You can noodle about and suddenly hit on an idea. It may come to you in retrospect. But overall I think many of us were devoted to inventions that spread, that are infectious. This is how you construct a viable medium. If I'm the only one in the world who can do something, then it will quickly die out.

I can be as inspired by a script as I am by an image.