

'A Donkey's Tale'
Rosy Martin

Martin, Rosy (2001) 'A Donkey's Tale' performance in 'Outrageous Agers' Exhibition at Focal Point Gallery, Southend 2001.

A figure that had haunted me for many years, the bag lady, found form in the second workshop. The idea of being a re-incarnation of a donkey was an old joke I'd made to describe how it feels to transport things if you are not a car owner. My shopping trolley is my solution, but I found it acts as a symbol for middle-age. I used it as my prop, for the afflictions exercise. In the dressing up session, I found the role through which I could express these ideas, the voice of a working class woman (which is the background from which I come). The text from the performance developed as improvisation in the workshops and was refined in the process of the filming:

'I think I must have been a donkey in a previous life. You see - I've always got too much to carry. Now, when it comes to carrying too much, this comes in handy. Now, I tell you, people laugh at me, people scorn me, people jeer, but, this represents liberation. Now, this, I tell you, is a liberating object. When you've got too much to carry. Now the thing about carrying stuff is, you've got to feel the weight, got to really feel it, you know, in the shoulders, in the back, when you're carrying stuff. Always carrying stuff. And there's another thing, if I haven't got enough weight, what I do is, I pick up other people's; other people's distress, other people's pain, other people's grief. You see, it's very important to keep worrying. Just got to keep on worrying about other people, other people's concerns. Got to keep up the excess baggage, 'cause it stops you thinking about other things. You see, the thing about all this excess baggage is - it stops you - having your own life¹.'

The simple and direct use of language emphasises the absurdity of the all too familiar position. In the performance, I am laden with bags, yet go round collecting even more, as a metaphor for the stereotypical woman's role as carer. I walk around and around within a confined space, pulling the shopping trolley, in long shot, turning to the camera/audience to deliver the text, in close up. Finally I let all the bags fall, walking out of the frame, unburdened.

1. Martin, Rosy (2001) 'A Donkey's Tale' text from performance in 'Outrageous Agers' .