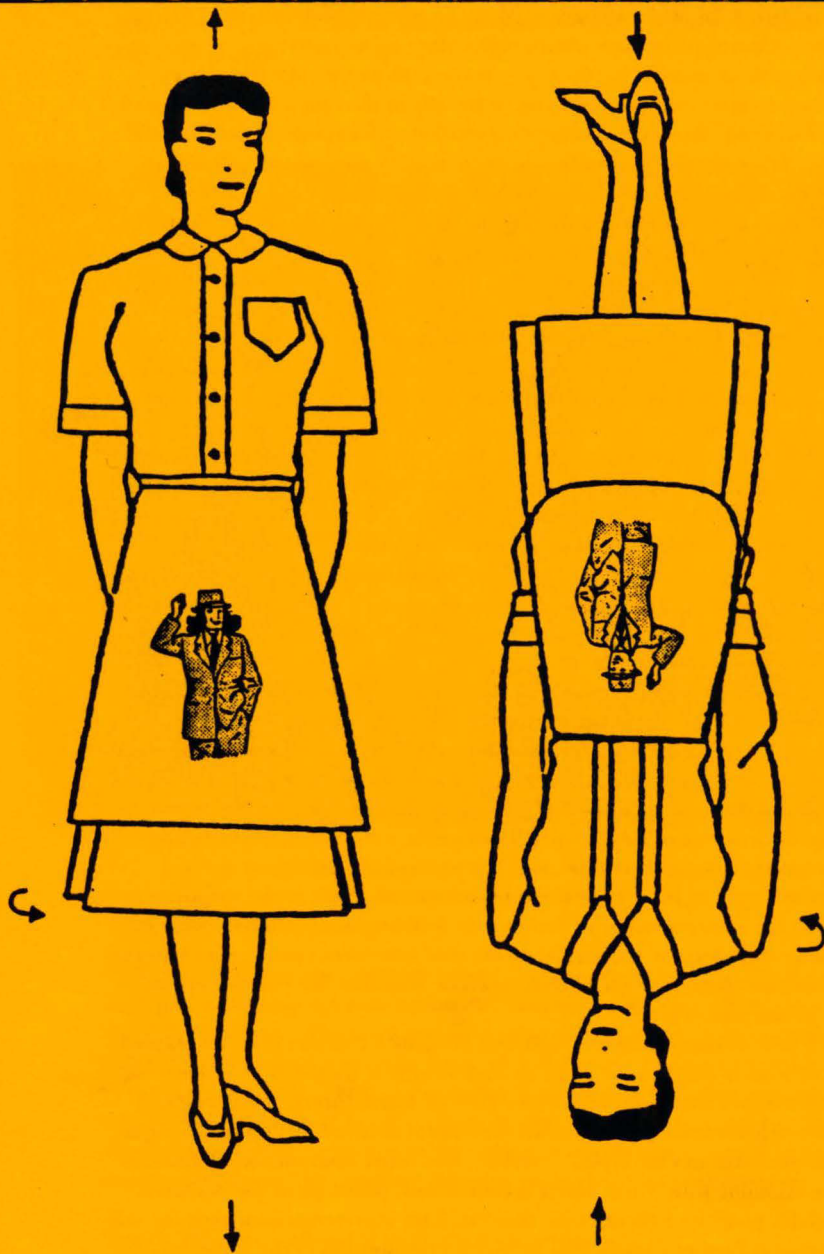


# The New Museum

OF CONTEMPORARY ART



CONNIE HATCH

April 12 - June 12, 1986

SERVING THE STATUS-QUO

Conventional documentary photography is often compromised by the very fact that the photographer can only be *outside* of what is being represented. The subject, then, whether person, place, or event, is both distanced and objectified. Consequently such photographs often seem insufficient or even misleading without specific, explanatory captions. Moreover, the distance established is often counterproductive, especially in the case of social documentary where this distance can connote alienation or inequities of power. And finally, the conventional structure of documentary photography allows no room for an internal consideration of (or disruption of) the institutional practice of photography itself. There is no possibility of cutting against the grain.

In Connie Hatch's work—consisting largely of slide/audiotape presentations and performances—the conventions of documentary photography are shattered, opened up, made to speak. In *Night Spot* (which is the third part of the trilogy, "Serving the Status-Quo"), for instance, Hatch fragments and extends the rather typical narrative format of the documentary. *Night Spot* relates the story of Marta Dane, a former singer and exotic dancer ("Ballet led to glamor job" reads one of her clippings) who now works as a *maitre d'* in a private women's club in San Francisco. In the disjunctive structure of the slide/tape synchronization Marta's story is often punctuated with jarring or contrasting images. For instance, at one point, when Marta is reminiscing about her childhood fantasies of travelling to exotic lands such as Georgia and Florida, Hatch inserts a somewhat unsettling map of Southeast Asia, where Marta actually ended up travelling to entertain American troops.

