

The Dream Weaver: Frank Moore and the Art of Performance

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Publishing date: 17.09.2003 04:13

Prolific Bay Area performance artist Frank Moore delves into his captivating past and the history and nature of performance art.



Without a doubt, Frank Moore has been one of the most original, provocative and inspiring American artists for decades. Yet his mix of erotic performance art, uncensored Internet talk shows and alternative news channels, and controversial poetry readings are particularly refreshing at a time when freedom of speech and other basic civil liberties are suffering from severe political arthritis in the Land of the Free. Frank is also a master story-teller—and an enthusiastic one at that.

When we asked him to tell us a little bit more about his past, he sent in an eight-page biography that reads like the synopsis of a Beat page-turner! We were forced to edit down the interview here and there, but if you come to the end of it and want to read more about Frank's early years as an artist, check out the imaginatively titled [Frank Moore – The Early Years](#).

And now, let us turn to matters at hand...

Mark: Frank Moore strikes me as a particularly apt name: your personality and work are, first and foremost, about extreme honesty and superlatives. Care to elaborate on these traits and tell us a little bit about your personal history?

Frank: Great brand name, eh? But ain't being extremely honest an important part of being an artist? And I never believed in leaving people wanting more. I believe in filling them to where it may be uncomfortable, but where they are expanded.

As for my life story, my first stroke of good luck was that I was born spastic, unable to walk or talk. Add to this good fortune the fact that my formative years were in the 60s, and my fate was assured! When I was born,

doctors told my parents that I had no intelligence, no future, and that I would be best put into an institution and be forgotten. This was a powerful expectation, with all the force of western science and medicine, as well as social influences, behind it. It would have been easy for my parents to be swept up into this expectation. I would have died long ago.

Instead, my parents rejected this expectation for the possibility they saw in my eyes. Their passionate commitment to how they thought things should be attracted people to me who kept opening new possibilities for me. Of course, these people were in the minority. But I focused on them, and I expected myself and the world at large to be like them. This opened up to me what is called luck. It also gave me the ability to trust and to use opportunities when they present themselves.



Yes, I always have been lucky. I have a body that is ideal for a performance artist. And I have always wanted to be a performer. When I was a kid, my younger brother used to get mad when people looked at me when he pushed me to the movies or to the teen club. He cried. But I liked people looking at me. That is what I mean by I am "lucky." I am lucky I am an exhibitionist in this body. One time, I was working out on the jungle gym outside of our house when a kid came by and asked if I was a monster. I just roared like a monster. It was fun.

Yet it was only when I was around 28 that I decided I did not want to be in a reality where I was ugly, where I could not give all I needed to give. It simply was not how things should be, not just for me, but for everyone. So I decided to act and think as if I were beautiful. I did not tell anyone of my decision. But within two weeks people started telling me that I had physically changed. This made me realize my body is a tool that other artists spend years to create. Most artists are not as lucky as me. They do not have the built-in advantages and shields that I have. They need to resist the real world, the normal world, more than I do. They need to be more sneaky to avoid being seduced by the business and politics of art.

Mark: What is your performance art rooted in?

Frank: My art is rooted in breaking out of isolation. Until I invented my head pointer at age 17, I did not have any way to communicate except through my family members. But it took me another ten years to shake off the isolation caused by my attitudes and self-image. This early isolation allowed me to observe life and people as an outsider. I always wanted to break physical, emotional, and spiritual isolation—first for myself, but then for other people.

My personal roots are in the idealism of the 60s. That was when I broke out of personal physical isolation. I looked for a way to bring about the ideals for me and for society as a whole. The normal channels obviously would not work for me. So all I had were my fantasies. I read novels like *The Magus* and *Steppenwolf*. I started



wanting to create other alternative/altered realities just like the magicians in those novels. I read the Beat writers and the French Surrealists, Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl and Abbie Hofmann, listened to Dylan, watched the hippie movement grow. I wished I could be a hip artist living in San Francisco instead of being stuck outside San Bernardino reading, listening, watching, waiting. All of this brewed inside of me.

But I didn't think I could get people to let me direct them in the rituals in my head. It was not until 1970 that I started trying to live out my inner visions. I tried to get the O.K. at Cal State, San Bernardino, to produce my all-nude play on campus. To my surprise, the college said yes. But I couldn't get any actors—I learned it can be hard to get people for weird things.

During the time of the Kent State killings, I saw my life was heading back into isolation if I did not make some radical changes. I dropped out of college and hitched to hippieland in Santa Fe. And thanks to the gentle guidance by Louise Scott, I started to see my body as a tool. I could get away with things that others couldn't. I can stare at people, laugh at them, touch their asses on the street, all because they don't think I understand. I can park myself next to them and observe them close-up without them realizing or changing. I am so visible that I become invisible.

Mark: You have been dubbed the Stephen Hawkins of performance art who "fucks with the frame." Explain.

