

# Artists Space

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## In Quest of . . .

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Ann-Sargent Wooster

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Jill Kroesen  
Artists Space

Artists' performance has one set of parameters in New York City, another in Canada and another in Europe. In Canada, it leans more towards the theatrical, with far more polish and conventional theater mechanisms than we find in New York. English performances incline toward traditional vaudeville with singing, dancing and skits. Although various types of performance are present in New York, the work produced here has a stronger commitment to text and a crudeness which is not wholly a product of the lack of financial resources available here (as opposed to the government funding found in other countries).

Jill Kroesen has invented a strange fantasy world part S & M and part punk rock, about a farming community where the women live on a hill apart from the men, who are predominantly gay when they are not having sex with sheep. In this segment of her version of *Fernwood*, they seem to have given up sex for tap dancing. *Previews of Lou and Walter*, (Lou and Walter are a homosexual couple) was one chapter out of a larger "opera" based on the convoluted relationships of this town. There is a distinct perversity to Kroesen's

vision of the order of things, but like *Valentino*, it presents an accurate, albeit slightly distorted reflection of the nature of the world today.

This particular version of the "opera," was loose and sketchy, caused in part by a turnover in cast shortly before the performance. Kroesen's singing and the tap dancing of the company held it together. Her voice, no matter what the subject (and some of her lyrics are decidedly strange) holds your attention. The tap dancing automatically adds other layers to the story/activity it is coupled with. Like roller skates or toe shoes, it transforms the performer from a gravity bound creature to another plane. Before Kroesen's performance I had never realized how completely the sound of taps forms its own music. In one sequence, the sheriff and his men are marching in, and the sound of their taps (more than the action) strongly evoked the '30s social commentary ballet, *The Green Table*. •

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*The Soho Weekly News* December 8, 1977