*Night Spot* is not simply a portrait of Marta Dane, however, for the issues that Hatch punctuates in her narrative point to larger social structures and conditions which position and define Marta's role as a woman. In part, Marta's role or social position is prescribed by her jobs, and indeed the overall structure of "Serving the Status-Quo" focuses on female workers in relation to their labor. But more than simply equating a given job with a given social and economic status, Hatch is careful to delineate how the "position" is in fact plotted by a matrix of gender-specific attitudes, unfulfilled personal goals, and representational accoutrements. It is particularly interesting the way rather arbitrary or conventionalized representations such as the striptease costume or the waitress uniform, become self-fulfilling masquerades. These masquerades then become the formal device that structures even Marta's fantasies and her role-playing which extends to exotic costumes like the dancer's regalia or the Indian sari.

As a documentary portrait, *Night Spot* presents a complex and complicated view of what it means to be a female and a worker. Ultimately it is these two representations which infiltrate every facet of Marta's story, predicting and describing the course of her life. In the careful structure of her photographs, Hatch demonstrates the typical, extreme, and often contradictory definitions of the feminine with which Marta is confronted: paintings of the Madonna and child, publicity stills of exotic dancers. This representational basis for self-definition is further complicated by Marta's relationship to the status-quo she serves. She prefers, for instance, to serve men ("I enjoy myself more when I wait on men, don't you?"). And, as she points this out, Hatch's slides fade to an image of a waitress grimacing as a leering customer grabs her from behind.

*Night Spot* then is an atypical documentary, a counternarrative which questions its own subjects, supplies its own evidence, and draws its own conclusions. But most significantly, in structuring an open, montaged narrative it allows a space for the participation of the viewer in the web of image, narrative, and fantasy. In so doing, Hatch proposes a structure of opposition to conformity and openness to dialogue; in other words, the manifestation of a viable, alternative political practice.



#### **Artist's Statement**

*Night Spot*, from the documentary trilogy "Serving the Status-Quo," is the third part of an ongoing elaboration of "Stories We Tell Each Other, Stories We Tell Ourselves." The black-and-white slides that I made from negatives with the tightly edited audiotape were compiled over a five-year period in Texas and California. These are everyday bread-and-butter, nuts-and-bolts tales of "our" struggle to survive. They include a built-in rationale that often impedes a conscious resistance to oppression, a maddening contradiction that implies complicity. The complete trilogy is often shown in performance.

*Recently, the artist is allowed to speak, she is the servant.  
Sometimes, the servant is allowed to speak, she is the artist.  
For the first time, he turns to me and asks me, "Who is she?"*

—Connie Hatch

## CONNIE HATCH

Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, 1951  
University of Texas, Austin, B.F.A., 1973  
San Francisco Art Institute, M.F.A., 1979

### *Selected Exhibitions and Performances*

- "There Not Here, Here Not There: The Exotic Image and Its Other," installation, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, N.S., March 24-29, 1986.
- "Serving the Status-Quo," performance, LACE, Los Angeles, Calif., March 10, 1986.
- From "Stories We Tell Each Other, Stories We Tell Ourselves," performance, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn., March 5, 1985.
- "The Nicaragua Media Project," Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, Los Angeles, Calif., February 1986.
- "This Is Not About," Artemisia Gallery, Chicago, Ill., January 1985.
- "Social Works," Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta, Canada, October 15 - December 2, 1984.
- "From *Serving the Status-Quo*," performance, New Generic Gallery, San Francisco, Calif., August 17, 1984.
- "From *Serving the Status-Quo*," performance, Square One Gallery, Houston, Tex., May 26, 1984.
- "How We Live Today: Beyond Social Documentary," P.S. 1, Long Island City, N.Y., October - December 1983; Gallery 400, University of Illinois, Chicago, Ill., March - May 1984.
- "Form Follows Finance," Camerawork Gallery, San Francisco, Calif., January - February, 1982.

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- Stofflet, Mary. "The Individual, the Family, the Group." *Artweek*, August 30, 1980, p. 25.
- Penley, Constance. "The Artist, Politics and the Image," in *Artists and Writers in Residence: 80 Langton Street, 1980*, ed. Renny Pritkin (San Francisco: 80 Langton Street, 1980), pp. 19-24.

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