

contemporaryart

tema celeste

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ellen leserance & jeanine oleson

Samson Projects
Boston

In a playful mélange of New Age spiritualism, radical feminism, earthworks and ethnography, collaborative artists Ellen Lesperance & Jeanine Oleson initiated their "Off the Grid" project of performance-based, large format chromogenic prints in 2001. Now urban dwellers, the uber-hippie pair attempt in their ongoing project to reconnect with the primordial forces of nature by assuming the mythical characters of prehistoric huntresses, earth goddesses, and pioneer women. For their debut Boston show, along with nine brilliantly colored and staged photographs, the pair displayed many of their ritualistic props, costumes and artifacts—pelts, clay fertility goddesses, kindling, mushrooms, mud and feathers—used during their recent vision quests in Florida, Iowa, Maine, Pennsylvania, and their native Pacific Northwest.

For the pure landscape (barely off the interstate) photograph, *Winter V* (2004), they painted primitive ochre female fertility pictographs on Maine boulders to emulate ancient cave paintings. *Fall IV* (2003) is set in the same Iowa location where Ana Mendieta created her 1977 "Silueta" series of earth body works. To likewise connect with Mother Earth's spiritual life-affirming power, here, Lesperance's body lies buried in mud and a ritualistic fire burns above her womb. The newest photographs depict open-ended mythic narratives based on the eerie invented characters Bigfoot, and his bride, Nioka. Her hefty nude body covered with shorn fur, Oleson/Bigfoot tries to build a labyrinth in the woods, poses by a waterfall with her veiled bride Lesperance/Nioka, participates in the bloody kill of a cow, and dies in her lover's arms. *Bigfoot & Nioka III* (2003) captures a tender moment as Nioka, dressed in black-and-white torn linens, gazes lovingly at her lifeless savage mate. Among the tall green grass, they parody Michelangelo's *Pietà* and recall the poignant Civil War photographs of fallen soldiers, while earnestly bemoaning the futility of living off the grid of "civilized" society.

Francine Koslow Miller



Ellen Lesperance & Jeanine Oleson *Off the Grid (Florida IV)*, 2003, chromogenic print / stampa cromogenica, 60,9 x 91,4 cm.