

B-Girl Be—A very different kind of T and A

BY LYDIA HOWELL , PULSE OF THE TWIN CITIES

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Lady Pink is slim and appears almost fragile—until this graffiti-artist groundbreaker speaks. Starting at 15, in 1979, she was the only female among about 10,000 young men, tagging the New York City subway trains. “I didn’t know about feminism. Just what I saw on TV—like Marcia Brady standing up. Guys would say I couldn’t do graffiti, but all I thought was, ‘You need testicles to paint graffiti?’ All you need is a little bit of courage and a little bit of skill and you’re good to go—as long as you can run from police.”

Here are a few highlights, all at Intermedia Arts, unless otherwise noted Friday, June 29, 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Dance Showcase, including a 2007 Fringe Fest hit, Universal Dance Destiny. \$7 general/\$5 youth. 9 p.m. to 2 p.m. at Nomad World Pub on the West Bank—Spoken Word Showcase. 21+. \$7. Saturday, June 30, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Workshops in different mediums, \$15 each. Also a 7 p.m.-10 p.m. Performance Showcase featuring Wonda Woman Project, Tish Jones, Black Blondie and more. \$7 general/\$5 youth. Sunday, July 1, noon-2 p.m., 3:30-5 p.m. Films. Intermedia Arts is located at 2822 Lyndale Ave. S., Mpls. Complete schedule at: www.intermediaarts.org or 612-871-4444.

She’s part of the third annual B-Girl Be—Women and Hip Hop Summit, organized and hosted by Intermedia Arts in South Minneapolis, (with some events and other venues), from Thursday, June 28, through Sunday, July 1. Women from New York to Los Angeles, Sweden to South Africa and Puerto Rico and across the Midwest express and explore the full range of mediums in the international Hip-Hop movement from a decidedly female perspective: MCing, break-dancing, spoken word video and visual art in diverse mediums.

In the aftermath of Don Imus, I can’t think of a better antidote than B-Girl Be and hell, yes, men are welcome—even encouraged—to discover that women in hip hop are so much more than scantily-clad booty in videos or the occasional lone woman in a crew of guys. Part of the joy of this annual convergence is to see both established innovators and fresh talent, to experience the creative energy of new work, created out of the gathering itself. There are plenty of workshops, gallery tours with artist talks, and performance showcases. All are free or mostly \$5.

DeAnna Cummings curated the visual art exhibit, “The Art of T and A: Truth and Activism,” which opens with a reception Thursday, June 28, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., and remains up through the end of summer. The exhibit title could stand in for the themes of the 2007 B-Girl Be. She weighs in on the national debate about misogyny and other destructive elements in the mainstream corporate-sponsored hip hop that’s all most people hear.

“I think today’s commercial hip hop is the theme music for today’s commercial, commodified culture. If rock and roll was the theme music of the 1960s and ’70s, then, commercial rap is the theme music for today. It’s only a reflection of the broader society’s misogyny, violence and pursuit of material things,” Cummings points out. “I mostly tune it out, ignore it and pay attention only as much as I need, in order to stay in connection to what the youth I work with are into. I think that women’s quandary is what birthed B-Girl Be.”

Lady Pink has gone from the streets to galleries and places like the Brooklyn Museum, but the risk-taking of her first endeavors with a spray can remains vivid. She makes me recall my own late night adventures doing political graffiti in my 20s to age 35, when a scary arrest by Minneapolis police ended my own graffiti career.

“I started because I lost a boyfriend. He was taken from me and I started writing his name in grief. Eventually, I fell in love with the adventure and excitement. I met guys that were painting the subway trains. That was a thrill that couldn’t be beat,” she says. “Sneaking around creepy tunnels at night with a bunch of guys, painting trains couldn’t be beat. Seeing your name running on the train the next morning, all colorful and beautiful. That’s the point of art by the masses for the masses. I painted trains for five years and then moved on to galleries—where you want to say more than just writing your name.”

On Friday, June 29, at noon, Lady Pink gives a gallery talk about her installation in the visual art exhibit. What she’s created is an essential response to the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

“It’s called ‘Women Breeding Soldiers’ [and speaks to the] claim that that’s what women are put on Earth to do—breed soldiers, for this senseless war. Women sending their children, boys and girls, to die for no reason at all—except for maybe a little profit for the oil companies or some obscure government reason.” Lady Pink says with quiet intensity. “I’m not a mother so I don’t know the sadness of losing a child to war. A hero to me is Cindy Sheehan, losing her child and protesting. I can empathize with her.”

Twenty-five visual artists are in the Truth and Activism show. They paint on canvas, wood and vinyl records, take photographs, make videos and toys, to explore burning questions of our time.

“The title ‘Art of T and A: Truth and Activism’ was born out of the contradictions in hip hop, to catch people’s attention and

turn it on its head,” Cummings explains. “The show is many-faceted, from traditional ways that women are seen, and [their] work looking at truth, activism or both.”

Again, that could stand for all of the 2007 B-Girl Be.

Hear more of my conversation with Lady Pink and DeAnna Cummings on KFAI Radio’s “Catalyst politics and culture,” archived for 2 weeks at www.kfai.org.

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