



HOT

Glenn O'Brien talks with Kerri Scharlin

Kerri Scharlin's work is about her image and the image-making process. Last spring she mounted a three-part exhibition in New York: one part consisted of studies of her made in a life-drawing class for which she posed nude, another of portraits made by police sketch-artists working from verbal descriptions of her by artists who know her, and the last of scenes from her life drawn by media courtroom artists.

Scharlin's latest project involves asking writers to write about her and photographers to photograph her. I was happy to accept, for several reasons: one being that hype and image control are integral parts

of an artist's job today, whether acknowledged or not. This is generally considered a modern phenomenon, but I suspect that the art of art publicity predates Andy Warhol, predates Jackson Pollock in Life, predates Salvador Dali, predates Whistler, predates the Renaissance even. There have been exceptions, of course, but look where they got van Gogh.

In fact I also talked to Scharlin because it seemed like something Warhol would have liked. For art's sake I've conducted this interview in the style of the old Interview magazine, back when Andy owned it, when interviewing was an art.

Glenn O'Brien: *Is Kerri your real name?*

Kerri Scharlin: Yes.

GO'B: *Is it short for something?*

KS: Kerri Sue. When I was growing up I went by Kerri Sue. I didn't realize how Southern that sounded.

GO'B: *Are you from the South?*

KS: Miami, if you consider that the South. I have relatives in Tennessee.

GO'B: *Does "Kerri" mean anything?*

KS: The verb "to transport." No, it doesn't mean anything.

GO'B: *What about Scharlin?*

KS: I don't know. There are very few Scharlins.

GO'B: *My name means Valley O'Strong.*

KS: What does Conan O'Brien mean?

GO'B: *I don't know, I'll have to look it up. [It means Brave]*

HYPE

This page: Kerri Scharlin, *untitled*, 1993, black and white photograph, dimensions variable. From "The Magazine Project," 1993-94. Opposite, top to bottom: Kerri Scharlin, *Wanted*, 1991-93, enlarged pencil drawings, each 49 1/2 x 78". Left to right: *Wanted* (Janine), *Wanted* (Rikrit), *Wanted* (Sam), *Wanted* (Charles), *Wanted* (Laurie). Kerri Scharlin, *Wanted*, 1991-93, enlarged pencil drawings, each 49 1/2 x 78". Left to right: *Wanted* (Tatyana), *Wanted* (Cheryl), *Wanted* (Craig), *Wanted* (Aki), *Wanted* (L.C.).



O'Strong.

KS: No relation?

GO'B: Not that I know of. There are many, many O'Briens. What nationality is Scharlin?

KS: Russian Jewish. But it's possible the name was changed at Ellis Island. I have no knowledge of relatives before my great-grandfather.

GO'B: What was his name?

KS: Morris. He lived in Brooklyn. He was a bootlegger.

GO'B: What did your grandfather do?

KS: He had a gas station. But what he really did was take junked Cadillacs and make them perfect and sell them. My grandmother was also very involved in the gas station. To hear them talk it was like a doctor's practice—their customers were very important to them, and she

went to work dressed up in high heels. You don't think of gas stations as having customers anymore.

GO'B: What does your father do?

KS: He changes the meaning of land and resells it. He doesn't build on it, he just does things with the zoning that change the property values.

GO'B: You're the first artist in your family?

KS: More or less.

GO'B: Are you religious?

KS: No. Are you?

GO'B: No. Have you ever been arrested?

KS: No, I haven't found a good reason to break the law.

GO'B: You've never broken the law?

KS: Well, minor degrees of shoplifting. I'll steal a piece of candy. I almost always steal a magazine from

Food Emporium. I used to do certain illicit drugs. Other than that I don't think so.

GO'B: What magazines do you steal?

KS: Whatever I haven't read in the check-out line. I think of magazines as the mental equivalent of candy, therefore I steal them. I steal *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, the *Enquirer*, and the *Star*.

GO'B: Have you ever considered committing any real crimes?

KS: Probably not. Have you?

GO'B: Yeah, murder.

KS: Seriously?

GO'B: I've wondered what would happen if certain people walked in front of my car. Would I miss the brake?

KS: Do you want to name names?

GO'B: They know who they are.

