

Roberta Neiman interviewed by Barbara Clausen, October 28, 2020

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<http://artistarchives.hosting.nyu.edu/JKB/roberta-neiman-interview-october-2020/>

*This transcript is a condensed and edited version of the original interview.*

Barbara Clausen: This is The Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, and I'm here today with Roberta Neiman. Thank you very much, Roberta, for taking part in this interview. And I'm going to jump right in and ask you, how did you meet Joan?

Roberta Neiman: I met Joan in New York City. And she was, I think, living with Richard Serra, and I was living with Rudy Wurlitzer. And then Joan and Richard and Rudy and I spent the summer in Nova Scotia, together, so I got to really know her.

Barbara Clausen: And how did you start working with her?

Roberta Neiman: I was just photographing, really, but we were in Nova Scotia for part of that time and it's pretty isolated. She started working on something, and then I started working on it with her.

Barbara Clausen: What was special about Joan's performances of that time? Do you remember some of them?

Roberta Neiman: Not that well. I do remember *Organic Honey*. Because I did a lot of the photographs for that.

Barbara Clausen: Did you ever perform in Joan's work?

Roberta Neiman: No. I might have walked across the stage, but not really.

Barbara Clausen: You also worked with Joan in 1972 for the *Organic Honey* performances. Could you speak about those first performances?

Roberta Neiman: I think some of it was done in her loft and I think some of it was done in Nova Scotia. I'm not sure.

Barbara Clausen: How did you start documenting Joan's work?

Roberta Neiman: Well, I thought I liked it and I liked Joan and I'm a photographer and it was nice for me to be able to work with Joan for these different occasions. It was also for me, I had just come from Los Angeles and I was not a New York person yet. So through Joan I became my New York self.

- Barbara Clausen: Did she ask you to start documenting? Can you tell us a bit how you started photographing Joan's work?
- Roberta Neiman: It was very organic. I mean, she was working and I photographed her, thinking "that's good," so we did more. And so we just did it that way. It wasn't anything official. I just started working with it. It was fun and it was new for me. I had never done anything like that. And Joan is an exceptional woman, that you must know.
- Barbara Clausen: What was the process of working together? Did you look at the rehearsals or did you perform when there was nobody in the studio, was there an audience?
- Roberta Neiman: It was often in the studio, just Joan and I, maybe one or two people
- Barbara Clausen: Did she give you any instructions?
- Roberta Neiman: It was very, very organic. It just happened. She would show me what she was doing. I might give her a few ideas. I would photograph, we would have lunch. It was just that. It wasn't anything planned or set up. I photographed a few performances, but not that many
- Barbara Clausen: And how did you select the images afterwards? Did you bring her your contact sheets?
- Roberta Neiman: No, I'm too arrogant to do that. I chose photographs and I brought them to Joan and she was very happy with them. I liked working with her because I was learning so much.
- Barbara Clausen: Did Joan's work influence your own work?
- Roberta Neiman: Well, I don't know the answer to that, maybe in some abstract way that I was photographing, not things that I photographed before.
- Barbara Clausen: When you look back, did you take care of your archive of performance photographs?
- Roberta Neiman: I am trying to bring all of my archives together, but half of it is in Mexico, which is where I used to live. I have to go through it all but I'm not very good at doing it myself. I really need help with that.
- Barbara Clausen: You have a very special perspective when you photographed her work, you were very close, but also offer a lot of generosity in

your images for the viewer to join you. Were you ever the camera person for the first *Organic Honey* performances?

Roberta Neiman: Yes, I think so. One of us did [at the LoGuidice Gallery in New York and then later that year in Rome at the Galleria L'Attico].

Barbara Clausen: Do you remember, that must've been really different, though—to have the camera, the video, and then to photograph. That must be really a different experience.

Roberta Neiman: No, because I had been doing that before. I had been working with video before.

Barbara Clausen: Thank you so much for your time.

Roberta Neiman: Always nice to talk about Joan.