



TRUTH LICENSED UNDER DESCRIPTION  
Dana Munro

"Come in." She answers the door dressed for a winter's hibernation. Cocooned in a large sweater layered over what can only be described as a Secessionist union suit, her long hair is loosely tied back and her pale blue eyes sparkle behind thin-framed glasses. I follow her to the kitchen which bears a faint smell of vinegar. Occupying this comely space since 1976, she shares it along with her dog, a cat and a lovebird that builds elaborate architectural structures in his cage using only spit and food. "I admire him immensely because he makes good use of his time and is a real workaholic" she says. On the floor, to her right, her white German shepherd, Fletch, gnaws on a gnarly hunk of rawhide. A Pink Panther soft toy peeps up from the pocket of a blazer hanging on the wall.

Pressed for details about her childhood she offers, "In-between the tree-lined streets of suburbia is where I grew up, in limbo. It was as flat as a Lichtenstein imitation Ben-Day dot. I remember drawing objects to animate the inanimate. It made life a little more... unexpected. Really, I just wanted to jump-cut outta there."

She did an alternative high school thing, studied industrial baking, became a plumber. In the 80's she ran a restaurant at an art centre. "Competition was fierce, never thought I'd get the job with zero experience. What I didn't know was that the guy who ran the bar also wanted the job. I arrived to find a dead rat purging fluid on the kitchen table. I named him 'Rat', a misanthropic stiff!" She laughs. She laughs often. Not nervous laughter, or space-filler. It is genuine, spontaneous and seems to originate in true joy over life and all of its befuddling complexities.

Instead of economic-self optimisation and in true subculture form, she then became part of a collective establishing a feminist bookshop. "I tried to dedicate my life to a communal space of experience or you could say, tried out an alternate vision of life. Art or culture, I am convinced, are things that can only be collective possessions". In the last gasp of late 90's hype she occasionally faked rock star air guitar poses with a thick belt holding up her deconstructionist skirt, like a hyperactive harpy with smudged makeup, an excitable dance style and *nouveau pauvre* bag lady clothing. "The quality was homemade, shaky, somewhat prankster-looking. It all looked fun, in a 'you-had-to-be-there' drunken Sunday afternoon kind of way. Dressing and undressing, different looks, I was trying to become a product." Like a late contrastive after-image, stylistic formations and artistic references to different eras seemed to roam and transform.

"Today everything seems muffled. The issues, clear, but the responses, somehow, muffled. There's a musty tone about," she explains. She mentions that someone said her earlier work was full of damp knickers which made her feel envious and nostalgic for those days and that, "It was terribly moist and a bit overexcited at times."

Needing to change she suggests I go on ahead to the studio which is "over there, in that direction". The warren of rooms forms a compelling cabinet of curiosities with implements perched on crowded shelves. Modestly furnished rooms, dimly lit in an intimate way, are filled with yellowing artefacts from her life. The walls are lined with a consistent backdrop to her oeuvre. Her studio can be found at the end of a long white corridor. I got lost twice on the way there. It was only when I saw a slice of canvas poking through an open door that I found it.

One large room with windows at the front and, at the opposite end, two tall open doors. I settle into a thin, deep chair. A bookshelf is centred with low stacks of books filling the floor. They're dusty as hell. Scattered across the table-tops and all flat surfaces are evidence of her prolific output. I can hear the works buzz with mystery – a quality so electric it produces a hum and crackle as if from a bug zapper.

The first thing she did when she entered was brush her teeth then open a can of beer. Sitting down she crosses her legs, and cut-outs stick to her bare feet. She is clad in a smudged white bodysuit, like an astronaut on leave. The space feels alive. We share gallery gossip punctuated by her raucous laughter. She speaks about creating work much in the way that a carpenter would talk about building a table. She isn't brooding, nor does she seem to be plagued by artistic angst. She seems simultaneously spry and frail – perennially on the verge of leaping to her feet but unable to make it happen. Her house she insists is "still in the big beginning of life", and is where she does much of her designing and making. She says "Everything's precious, I've always been archiving." There's no obvious divide between what's personal and what's waiting to be folded into work. Her work is her life and she keeps it about her like a living oyster keeps its pearl.

