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Press Release

Vanishing Art, Part II, Work 1
Monday, April 18. (Luna & Venus), '11
ICE-CAPADE FOR MARY CRAGIN

R.I.P. Mary Cragin (Nov. 18, 1810 - July 26, 1851), radical advocate of "Free Love", Perfectionism & Plural Marriage, herself the lover & partner of John Humphrey Noyes, & co-founder with him of Oneida Community in UpState NY.

In the 1830s she lived in Wilbur, a canal & riverfront hamlet in Rondout (Kingston NY), with her husband & another man. According to the late local historian Alf Evers, in his (last) book, on Kingstom (co-written with poet Ed Sanders), the locals rioted & almost destroyed their house when they began to suspect (correctly) that the set-up was a ménage à trois.

Later, after several years at Oneida, she moved back East, partly ~~in~~ Brooklyn at the sect's ~~HDQ~~ at 48 Willow Pl., and partly in Rondout. They acquired a large "Hudson sloop", the Rebecca Ford. Cragin served as Captain; limestone was shipped to NYC & sold to support the Perfectionist cause.

One night (July 26, 1851) a storm suddenly capsized the sloop while Mary Cragin was below-deck, reading the "Perfectionist" verses of the Bible (8 Romans) with her companion Eliza A. Allen. Both women were drowned. This occurred off Hyde Park, but the bodies, when recovered, were buried on the opposite bank, in West Park, in the graveyard of Ascension Episcopal Church. As Mary had died broke, a local admirer named Gilbert Johnson donated a bit of his own land there for a double burial with gravestone.

Some time subsequently the tombstone vanished. The ministers at Ascension Church were unable to tell me where the grave had been. But last year the Potters & I located the grave of Gilbert Johnson

(d. 1880), and we decided to assume that Cragin's remains must be quite near his.

On Monday April 18 (under the sign of the Full Moon) I returned to the graveyard with some of my friends (Raymond, Chuck, Shiv, Nathan, etc.) & new associate Kim Spurlock, who handled the hard work. We came direct from the Binnewater Ice Co., a charming ice house in Kingston -- actually just at the top end of Wilbur Ave., where Cragin once lived & loved. There I bought two large ($3\frac{1}{2}$ by 2 ft. by 8 in.) slabs of "old" ice, partly decayed, & looking exactly like translucent gravestones, for \$20 each. In the end we only used one of them. I paid Kim \$60 for his driving & hauling, so the whole piece cost about \$100 and change.

At the cemetery we set up the slab & I tried to write CRAGIN on the ice with black spray paint -- but it melted as I wrote. However the effect was unexpectedly spookily beautiful, like Japanese marbled paper.

We were a bit apprehensive about being "caught" in flagrante artistico -- were we "littering"? "desecrating a graveyard"? Of course not! This was a heart-felt homage to a heroine & martyr of Love, an ancestress of all 19th/20th/21st century American bohemians and sex radicals -- indeed a SAINT. But... would a cop see it that way? We left after about 20 minutes. We figured the ice would probably melt slowly over the next five days (unless it poured rain). It would be nice to think it might baffle a few people; but it doesn't matter if no one sees it. Its whole raison d'etre was to melt.

This piece parallels last April's work in honor of Jemimah Wilkinson "the Publicke Universal Friend" at Pang Yang cemetery (a huge mass of white flowers, left to rot), another "tantrik" local saint. Rotting & melting are techniques of Vanishing Art Works, of course, along with submersion, burial, burning, etc.

Ascension graveyard is quite picturesque (next to an abandoned stone monastery in full medieval style), overgrown with flowers,

atmospheric and sad -- but right next to Route 9 -- motorists could easily have seen us at work... so the atmosphere was a bit tense. Raymond & I shot some video -- me reading from Ec(o)logues -- in this cemetery last Autumn. Mary Cragin's "rediscovered" grave also played a part in 7 Churches/3 Tracts, a big separate work I did for Non-Juring Anglicanism ~~late~~ last year, from Thanksgiving thru first snow, using seven local churchyards (see the special Press Release). I may return here to do more work(s) for Mary Cragin, who is a great inspiration to me, another santo in the santeria I've evolved, based on Non-Juring Anglicanism and Hermetic paganism; she's to be identified with Venus, Erzulie, all the love-goddesses. AND... she's buried in an Anglican graveyard. Perfect.

Perfectionism, the doctrine that Christ has already "come again" & that it is now possible to live without sin, is very close to the Antinomian Libertinist theology my work is based on. The step to downright Pantheism is a tiny one. If it's a "transgression", then we transgressed. Or at least trespassed.

PS:

Five days later -- on Fri. the 22nd -- I visited the graveyard again & discovered a handful or two of ice still at our site, which means that the ice-grave slowly melted over those five days & could have been seen by many people (or none!) & was not disturbed or removed. (First photo by C. Stein; second by Nick Driano.)



Note grave of
Gilbert Johnson