KS: I often wish certain people were dead, but I don't think that's being murderous in my heart.

GO'B: Are there any criminals you've looked up to?

KS: I'm very interested in the Menendez case, the California boys on trial for killing their parents. I like the Menendez brothers for some reason, I feel real compassion for them.

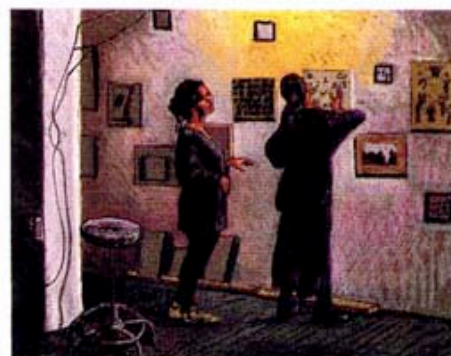
GO'B: Do you think the president should pardon them if they're convicted?

KS: No, that would be kind of disgusting.

GO'B: I've always felt that the presidential pardon is one of the most underused powers. I think the president should pardon a lot more.

KS: Why?





Above, left to right, top to bottom: Kerri Scharlin, *Drawing (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Modeling (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Studio Visit (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *El Teddy's (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Stairmaster (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Dooley (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Holcut (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Livingroom (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". Kerri Scharlin, *Bedroom (Witnessed)*, 1992-93, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 25 1/8". All works from the "Witnessed" series, 1992-93.

GO'B: Because justice often isn't done.

KS: In this case it would smack of pardoning them because they're rich.

GO'B: Yeah, if you just pardoned them. But if you pardoned people across the board it would be okay. Is there anyone people say you remind them of?

KS: Sometimes Kirstie Alley.

GO'B: Do they say "Kirstie! You've

lost a ton of weight!"

KS: I'm not vastly thinner than Kirstie.

GO'B: Do you think she would be appropriate to play you in *The Kerri Scharlin Story*?

KS: I do. You're not writing *The Kerri Scharlin Story*, are you?

GO'B: No, I'm waiting till you get arrested. Have you ever patronized a

dating service?

KS: No, but I set up my own dating service once. I matched people up. It was at the New Museum; I'm not particularly proud of it.

GO'B: Did any of the dates work out?

KS: Actually I lost interest after I had this mixer for people to meet their dates. People seemed to feel they were matched up pretty well.

GO'B: What criteria did you use?

KS: They indicated their interests on a questionnaire. If anything at all matched up I was happy. The first criterion was age. Then if people had physical requests I tried to meet them. People pretty much stated what they were looking for, so I wasn't being that imaginative. I was a servant of their desires. Have you

ever patronized a dating service?

GO'B: No. Have you ever advertised in a personals column?

KS: No.

GO'B: If you did, how would you describe yourself?

KS: I would have to spend days thinking about it. [Days later] My heart's in prison. Attractive female Virgo with a strong mind, artist, 31, seeks articulate Lyle Menendez clone to share fashion, beauty, and interior decorating.

GO'B: Do you consider yourself attractive?

KS: I think I'd be more attractive if I got into better shape, worked out more, and tried harder. My boyfriend keeps me feeling that way.

GO'B: He keeps you feeling attractive?

KS: No, he keeps me feeling I should try harder.

GO'B: How long have you been with him?

KS: Two and a half years.

GO'B: How did you meet?

KS: At the gym. He was two Stairmasters down from me and we spoke over someone's head. Then he came over to my Stairmaster another time and asked me what I was reading.

GO'B: What were you reading?

KS: I was reading an art magazine, I think it was *Artforum*.

GO'B: Since you met your boyfriend have you stopped going to the gym?

KS: Yeah, now we have a

Stairmaster in our home.

GO'B: If you broke up who would get the Stairmaster?

KS: He would.

GO'B: Have you ever been married?

KS: No.

GO'B: Have you ever been asked?

KS: I broke up with someone because I wouldn't marry him.

GO'B: Is getting married something you think about doing eventually?

KS: I do.

GO'B: Do you think you have a biological time clock?

KS: I really like babies. But I don't

know if I could ever be unselfish enough to have this person attached to me forever. Are you married?

GO'B: Several times. What sign are you?

KS: Virgo.