She demonstrates how an artist can thoroughly subvert first impressions. I made the mistake of thinking her art was hers, but even when I finally stood before her work I realised I'd misjudged what exactly she was up to. Not only can this artist topple first impressions, she also thwarts second impressions as well. Maybe that's because nothing about her art is benign. It's she that has blown the dust off what we thought was reality and revealed the actual reality underneath.

If you want to call or e-mail, don't expect a swift reply. Her phone is usually switched off or she doesn't pick up. She reads her e-mails once a week when someone retrieves them for her. On the repetitiousness of the internet, she asserts, "It's such a trap. Once you start looking at the Internet, that's all you're doing. To really understand the internet, the last place you want to be is online. I spend my time reading, thinking, things like that."

With all her solid affiliations with institutions and galleries, she plans to open her building to the public. In addition to preserving the studio and living space, she is currently overseeing the construction of a small sculpture park in the building's backyard, as well as the renovation of the townhouse next door, which will accommodate a research centre and two bedrooms for visiting scholars.

But she is in conflict with the Duke of Westminster who, (via his company, Grosvenor Estate) has made a bid to turn the townhouse into apartments.

After talking for over an hour she says she's too tired to explain things, a signal that the interview is over. As I leave I ask why she prefers to use only her last name. "The force conveyed from its three solid syllables is strong. It's good to pick a name that people can digest more easily than food. Like good copy."

—  
Coline Millard, *Taking Up Space: Phyllida Barlow is ready to get in your way*, Modern Painters, Summer 2001, p.61

Ian Macmillan, *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: Chicks on Speed bring forty years of music history and a hundred years of art history to their music and performance art – but is it enough?* Modern Painters, Winter 2003, p.29

*Eat The Top Lip First*, April Reynolds on Dana Schchutz, Modern Painters, Autumn 2004, p.58

Steven Sherrill, *Kiki and Me*, Modern Painters, July/August 2005, p.77

Eline Van Der Vlist, *Face Value: From Terrorists to dead movie stars, Marlene Dumas fearlessly portrays controversial subjects, reinvigorating portraiture in the process*, Modern Painters, June 2008, p.82

Andrea Codrington, *Holding Pattern: Louise Despont's esoteric geometries express the unseen energy of the cosmos*, Modern Painters, February 2010, p.48

Daniel Kunitz, *Alice Aycock*, Modern Painters, March 2013, p.44.

Coline Millard, Jane and Louise Wilson, Modern Painters, February 2014, p.40

Thea Ballard, *House Call: A tour of Louise Bourgeois's home and studio with her long-time assistant*, Modern Painters, June 2014, p.76

Scott Indrisek, *Precarious Weight: A graphite-obsessed artist chases a new thread*, Modern Painters, February 2016, p.56

Ariels Gittlen, *Shooting the Archive: Between Photography and Design*, Modern Painters, February 2016, p.60

Thea Ballard, *Taking in Puzzles: Distilling the personal into multimedia collage*, Modern Painters, April 2016, p.56

## A GUIDED TOUR

Anna Zacharoff

– Hey *Audience*, how nice of you to stop by our allotments!

*Director* opens the gates that are locked from the inside with a common bike lock. The path down the middle of the rectangular gardens is made out of gravel, making a recognisable sound when walking up and down the community. It's easy to distinguish one garden from another with some minor exceptions. There is a small water station in the middle surrounded by fruit trees, and at the far end is a compost station against the fence that surrounds the whole area. In style, it's not far from a small graveyard, but lacking a church.

– Are all the gardens the same shape?

– Well, yes they are exactly the same square meters, but it's hard to tell since everyone is really 'doing their own thing' with their gardens... Last year we had someone trying to get a second lot next to their own. When we found out the application came from the neighbouring tenant under his pen name we cancelled the contract immediately, but it was quite shadily done. He still claims he has the right to get it since his alter-ego is a person in its own right, but the *Board* did not agree.

