

## Working With Media

Once you begin to think of finding a larger audience for art, the process naturally leads one to mass communications. It is hard to remember when this idea occurred to me. The first concrete idea I had of the possible media relationship to Three Weeks in May involved an image of a daily documentation of the map's newest additions on television. This vision was not referenced by what I saw on television, but by the way art is documented. I wanted to simply translate through the media the daily act of stamping, much as I might have done in a gallery where the process was what was important. After a few calls to the Public Broadcasting Station I became clearer about the media's approach to newsworthiness. At that point I began to change my ideas as to what kinds of coverage I could expect, and from whom. Only certain information and events are either acceptable or appropriate to mass media forms.

Our discovery of how to obtain publicity was naive and intuitive. Working with the press relations personnel of City Councilwoman Pat Russell and City Attorney Pines, we began to piece together how press releases were written, when and to whom they were sent, and how to make follow-up phone calls. Barbara Cohen, an artist and organizer, assumed the role of general news publicist with Sara La Riveria assisting in writing and distributing press releases. We initiated another networking system to make personal contacts with people in the media industry.

There are two major categories of coverage possible for television news and newspapers. News, or hard news, describes events happening which are judged to have immediate importance as part of the informational surround. Features are the "human interest" stories, interviews, or events covered from a broader social or historical perspective. We planned our strategy to accomodate both forms of coverage. It had three objectives:

- To make the general public aware of the issue of rape in Los Angeles by advertising the maps and the activities of Three Weeks in May.
- To publicize the rape prevention and intervention groups working on the piece

•To provide the art community with a model for using socio-political information in a performance context.

Our breakthrough in the first objective came when City Attorney Pines, at the recommendation of his special counsel on women, offered to call a press conference prior to the opening ceremonies. As he was currently embroiled in an unrelated public controversy, his offer to sponsor a news conference ensured publicity far beyond that we might otherwise have expected for such an event. The reporters who showed up at our conference came because anything Pines did those days was newsworthy. Once there, however, the panel of women from rape hotlines, the Deputy Mayor and myself communicated our true intent to announce the opening of the piece. Since no dramatic or tragic event occurred later in the day to obscure our report, it was well covered on local television news stations.

The strategy to fulfill our second objective was to essentially recreate the networking phenomenon of the piece within the mass media, through interviews and feature programs. As with the other events, we mixed and matched the participants from various politically, professionally and esthetically diverse organizations with each other. An officer of the Los Angeles Police Department Rape Detail appeared on an early morning television talk show with a member of the Rape Hotline Alliance; one of the artists working on the project spoke for a noontime show with a self defense instructor; Leslie Labowitz and I spoke on a radio program about art and politics. People were free to talk about their organizations or the issue of rape, however with each program some reference was made to the entire event, a way of tying together the various aspects of the issue as well as advertising the subsequent events by other women in the piece.

Surprisingly, art publicity was not as accessible as mass media. Although we had one small preliminary announcement in Artweek, a California-based newspaper of the visual arts, most publicity came in the form of reviews, commentary and exhibitions subsequent to the piece. This is partially related to the after-the-fact review form employed in art reporting. It also took a certain amount of time for the notion of a performance which looked like a political campaign to be rationalized into the art system. Later, the success

of the mass media coverage of Three Weeks in May, which happened during and as part of the event, stimulated art writers' interest. Reviews and descriptions were published in Frontiers, A Journal of Woman Studies, EMMA ( A German feminist magazine), The Journal of The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, High Performance, and Arts. (See appendix for reprints.)