GO'B: I married a Virgo. If you have to list personal references on an application, whom do you list?

KS: My boyfriend.

GO'B: Do you wear makeup?

KS: I wear foundation and lipstick. That's pretty much all I wear and I wear it all the time.

GO'B: How much do you weigh?

KS: Hopefully by the time this is printed I'll weigh less, but right now I weigh 132.

GO'B: Do you smoke?

KS: No.

GO'B: Did you ever?

KS: Marlboro Lights and Merits.

GO'B: What civilian jobs have you taken to subsist?

KS: I painted mannequin faces in a factory in Brooklyn. I worked in art galleries. I did graphic design.

GO'B: Have you ever walked off a job or been fired?

KS: I walked off the mannequin painting job, actually. And I've been fired from working in a gallery.

GO'B: Have you ever been subjected to sexual harassment on the job?

KS: No.

GO'B: Have you ever been denied a

job because you're a woman?

KS: I don't think so.

GO'B: Have you ever had sexual stereotypes applied to you?

KS: I think so.

GO'B: Did you ever identify with any sexual stereotypes?

KS: In retrospect I felt responsible for allowing those stereotypes to be applied to me. I feel it's important to be responsible for what you manifest. It's tricky to manifest something sexual and not have negative things applied to you.

GO'B: How many times did you pose nude?

KS: Five or six. I was interested in the idea of figure drawing and the artist's model, that institution. I think most people who study art start out with that foundation, and I thought I should experience being on the other side. I thought about doing it clothed but it really required being nude.

GO'B: Were you nervous?

KS: The first time I took my clothes off I was nervous, but I got over it pretty quickly. It's like diving into a pool: once you're in, it doesn't seem cold any more.

GO'B: What did you think about while you were sitting?

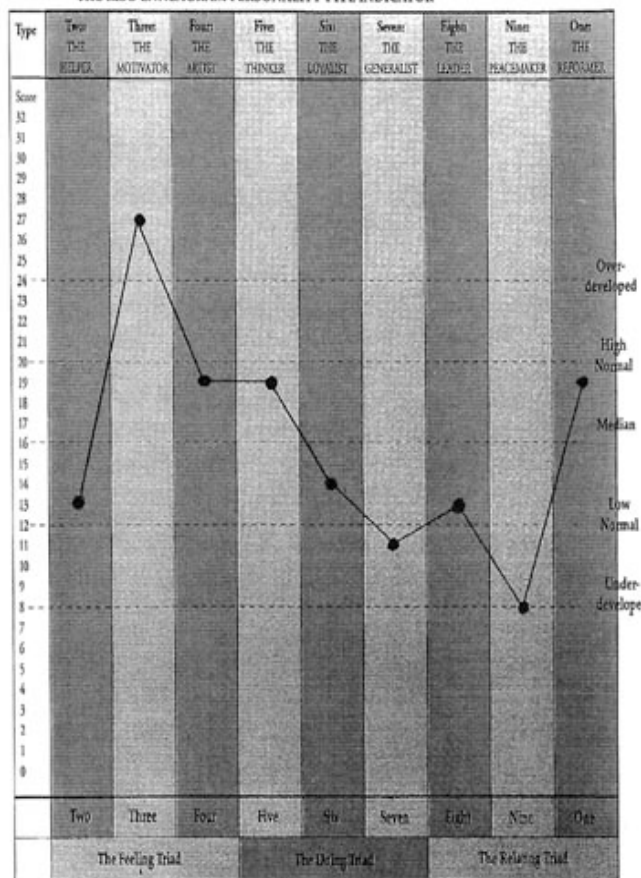
KS: A lot of things. I thought about the body of work being created. It was an interesting sense of accomplishment, a kind of passive/aggressive thing. At other times there was something that was an unexpected turn-on about it somehow.

GO'B: Do you think anyone else was turned on?

KS: I wouldn't count on it. One or two people seemed to be hovering in a certain sense, but maybe that was my fantasy. In another sense I was distancing myself and daydreaming and not thinking about the people in the room. But maybe my experience was different: being an object for other people is basically passive, but

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THE RISO ENNEAGRAM PERSONALITY TYPE INDICATOR



Kerri Scharlin, Kerri Scharlin: Personality Test #4, 1992-93, C-print, 40 x 52".
From the series "Kerri Scharlin: Personality Tests," 1992-93.

