



White Fungus

RH You've said in previous interviews that perhaps there are too many artists now — that artists should really interrogate themselves and their motivations for becoming artists. The role of the artist seems to have been greatly reduced. We don't think of artists, these days, so much in terms of being visionaries. It's become just another profession, another segment of the culture industry.

CS It's "lost that loving feeling" — that's that song, right? Well, we desperately need artists, but we have a surfeit. There's too many of them working for an incorrect motive. I'm of mixed feelings. I want most of my students to join the Friends Service Committee; they've never even heard of the Friends Service Committee! I want them to go build toilets and help people irrigate and plant indigenous, useful things, make a humanistic difference and get out of the studio. At the same time, there is such a wonderful vitality and visionary potentiality in certain new artists, in the music, in the cultural integrations they have in their sense of gender transformation and racial and gender issues that are very full and compelling for them. Well, that's the good part — and the fact that many artists are going into derelict, neglected, abject parts of the culture and working with local people there. And, of course, Gittoes. You know George, right? George Gittoes?

RH No.

CH No? When we finish, you look him up immediately: G-I-T-T-O-E-S. He's Australian. He only works in areas of extreme disasters. When I first met him, he was here from the war in Rwanda. He committed to an effort to pick up all the baby infants that were still alive after the battles, to find them next to the dead parents and carry them to a nunnery. He saved a lot of these infants. But he was walking on dead bodies, the mutilated bodies in the jungle. Right now he's in Chicago, in a part of South Chicago where most of the children have never seen a white person, unless it's a policeman coming to threaten someone in their group.

Gittoes just left Afghanistan, where he made a cultural center called "The Yellow House". And everybody was after him — the CIA, the arms dealers, the Taliban, the priests — because in his yellow house he was teaching girls and young boys to use cameras to document their lives, to work together as a community, to make food, to make music. And so every now and then, one of the kids would come to him and say, "Our dad told us that the Taliban is coming with a group to kill you." Somehow George deflects these potential aggressions, always finding some common ground to communicate.

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He has made it possible for suppressed local people to work with film and materials which describe their lives, and the films they make are incredible! *Snow Monkey* — write that down; you have to look up *Snow Monkey*. So George has the magic, intensity, surety, determination and good luck. He received the Sydney Peace Prize in 2015. He's very famous in Australia now, but no one here necessarily knows all he has accomplished.

RH You mentioned that in the reception of your work that there are still frustrations. What are some areas that you think have been overlooked at this point?

CS Well, you know, I can't think about it very much; it's daunting. I need a tremendous amount of assistance to sort everything out and just see if these values can be sustained or maintained. Or will the mice continue to chew up the prints? Will the racoons get into the costume drawer again? Will the birds keep stealing parts of my constructions because they need bits of silk fabric? There's so many odd elements here. There's all the videotapes that need to be edited and made available, the lectures or things that could be useful. But I can't do all that. I try to organize or delineate it, but then I have to make some work. And the work I'm doing now is writing — because that seems to be what's possible, and it emerges. I'm in a kind of writing trance that happens.

RH What kind of things are you writing?

CS I'm writing a lot about the body and death, and the physical disasters we survive... Autumn frost influenced my writing this morning. My memory wanders around freely, so I can enter and exit all kinds of lost sensations very quickly and intensely. I can be at the beach when I'm seven years old, in my little yellow bathing suit that has rumples on it, and in my sandbox digging up little tiny clams. I can go there and smell the sea. It's a wonderful, old wooden aroma in buildings near the ocean.

Opposite: Carolee Schneemann walking on 29th Street, New York, 1965. Image copyright Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Robert Zakanych.

Following spread: "Infinity Kisses — The Movie" (2008). Frame enlargements of 35 mm slide photos transferred to HD video, color, sound, 9 min. Image copyright Carolee Schneemann.

