

1971 **20** 1991

THE **KITCHEN**
VIDEO MUSIC DANCE PERFORMANCE FILM LITERATURE

THE NEW YORK TIMES **THE ARTS** SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1992

Review/**Cabaret**

Avant-Gardist Rage

By **ALLAN KOZINN**

For an avant-gardist, adversity can be the stuff of dreams. It can fuel the creative engines, and it can draw a spotlight to the results. For Karen Finley, both apply. Her best works are furious, scathing responses to injustice, especially against women. And the speed with which her audience has grown in the last year is directly attributable to the zeal with which conservatives have tried to muzzle her. (Ms. Finley is one of four performance artists who were denied grants by the National Arts Endowment last year and have filed suit against the agency.)

Ms. Finley and Jerry Hunt, a composer with a deadpan sense of humor that serves as a foil for Ms. Finley's sharper wit, are collaborating on "The Finley/Hunt Report," which opened on Thursday at the Kitchen (512 West 19th Street). They begin the 90-minute piece as a satire of a television talk show, discussing off-color subjects in the glib tones and smiley cadences television interviewers use for innocuous chatter.

Ms. Finley and Mr. Hunt quickly go on to skewer other things, but televi-

sion interviews become a leitmotif. In one early video sequence, two television sets are shown, one with an image of Ms. Finley, who asks questions, the other with Mr. Hunt, who responds. An amusing sequence that follows, edited by Bobbi Tsumagari, includes clips from Ms. Finley's recent television interviews but shows only the questions (some sympathetic, some antagonistic, some pure boilerplate), not her responses.

But the show's central moments are those given to Ms. Finley's recitations of a handful of her poems of rage on topics ranging from police brutality in its many manifestations to the callous murder of a doe as a symbol of the devaluation of women. Topical references abound, but the subjects remain expansive. Ms. Finley characterizes her texts compellingly, alternately shouting them gruffly, like an old bluesman, and intoning them in a tremulous whine.

Mr. Hunt contributed effectively raucous electronic backdrops for Ms. Finley's writings. The show runs through tomorrow night.