

# THE DIARY OF NATHAN ADLER

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or

## The Art-Ritual Murder Of Baby Grace Blue



**A non-linear Gothic Drama Hyper-cycle**

(Originally appeared in *Q Magazine* #100, 1995)

*By David Bowie*



It was at precisely 5.47am on the morning of Friday 31 of December 1999 that a dark spirited pluralist began the dissection of 14-year-old **Baby Grace**. The arms of the victim were pin-cushioned with 16 hypodermic needles, pumping in four major preservatives, colouring agents, memory information transport fluids and some kind of green stuff. From the last and 17th, all blood and liquid was extracted. The stomach area was carefully flapped open and the intestines removed, disentangled and re-knitted as it were, into a small net or web and hung between the pillars of the murder-location, the grand damp doorway of Oxford Town Museum of Modern Parts, New Jersey. The limbs of Baby were then severed from the torso. Each limb was implanted with a small, highly sophisticated, binary-code translator which in turn was connected to small speakers attached to far ends of each limb. The self-contained mini amplifiers were then activated, amplifying the decoded memory info-transport substances, revealing themselves as little clue haikus, small verses detailing memories of other brutal acts, well-documented by the ROMbloids. The limbs and their components were then hung upon the splayed web, slug-like prey of some unimaginable creature. The torso, by means of its bottom-most orifice, had been placed on a small support fastened to a marble base. It was shown to varying degrees of success depending upon where one stood from behind the web but in front of the Museum door itself, acting as both signifier and guardian to the act. It was definitely murder - but was it art? All this was to be the lead-up to the most provocative event in the whole sequence of serial-events that had started around November of that same year, plunging me into the most portentous chaos-abys that a quiet lone-hacker like myself could comprehend. My name is Nathan Adler, or Detective Professor Adler in my circuit. I'm attached to the division of Art-Crime Inc., the recently instigated corporation funded by an endowment from the Arts Protectorate of London, it being felt that the investigation of art-crimes was in itself inseparable from other forms of expression and therefore worthy of support from this significant body. Nicholas Serota himself had deemed us, the small-fry of the division, worthy of an exhibit at last year's Biennial in Venice, three rooms of evidence and comparative study work which conclusively proved that the cow in Mark Tansey's "The Innocent Eye Test" could not differentiate between Paulus Potter's "The Young Bull" of 1647 (exactly 300 years before I was born, incidentally) and one of Monet's grain stack paintings of the 1890's. The traditional art press deemed this extrapolation "bullshit" and removed itself to study the more formal ideas contained in Damien Hirst's "Sheep In A Box". Art's a farmyard. It's my job to pick thru' the manure heap looking for peppercorns.

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## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1999, 10.15AM

As in any crime, my first position is to peruse the motive-gag. The recent spate, thru' '98-'99, of concept-muggings pretty much had me pulling breath for an art-murder. It was a crime whose time was now. The precedents were all there. It had probably its beginnings in the '70s with the Viennese castrationists and the blood-rituals of Nitsch. Public revulsion put the lid on that episode, but you can't keep a good ghoul down. Spurred on by Chris Burden's having himself shot by his collaborator in a gallery, tied up in a bag, thrown on a highway and then crucified upon the top of a Volkswagen, stories circulated thru' the nasty-neon of NY night that a young Korean artist was the self-declared patient of wee-hours surgery in cut and run operations at not-so-secret locations in the city. If you found out about it, you could go and watch this guy having bits and pieces removed under anaesthetic. A finger-joint one night, a limb another. By the dawning of the '80s, rumour had it that he was down to a torso and one arm. He'd asked to be left in a cave in the Catskills, fed every so often by his acolytes. He didn't do much after that. I guess he read a lot. Maybe wrote a hole bunch. I suppose you can never tell what an artist will do once he's peaked. Round this same time, Bowie the singer remarked on a coupla goons who frequented the Berlin bars wearing dull surgery regalia: caps, aprons, rubber gloves and masks. The cutting edge. Then came Damien Hirst with the Shark-Cow-Sheep thing. No humans, palatable ritual for the worldwide public. The acceptable face of gore. Meanwhile in the US, 1994, I was in town on the night of the Athey scarifications.

