

# The Arts

## Gal on Work, Women, and What Makes Men Weird *(from page one)*

me to go to London and live there for six months because I know it isn't forever. It's a kind of nutty life. And it would be very difficult if I didn't have my home.

**OITM:** Let's talk about the political work you do--how you see yourself as a feminist performer and the reactions you get to the political content of your shows.

**GAL:** I think that people like it. A lot of stuff that I talk about is stuff that I've thought about a lot, and that most people never really think about too much. And why should they? Except that they should, and that's why I'm talking about it.

I'm doing this thing with a penis now. I had my friend Alice make it. She couldn't remember what they look like, so I had to draw a diagram. I'm using it to talk about power. In the beginning I'm talking about the Mapplethorpe photographs, and I put it on this chest I use in one part of the show, and I do the Mapplethorpe poses. "Now, what's threatening about this? Or this? Or this?"

Wearing it and making fun of it is the most powerful of all. It's funny; the thing is flapping around down there, and the moment I put it on I understand that this is why men are so weird. This is why they're so frightened and unconnected. Well, of course, mine is very large. But if I put it on and walk around, and it's flopping around, and I say, "No wonder men are so weird," that's all I need to say. And the men didn't feel upset about me saying that. The men went, "Oh yeah, that *is* why we're so weird."

**OITM:** Is there anything that you've wanted to do that you just haven't been quite brave enough or bold enough to do on stage at this point?

**GAL:** Well, I really wanted to read this

overt lesbian erotic story at midnight on my birthday, but I wanted to do it for a woman-only audience. I've done it a lot, but I do it for women's space or for a mixed gay and lesbian space. It's a really funny story, but I just don't want some creepy person or some homophobic woman going, "yuck..." I just don't want someone getting off on it. I mean, I do want people to get off on it, but only who I want. So it's not really that I was *afraid* to do it - it's a special present for special people.

So, no, I think everything that I've thought of doing that really scared me, I've done.

What happens with a lot of my work is people see me do something, or they hear part of what I'm saying. They don't hear the whole thing because I talk about stuff that's forbidden as often as I can, and some kind of gateway of perception snaps shut, and they become very angry. In the '70s and early '80s it was a lot worse because they would come and attack me after my show. That doesn't happen so much any more, which is nice. You know, thought-police kind of people. But I'm also much more careful now. When I'm going to do something, I say, "Look, I don't know how you're going to respond to this, but I'm going to try it out, and let's see how it goes."

**OITM:** Do you feel a certain pressure to be outrageous because people expect it of you?

**GAL:** Well, I don't want to outrage people. I want to surprise and shock them and educate them. When I've done a piece that's really good and really perfect that I really love, it always frightens me that I'll never do anything that good again. Then I do something that's different. And I have to remember that.

**OITM:** Do you have any evidence that you are changing people's lives or making a difference?

**GAL:** Well, no (laughs). A lot of people, especially in England, have never seen a woman who called herself a feminist do something funny. They have only seen feminist women doing this very heavy stuff about, oh, "too many children, my life is hell." Kind of like Anais Nin's autobiography. You know, horrible, depressed, Joyce Carol Oates on stage or something. So that was an education for them, I think. Many, many people said, "I've never seen a woman do anything in this way. I've seen women comedians, but I've never seen a woman be funny."

A lot of times when I first started, I would make fun of Holly Near or someone like that. I would see that people weren't laughing. And then I'd see them looking toward someone in the room, who I quickly realized was the arbiter of political taste and style. And if that person would laugh, then everybody would laugh. And that person *would* laugh.

So that has really changed. Because you didn't make fun of this stuff in the early '80s at all. I mean, you *could*, but you weren't supposed to. It wasn't acceptable.

**OITM:** What did you say about Holly Near?

**GAL:** I just made fun of her. I made fun of how she had ten million causes in every song, and how she would talk about pollution and things like that. And meanwhile, she was making money and paying taxes. And my attitude at that time was that if you're paying taxes, you're part of the problem.

**OITM:** Would you sing?

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