– So who is on the *Board*?

– Here we are! Welcome to my humble rectangle...

*Audience* follows *Director's* hand pointing to the right side of the pathway, up to a miniature house in yellow, on top of an artificial hill. It really is spring he/she thinks. There's morning dew on the window, most of the earth is just turned and not yet planted; the air is moist. The grass is slowly getting green again and one can hear the black-bird's frantic singing.

– *Lovely*; *Audience* replies with a slow and serious voice, to really give the word a bit of gravitas.

– Yes I had my cousin *Curator* come in and organise the plants. There's some perennials that can't really be moved about, like the pink lady apple tree of course. Besides that, I prefer the flower beds that can change from year to year. Sometimes I travel and acquire new seeds from different countries, especially now one can find so many differentiations among the vegetable seeds. Purple carrots, graffiti cauliflower, beef tomatoes and so on. I try to get as many different tulips I can find in the spring. *Absolutely love* tulips, don't you think they're wonderful? They're so sturdy in their fragility...

– Oh! What's that small windmill statue over there?

– Well! yes, that's the hedgehog house my niece brought over as a presence. Not sure if it's still in use, but last year it was and I sure hope it comes back.

– Is there a lot of wildlife around?

– Absolutely! Some more wanted than others as it normally is with wild elements... No one minds a hedgehog,

but it's hard to defend the ticks and deer. *Performance* started to care for some chickens and rabbits last year so we tried to scare away what we thought was a fox, but it turned out to be a badger.

– What about cats?

– Ahh you know your questions... that's an ongoing debate. They are good for the mice but bad for the goldfinches. Or more that they would be bad for all small birds and mice, but we prefer the birds to be around.

– Are there any rare species for the birding crowd, or just the average sparrows?

– You would have to ask them, whoever they are. I'm not sure that this trend has reached our fences, and if you do have binoculars perhaps you don't want the neighbours to know.

– I see.

– Oh look, *Sculpture* has just arrived. Better early than late this time. I really envy some of his self-made hills. They are truly constructed, smooth yet so naturally comfortably to lie down on. I simply just want to touch them.

*Audience* looks over. Two plots down on the other side of the gravel path *Sculpture* is walking and waving hello while entering his rectangle. A low concrete wall seems to be able to work as a bench. Behind, two small grass hills on either side of a path made in round stepping stones lead the way to a white shed. A small yet monumental rectangle with a roof going over the edge, so to create a shadowy space before entering the garden. On top, a round column for who knows what. The only plant on the grounds seems to be a cherry tree, beautifully cut.

– That is someone who knows how to make a picnic! We should go over there later and say hello, *Director* joyously bursts out.

– It's a rather sparse presentation he has over there.

– Minimal and grand at the same time. I know, *Sculpture* is ridiculously proud and called the shack his *Savoie*. He was one of the first to move in during the environmental wave in the sixties, re-modelling the entire plot.

– Would you know when these gardens were first established?

– I'm not entirely sure, but they were here during the war. There must have been something before that, but what is unclear... Some of the apple trees down in the central part look indeed older than 100 years. There's also a moss covered stone wall in the process of falling apart, however that could have been placed there later on for a genuine atmosphere. The water system was changed and the layout re-done in the seventies nature days, so there is no way to tell.

– And when did you move in?

– I'm relatively new here, but experienced.

– Yes I see. This garden is really flourishing... Should we take a stroll around?

– Please, let us. It's lunch time soon anyway. We might be able to trade some tulips for early salad greens.

They stroll down the few steps it takes to get to the miniature gate that *Director* carefully closes behind them. The air feels moist, even in the sun, but smells of grass and *Sculptures'* cherry blossom. A dull hammering seeps through the vegetation and the gates makes a distinguished rattling noise when yet another tenant opens and closes it.