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**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1994**

122 EAST VILLAGE, MANHATTAN

Ron Athey, performance artist not for the squeamish - former heroin addict-HIV positive, pushed what looks like a knitting needle repeatedly into his forehead, a crown of blood, must hurt like hell. Stream red dribble-dribble. No screams. Face moves in pain. Carried upstage and scrubbed down in his own blood. Then water. Now dresses in nice suit and tie. Now in black T-shirt and jeans, carving, with a disposable scalpel, patters, into the back of Darryl Carlton, a black man. Bloody blotted paper towels then hung on a washing line suspended over the heads of the audience Blood-prints from life. An extremely limited edition. When it was first performed back in March, "Four Scenes In A Harsh Life" exploded controversy shrapnel throughout the National Endowment For The Arts. "We have taken every precaution with our disposal systems," and Athey spokesperson said. "The towels containing the blood are immediately deposited in hazardous-waste bags. Each evening, the material will be driven to a hospital for final disposal". Athey says he is dealing with issues of self-loathing, suffering, healing and redemption.

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**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1999, 10.30AM**

MUSEUM OF MODERN PARTS

I'm drinking up the Oxford Town. New Jersey fume. Salty and acid. maybe I can get a handle on this thing back in Soho at the bureau. It used to be Rothko's studio, now the playground for all us Art-Crime folk, AC' or "the daubers" as we're dubbed. Rothko himself, in a deep-dark-drunk one night, carefully removed his clothes, folded them up neatly, placing them upon a chair, lay upon the floor in a crucified position and after several attempts, found the soft blue pump of his wrists and checked out. He'd held the razor blades between wads of tissue paper so that he wouldn't cut his fingers. Deep thinker. Always was.

**11.00AM**

"DAUBER" HQ, SOHO

The only names the Data bank can associate with Baby Grace are *Leon Blank*, *Ramona A. Stone* and *Algeria Touchshriek*.

The rundowns are brief but not to the point:

**RAMONA A. STONE:** Female. Caucasian. Mid-40s. Assertive maintenance interesting-drug dealer and Tyrannical Futurist. No convictions. Contacts: Leon Blank, Baby Grace Blue, Algeria Touchshriek.

**LEON BLANK:** Male, Mixed race. 22 years. Outsider. Three convictions for petty theft, appropriation and plagiarism with license. Contacts: Baby Grace Blue, Algeria Touchshriek.

**ALGERIA TOUCHSHRIEK:** Male. Caucasian. 78 years. Owner of small establishment on Rail Yard. Oxford Town, NJ. Deals in art-drugs and DNA prints. Fence for all apparitions of any medium. Harmless, lonely.

Small cog, no wheels. Not much to go on but R.A. Stone weighs heavy on my memory. No problem, it'll come back. Best thing to do now is feed all relevant pieces into the Mack-Verbasiser, the Metarandom programme that re-strings real life facts as improbable virtual-fact. I may get a lead or two from that.

**11.15AM**

Jesus Who. I hate typing. Anyhow, we've got some real interesting solvents from Mack-random. How about this! Verbasiser down-load, first block:

No convictions of assertive saints believed Caucasian way-out tyrannical evoked no images described Christian saints questions no female christian machine believed no work is caucasian assertive saints believed female described christian tyrannical questions R.A. Stone convictions martyrs and tyrannicals are evoked Female described sado-masochist

questions I am suicide described the fabric machine Slashing way out saints and martyrs and thrown downstairs

Now the swirl begins. Now the image stack backs up and takes center stage. Ramona A. Stone, I remember this thickness, this treacly liquid thought. But wait, I'm ahead of myself.

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**JUNE 15, 1977**

KREUTZBURG, BERLIN

It's two in the morning. I can't sleep for the screaming of some poor ost-racised Turkish immigrant screaming his guts out from over the street. His hawking shriek sounds semi-stifled like he's got a pillow over his mouth. But the desperation comes through the spongy rubber like a knife. It cuts the breeze and bangs my eardrums. I take a walk past the fabric machine, turn left onto a street with no name. The caucasian suicide center, naked and grimy silhouetted by fungus yellow street lamps female slashing way-out saints for a dollar a time thrown downstairs if you can't take any more. Pure joy of retreat into death, led by the shepherdess. Anti mixed-race posters pasted upon their altar of pop-death icons party people. A zero with no name looks dull-eyed to Ms. Stone, the drone that says "in the future, everything was up to itself". Yea. I remember Ramona. She set herself up as the no-future priestess of the Caucasian Suicide Temple, vomiting out her doctrine of death-as-eternal-party into the empty vessels of Berlin youth. The top floor rooms were the gateways to giving up to the holy ghost. She must have overseen more than 30 or 40 check-outs before the local squad twigged what was going down.

