

## Jeane Fabb *...gently holding...*

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## Jeane Fabb

JOHN K. GRANDE

### ...gently holding...



Jeane Fabb enacted a sculpture performance piece at the Coed Hills Rural Artspace, a 180 acre area of woods and farm in the Vale of Glamorgan near St.Hillary in South Wales titled *...gently holding...* This work may be considered a continuation of Fabb's 25-year involvement in *in situ* installations, art actions, and performances preoccupied with an eternal relation between woman and land. Fabb's site-specific sculpture performance was part of a major Yurt convention titled *Ancient Futures*, which incorporated the work of Helena Norberg-Hodge concerning the effects of globalization on the Ladakhi people in the western Himalayas.

The organizers at Coed Hills offer this cue to the event: "*Ancient* raises important questions about the whole notion of progress, and explores the root causes of the malaise of industrial society."<sup>1</sup> For the first part of the event in June 2002, the 14 invited artists from Finland, Norway, Germany, the UK, the USA, Portugal, and Aotearoa created their own land-based, site-specific response to Celfan Wledig (Coed Hills). The Coed Hills Rural Artspace brochure provided an accent this ongoing art event sought to achieve: "Performing

the art of dwelling, dwelling within the art of performance."<sup>2</sup>

The completed land piece was around 100 metres long, one metre high, four metres wide, and traversed a whole hillside that became part of the artwork, at the intersection of two sacred "ley lines" (part of a network of such lines throughout Great Britain that intersect at traditionally holy places such as prehistoric mounds, churches, wells, stones, and mountains).<sup>3</sup> This was not the average object-based nature installation, but instead a work that involved direct interaction with women on the site. Ironically, the line Jeane Fabb intuitively circumscribed across the hillside that began the process paralleled two ancient ley lines.

Fabb's contemporary and hypothetical line became a site for interaction between women, as each participant, for reasons particular to themselves — the location's relation to other women, or the view from a chosen vantage point —, selected a place along it. Christiane, a German visitor and participant, commented, "Jeane asked me to chose one of the seven places she had marked in the countryside... I chose the left outside space, between the old oak tree and a telegraph mast. I was lying on the ground and my first sensation was that my body was meeting something organic, that it was an energetic place. I became very excited."<sup>4</sup>

The next stage of Fabb's artwork involved placing a series of sticks (recycled from a nearby artist's Yurtwork) at a specific distance from the body-form of each participant, forming a sort of shadow image of each person. Christiane describes the process: "Jeane was carefully putting the sticks around me. Sometimes I felt that they were touching me. As I was lying there I perceived the world like a newborn baby."<sup>5</sup>

Stick placement usually followed a discussion about one's feelings and relation to the land, be it Wales or other land that people came from to be there. This was unquestionably a woman's perspective on the land. Each person lay on a black cloth, and a cord traversing the territory ran under each person's body, thus connecting all participants. Fabb has successively used black cloth in previous events. Back in 1989 in the Laurentians, it symbolized the effects of acid rain on the environment. Since 1995, Fabb has featured black cloth in her Wilderness Women in Black actions and in performances to do with solidarity between women and the land.

After the creation of their particular silhouette, the women left. Earth recycled from residue of a 160-foot earthen whale sculpture nearby was then piled to form a sort of shelter or windbreak. The earth walls were lined with a very thin layer of raw wool (a woman by the name of Nada had taught Fabb to card wool). When each woman returned, her place was built. The earthen shapes recalled the forms of mythical ships, or shelters, even a primordial past, or an ancient journey to a place devoid of anything contemporary. The overall atmosphere was reminiscent of Mother Earth Art pioneer Ana Mendieta's body art pieces, but the scale was larger and Fabb's initiative was a collective and collaborative one. On the last day, Sunday June 30th, all original participants except one took part in a perfor-

mance. Each woman lay in her open "enclosure" facing the sky and holding a chosen object symbolically over her womb (such as a stone, a crystal, a flower). Visitors to the hillside came in large numbers, curious about the event, occasionally touching or tripping on the red cord running under each participant and crossing the hillside. When this happened, all participants simultaneously felt the cord move... a universal connection was established between all participants and the earth. As Fabb states: "Throughout the three-day open event of performances and installations (over a thousand people came), I would often find people lying in my work, taking time out from all the intense social collective actions and performances. Each space had its own special intimacy, quiet, and energy." ←

#### NOTES

1. Celfan Wledig Coed Hills Rural Artspace Brochure.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, New York: New Press, 1983, p.133-134.
4. Jeane Fabb: *...gently holding...*, Artist's book, np.
5. *Ibid.*

JEANE FABB, *... gently holding...*, 2002. Art nature action and installation. Participation of 7 women. 60 x 3,5 x 1 m. Earth, branches, raw black wool and black cloth. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