– Lets keep to the right and walk down south shall we... *Concept* and *Painting* always have something to show and tell, they are both very social in their different ways. Look, you can already see their shacks behind the oak.

*Audience* stares across the considered landscapes, wondering if it would be feasible to have one of his/her own. Or worth the time.

– Now look at that. *Concept* put up a new fence, but kept many of the plants and flowerbeds from last year. Actually he/she already has a very fun combination of raised planting spots and containers with elaborate water systems. Aha, I knew it! It's all herbs this year too.

*Director* has opened the gates and quickly moves along the rows of greens starting to show, reading the small notes put down in a neat pattern.

– He/She won't mind us taking a peak, I promise...

A crepitating noise behind the lavender quickly caught their attention, and in a swift move that *Audience* barely caught, *Director* is out chatting with the tenant next door. It seems to be a polite greeting that will not drag out in conversation. The tenant, all geared up in heavy duty garden clothes, waves and smiles before rapidly walking into a construction – mimicking a shed but in reality being something closer to Eeyore's house.

– That was *Installation*... he/she just moved to a new space, since she/he really wanted something without a fence and *Concept* was kind enough to offer to take his/hers down on that side of the plot. The lavender is working as a divider somehow now; do you see it?

– Yes I agree that is a huge lavender row. And is it also rosemary?

– Absolutely. Still all herbs, I really wonder what they eat sometimes... Thyme will tell...

– Would you say a lot of the people here live off their harvests and what they cultivate?

– No I highly doubt that, even if some of us try and some succeed, the majority don't survive on the fruits of their labour. That's too sweet of a diet anyway wouldn't you say?

– If it's all fruit I'm ready to agree.

– Look at *Painting's* plot over there. Every year it's full of flowers, but no perennials. One summer it was all poppy, the next year she/he made a pattern out of marigolds and Lobelia. That year was a bit mundane I suppose, but it had its moment in the sunset light.

– Aha, mmmhmm. And what is that vague construction sound in the background? The dull hammering noise...

– Oh yes that's a child of an old tenant, *Text*. She/he is currently building a new brick wall down in the left east corner. A fine work I dare say.

## COMPANION

At the heart of the ensemble is a strive towards the unified effect achieved by all members of a cast working together on behalf of a play rather than individual performances. Its structure stands in opposition to the structure of the protagonist as seen in Hollywood cinema. Working closely together in small groups over years, the ensemble becomes familial. Besides the imagined, a presumed actual psychosexual tension within the ensemble becomes allegorical of the world in which the dollhouse is situated. Both play and production could in this regard be considered mimetic action.

## PUPPET

Why work?  
Susceptible, observant—when safe in hiding.  
Safety is boring.  
I am seen? This is almost erotic.  
Could we be friends?  
Maybe talent doesn't matter; maybe bad acting is better?

No reflection  
But a copy in-the-making  
An object exhibiting  
The time of its production  
As eternal repetition  
You turned your head

I was too shy to join for post-show drinks under the risers.

OFF-BROADWAY

A fly  
On the monster's back:  
"When the monster laughs I shake"

LORDY, I HOPE THERE ARE TAPES!

---

CONVERSATION is a series of small pamphlet publications that follow from the previous publications LABOUR (2011) and PERSONA (2013) edited by Melissa Gordon and Marina Vishmidt. They arise out of the series of events titled WE (Not I) which took place at South London Gallery and Artists Space in 2015. This publication specifically arose out of the Female Genius Night Club, hosted by Gordon at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in 2017 alongside Rita McBride's exhibition 'Explorer'. CONVERSATION aims to capture the active discussions between artists and writers in a timely fashion.

Over the last five to six years, Anna, Dana, and Erika have studied, lived, exhibited and worked together. This, however, is the first time they've all contributed towards one publication.

Texts: Dana Munro, Anna Zacharoff, Erika Landström

Editor: Melissa Gordon, 2018

Copyediting: Melissa Gordon

Publisher: Anagram Books, Berlin

ISBN 978-3-947804-00-9