Gary Indiana?"—at the time, nobody very thrilling.) The piece went on to bemoan the fact that by 1987 I had become "obsessed by AIDS," an obsession that came to be shared by the rest of the art world a year or so later.

I like to think I brought a breath of scandal, suspense, and fresh air to a period and a place, that I punctured a few follies and got things better than right at least part of the time, and I especially like to think I bailed out at exactly the right moment—that leisurely half hour before the aircraft hit the ground. □

Gary Indiana's third novel, *Rent Boy*, is being published this month by Serpent's Tail/High Risk Books of New York and London.

O'BRIEN *continued from page 85*

since I was manipulating the sessions for my own purposes, I wasn't really being passive. Actually I found the experience liberating, in the sense that when there's nothing left to hide, you can move on. It was like getting rid of a secret.

GO'B: *Do you think women should serve in combat?*

KS: I find it kind of funny that this issue should be such a barometer of liberal views: decades ago, liberals were against combat. But I guess if women want to fight in wars, let 'em.

GO'B: *Do you think gays should serve on submarines?*

KS: Yeah.

GO'B: *Then you disagree with the President?*

KS: He doesn't think they should serve on submarines?

GO'B: *No, the bunks are too close together.*

KS: What do you think?

GO'B: *I think if gays want to be in the military they should join the Marines. They'd be prouder if they had their own service. They'd be competitive.*

KS: Why the Marines?

GO'B: *There seem to be a lot of gay Marines anyway. Their slogan is "We're looking for a few good men." Do you have any unusual skills or talents?*

KS: Finding and killing bugs and hailing cabs are my two good skills.

GO'B: *What about talents?*

KS: I think I have talent as a poet. And I can draw well.

GO'B: *Do you practice poetry?*

KS: It's something I did in college.

GO'B: *Are you right-handed or left-handed?*

KS: Right-handed.

GO'B: *Are you a registered voter?*

KS: I'm a registered Democrat.

GO'B: *Have you ever had an out-of-body experience?*

KS: No.

GO'B: *Do you believe in reincarnation?*

KS: No.

GO'B: *Do you have recurring dreams?*

KS: No.

GO'B: *Tell me a dream you remember.*

KS: [Extremely long pause] I was crossing an avenue, going to a shrink appointment, and it was flooded. Therapy was like an art-school critique with the shrink being the teacher. There were various artists there. At one point the shrink was talking about L's work, saying how good it was, using the word "thin," meaning it had no excess, it was beautifully economic. The only problem was L's inability to talk about it. I said That's okay, that can be learned. It's better for it to work visually than verbally. I asked if the teacher/shrink could come to my studio because my work was too big to bring in. I had some disappointment about not being adequately critiqued. Then I was sitting in a bar drinking Diet Coke with the shrink/teacher. We were having a fun, flirtatious conversation. I was thinking he would have liked more but for the prohibitions of the therapeutic relationship. It was as if we were on a date getting drunk together. I couldn't remember the name of the avenue that was flooded. Then I remembered: it was Second Avenue.

GO'B: *Do you have any pets?*

KS: Not now. Growing up I had lots of cats. And then lots of dogs.

GO'B: *Do you have plants?*

KS: No, just stuffed animals.

GO'B: *What's your favorite article of clothing?*

KS: I have a long black dress I like, but that will change. I go through favorites; they last about a week. I don't have a deep commitment to clothes.

GO'B: *What about shoes?*

KS: I think shoes are important and wonderful, but I hate buying them and I often wind up buying shoes that are too small or too big. I have one pair that worked out well last year, sort of platform loafers. Very all-purpose.

GO'B: *Are there any words that you live by?*

KS: It's necessary to be slightly underemployed.

GO'B: *Do you want to hear your horoscope for today?*

KS: Yeah.

GO'B: *Career prospects grow brighter. Pursue ambitions fearlessly. If you haven't any clearly defined goals, get some.* □

Glenn O'Brien is a contributing editor to *Allure* magazine and a former stand-up comedian. He edited Madonna's *Sex* and is creative director of advertising at Barney's, New York. He is Pisces with Aquarius rising.

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