Frank: Hmmm...Hawkins and I both play with time and space...and what is beyond, outside of, and deep within time and space. We are explorers of what is not within the frame of "normal." This is one of the functions of art, science, and philosophy: to explore outside the frame and to bring new possibilities from the outside into the frame. The people who have a vested interest in the status quo see this as "fucking with the frame." But it's really evolution. This evolutionary function is usually the real target when censors go after art. They use sex, etc. as a pretense. But they want to control evolution for their profit and to eliminate what they can't control.

I think performance is an action, not a thing, not a creation or a product. You perform art. You perform magic. You perform a ritual. You do, or we do, or the magic/art does. I don't think there are separate art forms. That's an artificial frame designed to fragment and isolate. In performance, it may look like lines are being erased. But how can you erase what ain't really there? Art is creative action.

Mark: Where does that leave your audience, or the spectator of art?

Frank: The dynamic of seeing art is not the fundamental dynamic of art. The doing of art is art's basic dynamic. The doing of art and having other people see the artwork are two separate dynamics, events, rituals. The seeing of art is what the viewer or listener does in her head. The doing of art is the ritual of creation, is what the artist does. In reality, this ritual has more to do with the act of doing than the act of creating. When a child first draws

crazy lines on the wall, he is not trying to create something...but to do something for some effective purpose that our linear logic cannot grasp. The crazy person does his insane rituals not to express himself but to keep the sky from falling or to make pain go away. And it works.



The very act of doing changes the whole universe. This is a key principle of magic. By doing a ritual or by speaking a spell, you can effect change. Painting a picture, doing a dance, writing a poem, any act of art can be a magical ritual, the doing of which has nonlinear effects. Seen in this way, most acts of creation are private rituals done in personal caves. What we usually think of as works of art are aftermaths of art.

The problem with our modern frame of art reality is not that we make art to be seen, but that we have forgotten—or have been made to forget by those who control what is to be seen and what is not—that the power of doing art is the main power of art. The private performance is a way to regain the magical power of the doing of art. And defining what is a private performance is an interesting way to enter the magic. I define it as a ritual that is not for an audience. It is something that has to be done, something you may not even want to do. One of the easiest to frame as a private performance is a shaman going to his secret spot to do rites nobody will see, to open himself up for channeling visions that he cannot personally use or tell anyone about. We have seen other obvious private performances—the child, the madman, the artist alone doing art. We can add things like doodling, singing in the shower, playing invisible drums to the radio when you are safe alone in your room. It is something that has to come out. It is something too silly, too taboo, too sacred, too intense, too raw, too vulnerable to be done in public, to be expressed. This may be where real art begins. This kind of doing by one person is clearly private performance. It has an element of secrecy and undercover. I can remember singing on my bed along with the radio, quickly stopping when anyone opened the door, not wanting to be exposed, not wanting to lessen the magic. And now I sing in rock clubs!

Mark: What are the origins of performance art?

Frank: To find out the answer, it is important to understand the root urge of performance and of art in general, and to go all the way back to the primal fires around which humans huddled, telling one another dream stories—not to entertain or impress one another, but to keep away fearful demons lurking in the cold darkness just outside the firelight. There was no division between reality and imagination. The gods and demons were real. In this ritual of storytelling, there was no division between the storyteller and listeners. They were all actively involved in the magical battle of survival. The rituals expanded to dance, chant, music. But the ritual was to affect magically the hostile world in which the humans found themselves. The audience of these rituals were the natural world, the gods, and the demons.

When humans started living in caves, they did their rituals and wall-paintings in the bowels of the caves where no one could see. The purpose was an active change—a good hunt, sexual power, pleasing the gods, etc. Art was not for watching. This is why these humans did their rituals and paintings in very dangerously inaccessible, pitch-black bowels of caves. They wanted to magically effect change in the world (the past, the present, and the future as well as the life after death) or to communicate with the universal powers through their art.



Mark: How would you describe our own life and times in terms of performance art?

Frank: I think contemporary performance art came into existence to fill a void in Western life. The void was the lack of magic and inspiration. The two areas of creativity, theatre and religion, which traditionally were the source of this magical inspiration, have long ago moved from magic to entertainment and politics.

In the 70s and the early 80s, the calling of art became just another career path. The passion and idealism became the studying of the trends of what will be "in" next. The passionate vulnerability that creates magic was replaced by a cool and clever intellectualism. We artists got seduced by high tech. We got seduced by the modern media, by the quest for large audiences.

I think performance art is being ruined by trying to package it as entertainment, as off-beat cabaret. Some performance is entertaining. Some performance is cabaret. That is great. But when you try to package performance into a neat cabaret format, as I think is the trend, to make performance acceptable and profitable, it becomes a hip form of nightclub watching or groovy TV watching. If you limit performance in time and space for acceptability, it stops being performance.

