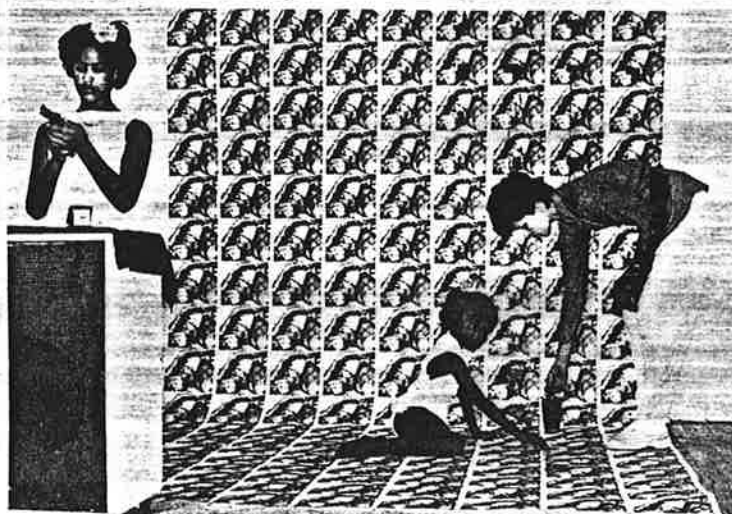


# THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR  
VIDEO, MUSIC  
AND DANCE

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Judy Nylon with two young assistants/performers in her recent performance, *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, at the Kitchen.

## Judy Nylon at The Kitchen

Judy Nylon is perhaps best known by those who frequent the Bowery bar CBGB's and other punk hangouts in New York; she established herself as an underground rock singer working in London with John Cale and Brian Eno. Recently she has been appearing in America as both a rock-and-roller and a performance artist. In her November performance piece at The Kitchen she matter-of-factly combined the iconography of feminism, terrorism and punk.

The event lasted only 15 minutes and involved three people. Nylon was dressed as a '50s housewife in pants, button-down-collar shirt, a red leather apron scalloped around the edges, short cropped hair and red lipstick; her two young black girl-child assistants wore red tights and white T-shirts tied as tunics. The location was a gallery room; fastened to the wall and running down onto the floor was a hanging mural of black-and-white silk-screened shapes, framed on both ends by a large pink border. Sections of the mural had already been randomly painted with red paint, and other parts colored in with yellow and purple crayons. There was a large white speaker broadcasting CB conversations; on top of it a red cologne bottle, a red alarm clock and a revolver in a holster.

The action itself was very simple. Nylon walked in with the two girls and began to paint sections of the mural, patiently explaining to them what she

was doing, the way a mother might teach her daughters to make a pie. Then she gave the beaker of red paint to one of the children and calmly walked over to the table to teach the other in the same matter-of-fact way how to take the barrel out of the revolver, how to shoot, how to aim. The gestures were simple, direct, show-and-tell-like. After 15 minutes during which she repeated both demonstrations again and again, Nylon looked at the clock, took the girls' hands and bowed to the audience.

Obviously, much of the power of this piece came from the juxtaposition of female stances, gestures and points of view with the equipment and techniques of terrorism. There was a strange psychological distance created by the real noise of the CB transmissions, the sound of the gun pin closing, contrasted to the quiet reassuring directions being given to the girls.

Nylon's punk sensibility is forceful, aggressive and concrete. By presenting herself in the image of the unruffled housewife/mother, she refers at the outset to the stereotypical defense persona available to women—that of victim. From that point of departure, Nylon gives us her own vision of the punk feminine mystique, a view of women as tough, invincible, completely self-absorbed. The acute strength and roughness of this image is almost a punitive answer to the current vogue of feminine ambiguity. Nylon's punk style is both nihilistic and narcissistic, negative and ahistorical at the same time. This makes it an unusually powerful addition to the ever growing ranks of feminist performance.

—Jill Silverman

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