

ARTFORUM

A line was already forming outside Andrea Rosen Gallery when I arrived a half-hour early for Monday night's first-come-first-serve "3rd Rail Revisited—An Evening of Al Hansen Performance." The event, organized by Hansen's daughter Bibbe in collaboration with Gracie Mansion Fine Art, drew an eclectic crowd; boho-affected youth mingled with "friends from Connecticut" in tweeds and ribbed pastels. The gallery eventually reached capacity, with over one hundred attendees waiting to be touched by the spirit of the late Fluxus artist, who died in 1995.

With a solo show in Rosen's project space, a significant presence in a group exhibition at Pavel Zoubok, and work in Geoffrey Hendricks and Sur Rodney (Sur)'s tenth-wedding-anniversary installation at Printed Matter, renaissance man Hansen is finally having his Chelsea moment. In a market reportedly infatuated with youth, Hansen, almost eleven years beyond the pale, continues to go against the grain.

Inside, old friends and curious newcomers lined up at an orange telephone to hear messages Hansen had left on German photographer Pietro Pellini's answering machine. Mansion chatted with Los Angeles-based critic Peter Frank, while Hendricks and Rodney (Sur)'s assistant, artist Ethan Shoshan, cavorted with a younger generation of Happening virgins. Some anticipated faces, such as fellow Fluxist Yoko Ono, Beck (Hansen's grandson), and Carolee Schneemann, didn't show. ("Oh, you know, the two of them had a thing," Rodney (Sur) explained vaguely of Schneemann's absence.) I sidled up to Mansion to elicit the truth about a different rumor: "Of course Al introduced John to Yoko—or at least that's what he always said." Frank chimed in: "I have no idea how he knew John, but Al managed to know *everybody*."

The evening kicked off with a towering projection of Hansen describing his first encounter with John Cage at the musician's storied composition course at The New School. Reciting Cage's reaction to the artist's musical ignorance, Hansen recalled him exclaiming, "I don't need to unlearn you at all—you don't know anything!" Four friends-of-Hansen—artists and frequent collaborators Larry Miller and Alison Knowles, as well as Hendricks and Frank—then took the stage for the first live performance, an execution of Hansen's *Alice Denham in 48 Seconds*. This was an homage to the author and pinup queen comprising a complicated series of boings and rat-a-tat-tats extracted from toddler toys. Afterwards, a younger group, carrying themselves with jovial pride, reinterpreted *Ladder Poem #2*, painting a white stepladder light blue to the tune of an old Hansen song, strangely redolent of Beck's folkier forays.

This night of memories and renewal offered a stark contrast to the Guggenheim's sanitized presentation of Marina Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces*. While a few archivists recorded the evening for the gallery, no one patrolled the dozens of others snapping pictures, good-naturedly heckling the performers, or otherwise interacting with the show. It was as permissive as a backyard party, with a concomitant lack of pretension, but was not without structure: ideal conditions for performance.

As Bibbe stood up to describe her memories of the Happenings scene, audience members gradually made their way towards the stage, carrying pink balloons and assorted trinkets. A young woman, Gillian Wilson, began breaking bottles with a hammer while Bibbe merrily propelled a toy across the floor and Miller circled the crowd, carrying a cheap boombox that played samples of Beck songs. Often prone to shivers of embarrassment, especially in the presence of self-styled wackiness, I nevertheless felt my jaded edges soften and enjoyed the frenzy. Later I heard Bibbe recall: "As a little girl, I did the glass-breaking part. It gave me a license to destroy!"

The evening culminated in a touching rendition of Hansen's obsequy *Elegy for the Fluxus Dead*, lovingly performed by his grandson Channing. Echoed by a projection of his grandfather performing the rite in 1994, the young Hansen listed dead Fluxus artists, adding, after the filmic Al had finished his tribute, those who had died since the recording, including Hansen himself, Nam June Paik, and Allan Kaprow, before wrapping his head in masking tape and opening his arms to the audience. "Oh! That piece always makes me cry," Mansion remarked afterwards, and she certainly wasn't the only one. As I made my way towards the door, I stopped to chat with Channing, who noted gracefully, "not everyone can say they inherited a performance piece from their grandfather."