I like doing cabaret and video. They are great mediums in themselves. But when I am doing cabaret or video, I am always aware of the limitations built into their formats. When someone watches a video, he knows that he will remain passively watching from the outside; the video will not literally pop out into his reality, or physically drag him into the TV.

When someone goes to a cabaret, he knows there are certain limits involved such as that each act must end before another begins—but in performance, anything is possible. A performance can last for a minute or it can last for days. Performance can start in one space but then move to another. Performance can be storytelling, it can be a guy threatening you with a baseball bat, it can be a guy hanging by his skin, or throwing food, or anything. In performance all things are possible. And that is what gives you an extra edge to create dreams.

Performance, like any avant-garde art, is the way society dreams. It is the way society expands its freedom,

explores the forbidden in safety, loosens up. Society needs its dream art, just as an individual needs to dream not to go insane. Our moral majority society, bent on going backwards into the violent blank rigidity of a censored mind, needs taboo-breaking dreams to get back to freedom. Performance is perfectly suited for this dream role.

At the present time, our society is at a fork in its growth. It can go deeper into high-tech impersonal isolation, or it can rediscover the magic that happens when physical and emotional humans actively and directly link up with one another. Art can either just follow society, just recording the trends, or it can take a path-breaker role. I am telling this to the artists who are not as lucky as I am to have a physical reminder that they are misfits whose job it is to push back the limits of society. This is a reminder that we misfits are still needed.

Mark: Nudity and erotic play are integral components of your performances. How does your own website contribute and/or tap into this?

When we first started www.eroplay.com (aka Web of All Possibilities) in 1996, we put my [writings and photos](#) on it. That made the work I do much more accessible to all kinds of people. But I have always been bored with just *my* work. My work has always been combinations of/with the work of other people. I have always created pipelines for these combinations to flow, uncensored, to the people. This is erotic in the broadest sense. So we quickly started putting the work of other artists who push the edges in our [online galleries](#).

In 1998, we started putting audio and video on the site. Again, the pattern was the same. First, we posted on our [on-demand page](#) the videos we had made over the past 15 years and had put in the closet with hardly anybody seeing them. All of a sudden, thousands were seeing these videos and experiencing performances that maybe five people came to! Again we quickly got other artists and musicians to let us put up their [videos and other recordings](#).

Also in 1998, I started doing a live internet radio show, [The Shaman's Den](#), for FAKERADIO. [LUVeR](#), our 24/7 web station, was born out of the show the next year. LUVeR quickly grew into a streaming video-based culture/community of cultural subversion. If that ain't erotic, I don't know what is!

Mark: Particularly important for your performance art is the exploration of shamanism. Please explain.

Frank: Shamanism came from a pre-religious state...before dogma, moral rule structure, and organized systems of power. It is the direct experience of reality. The shaman works with altered states of physical trance. Within these altered states, both acts and objects are drained of their normal meanings and qualities and are infused with new, hidden and magical meanings and qualities, so that they can be used to effect both local and non-local changes. This process is art/poetry. Shamanism is the journey into experiencing reality beyond the social frame. Historically, the shaman guided a person or the tribe outside into the unknown to have this direct experience, using whatever visions/rituals that the magic provided during the journey. The effect of these direct experiences is healing, expanding change. The shaman also goes out alone, descending into the dangerous unknown to

discover new possibilities, new ways, which she then brings back into the tribe/society—the very function and process of art.

It was just my luck to be born into the long tradition of the deformed shaman, the wounded healer, the blind prophet, the club-footed "idiot" court jester. Primitive tribes believed that if a cripple could survive childhood, he was blessed by the gods. He was special. He was not really from this physical world. He belonged to the spiritual world, with an inside channel to the gods. He was not suited for the normal activities of living such as hunting and fighting. But everything he did or said were omens from gods. He was taken care of by the tribe and lived in freedom. The court jesters in the Middle Ages came from this tradition. They were given an easy life and freedoms such as the ability to tell the king off because their babbling just might have been divine in origin. Parents were even known to cripple their children in the hope the child would become a jester, a prophet, a shaman.

Mark: What does the future hold for Frank Moore?

Frank: I never have goals—except to perform in Europe! My work has become increasingly more explicit and direct as the repression here in the U.S. has tightened. This has made it even more powerful and effective, attracting an extended community of amazing artists and musicians in this country and Canada who are committed to art as (r)evolutionary magic. I hope this feedback cycle continues. We have been doing outrageously subversive performances at the university. I hope we can continue those surreal raids on rigidity.

For about two years, we have had a 2.5-hour show, "Unlimited Possibilities," on Berkeley's public access cable TV channel in spite of attempts to get it off the air. Last week we added a new one-hour show, "Deep Core Magic," in which I reveal for the first time what I do in private/secret magical work, which makes up 80% of what I do. I'm hoping other underground stations will air these shows.

Hey, I'm just on for the ride, and what a ride it has been! But I wouldn't mind if the next stop was a European tour of subversive performance! Hint, hint!

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[Read more](#) about Frank's early years as an artist.