



Unravel in the exhibition *Stitches*, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena.
photo by Kosta Potamianos.

Jane Brucker

Rituals
& CONGREGATIONS

Jane Brucker uses objects and performance to engage the viewer through movement, sound, and ritual. Combining found objects and family heirlooms, Brucker examines memory, fragility, and death. Her work has been exhibited at venues throughout the United States and internationally, in Nepal, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Brian Getnick At what point in your life did art and spirituality first intersect?

Jane Brucker At church when I was young. I loved the sense of community, of all those people coming together. It was my first experience in art and performing, singing in the choir or praying in front of the congregation or making little sheep out of cotton balls. So I went to the School of Theology, and I was in the first Women's Studies in Theology program. I found that theology school was way more radical than art school.

bg Why?

jb Because of the challenges that we were asked to confront within ourselves, looking at culture, society, feminist dialogue, ecology. It's not that art school wasn't challenging for me. I just felt that I wasn't able to engage as deeply. But I think that in terms of how one thinks about oneself within culture, or how one looks at participating, theology school was much more challenging. Part of that was that you're questioning everything — your purpose philosophically, spiritually and intellectually.

bg The art community ostensibly regards itself as secular but I'm wondering about the appearance of so many rituals in performance art. Many of these look to neo-paganism or new age symbolism, while very few engage with Judeo-Christianity, and the ones that do are typically antagonistic toward those symbols, or caught up in an process that seems like a kind of self-flagellation.

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jb In some ways, as a culture, we're sadly removed from tradition and ritual. Especially in Los Angeles. Here there's been the freedom to do whatever you want, and an absence of a historical tradition. When I started doing performance, I was just making it up because I had never really seen performance art before. This is one of the positive aspects of working in Los Angeles. On the one hand, having no history has taken away our sense of ritual or being part of a religious or aesthetic tradition, and on the other it's such an open opportunity.

bg Its flaws are its benefits. What kind of spaces are you drawn to working in in a city like Los Angeles?

jb My performances have tended to happen in controlled spaces. I find that a gallery space is a good space. It's quiet. It takes you away from the world outside. If it's a white cube, it doesn't have anything that it's imparting onto the work. In that kind of space, I think I'm able to best allow the viewer or participant to engage with what I'm exploring in the work.

bg The form and the concept.

jb Yeah, both. I did a performance in Santa Monica, years ago, and there were lots of other performances going on. We created an installation, but the way they set the space up, they ended up installing the bar right next to my piece. It's such a different energy, right? And that's how so much contemporary art feels like. You go to the openings at Bergamot Station, and it's like a zoo — food trucks, vodka and maybe some art you can see, but it's so crowded. That's not the experience I want. I would like it to be a chance to remove yourself from yourself, your situation, your life, your city, your world, the world. And just to be there, and engage with your eyes.

bg Does the gallery remind you of a church?

jb I think so. And there's been a lot of writing about that idea. The gallery, especially the white cube, becoming a sacred space. And of course, now, everyone's very

involved in taking that apart. But I think we need it.

bg To be sacred?

jb Yeah. I think it's OK for an art space to be a sacred space. I don't think it means it's overly precious, but I think it needs to be quiet, or removed, so that in your busy life with your cell phone and maneuvering around the freeway, and whatever else we do here in LA, that there's a place we can go and just look, just be. One of my friends is the pattern maker for Colleen Atwood, the Oscar Award winning costume designer. She told me that when she goes to the old fashion houses in the Valley — where they keep all the old movie costumes — that when she's touching the gowns, she can feel the DNA of actors like Greta Garbo or Claudette Colbert. I've always believed that about objects. That's why so many of the objects I work with are heirlooms. I have a sort of reverence in handling those objects and paying tribute to those materials, and to the people who they belonged to. I owe them that.

bg Is that a form of worship?

jb Not really worship, more like an offering. I would use that word.

