

Edited by Guy Trebay

Richard Gallo

The lights in the Kitchen are the only sign of life on Broome Street. It is 11 o'clock on a Wednesday night and Soho is as sleepy as Main Street in some corn belt burg. There's a fresh breeze lifting up papers, carrying the smell of something sweet.

Upstairs, on the second floor of this dowdy cast-iron building a man rests on a ladder, three workmen stand by white panels sets angled to a window wall, a child sleeps on a black leather cushion, and two young men leaf through the pages of a pornographic magazine.

The men holding the panels are waiting for the approval of the man on the ladder before nailing the boards to the wall.

"The angle isn't right," he says. "It isn't right. I don't want to see the pigs, just the cables coming out."

"We're little piggies," one worker squeals, "and you can't see us."

The reason for all this activity Richard Gallo's theatre piece, *A Killer's Loose but No One's Talking*, involves the use of suckling-pig corpses. The pigs ascend cables worked by pulleys. The pigs have not arrived. The pulleys are not hooked up. Gallo is in rehearsal, too frazzled to come and talk. But someone has a beer and a plastic booklet for me to read. It is a prospectus, a slickly professional outline, and from it I learn that Richard Gallo is a "spectacle greater than Marlene Dietrich" (Andy Warhol), that he has performed with Robert Wilson in Europe, that his piece is part of a larger work called *The Tip of the Iceberg*, and that the expensive props for this two-evening event include:

Gray Gravel	\$200
Black Net Box	\$30
Lamb Carcass	\$50
Cut Crystal	\$30
Fresh Lobsters	\$35
Smoke Machine (rental)	\$100
Photomural of a Fly	\$500

And other things. If you did not know that Richard Gallo is a performance artist you might think, reading this, that you had come across a necromancer's grocery list.

For the brief life of Gallo's performance, the Kitchen floor will be decorated with lava rocks arranged in triangle,

a smooth bed of plaster rutted by tire tracks, and Sheryl Sutton hanging from the ceiling by her heels. Sutton is a sweet-faced black woman who played a main role in Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*. For this spectacle she will be unrecognizably encased in a chain-mail suit of Gallo's design, so it helps to know in advance that it's her.

I first saw Richard Gallo in 1972. He was then called Lemon Boy. I met him at a party. I say met but encountered is a better word. In those days, Gallo only ventured into public costumed in leather or rubber bondage clothes. He was always masked and he was always accompanied by a woman interpreter. Although Gallo is from Brooklyn and speaks fine English, he never talked. This was just as well, since in the dark at parties he could be a fairly spooky sight.

Then, dressed like that, Gallo performed art pieces on the steps of the New York Public Library, 42nd Street branch. Lemons were his main prop. Starting with a truckfull, he arranged the fruit in green-grocer's pyramids or in precisely arranged grids. It is probably safe to say that in 1972 no one who watched these midday performances had much idea what they were about. Neither, for that matter, did Gallo.

"I don't know why I was doing it," he says, coming out of rehearsal. Without his mask, his interpreter, his lemons, Gallo is disarmingly sweet, open.

"In those days I just followed whatever I was doing to the limit. A thousand lemons two feet apart, or whatever. Then that guy Beuys gave me a big piece of felt. He liked me. So I made a costume out of that and wore it for a while."

"The costumes were a natural thing. I've done it since Pratt. When we were both there Bob Wilson and I would take turns trying to top each other. He would do a piece and say, 'Everyone wear khaki,' and I'd show up in a red tuxedo with 200 yards of chiffon. When I worked with him in Europe, he never directed me. He'd just say I'm doing 20 minutes of green and then leave a space in the piece for me. It's my unconscious I go by."

"In this piece I *knew* I needed little suckling piglets with their feet like this." (He imitates an attitude of prayer.)

"And brains. I don't know why. I don't have a thing about guts. But the kid had to be standing in brains."

The kid in question is actress Cookie

Mueller's son, Max. His part in *A Killer's Loose but Nobody's Talking* is to stand in the small pile of pink brains, a shadowy figure in the pool of light cast by a spotlight on Sutton.

"What am I supposed to do?" Max asks, fidgeting at his mark on the edge of the scene.

"Just remember there is a pile of brains over here," says Gallo, "so get in a possible position and hold it as long as you can."