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**OCTOBER 28, 1994**

New Yorker magazine advance copy, celebrating fashion. It's a first of its kind since Tina Brown took over as editor. One look is all it took. It took the look and wrote a new book on what sophistaplites would take and bake. Guy Bourdin featured heavily in this new eDISHion. Since the advent of AIDS and the new morality, and, of course his death, his dark sexy fatal style had fallen out of Vogue. An uncompromising photographer, he had found a twisty avenue through desire and death. A white female leg sticking gloomily out of a bath of black liquid enamel. Two glued up babes covered in tiny pearls. The glue prevented their skins from breathing and they pass out. "Oh it would be beautiful," he is to have said, "to photograph them dead in bed." He was a French Guy. He had known Man Ray. Loved Lewis Carroll. His first gig was doing hats for Vogue. He'd place dead flies or bees on the faces of the models, or, female head wears hat crushed between three skinned calves heads, tongues lolling. What was this? Fine Arts? The surrealists might even think his work passé. Well, it was the '50s, that's what it was. The tight-collar '50s seen through unspeakable hostility. He wanted but he couldn't paint. So he threw globs of revengeful hatred at his nubile subjects. He would systematically pull the phone cord out of the wall. He was never to be disturbed. Disturbed. Never. Everything and everyone died around him. One shoot focusing upon a woman lying in bed was said to be a reconstruction of his estranged wife's death. Another picture has a woman in a phone booth making some frantic call. Her hand is pressed whitely against the glass. Behind her and outside are two female bodies partially covered by the autumn leaves. His dream, so he told friends, was to do shoots in the morgue, with the stiffes as mannequins. I don't know. I just read this stuff. Now is spirit was being resurrected.

We're mystified by blood.

It's our enemy now.

We don't understand it.

Can't live with it.

Can't, well...y'know?

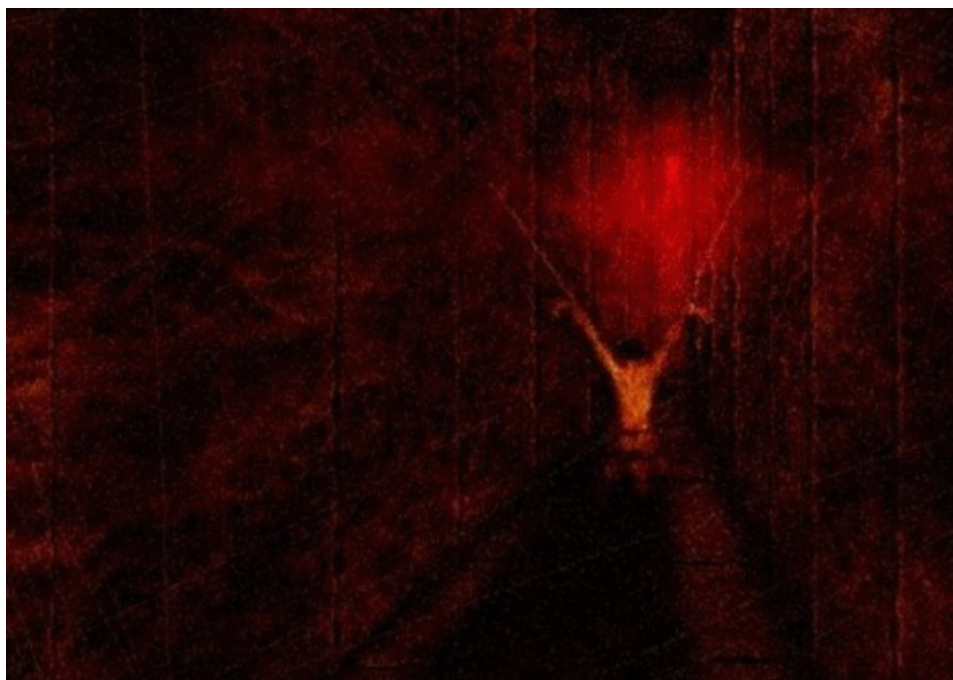
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**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1999, 11.30AM**

After surgery and investment in a bullet-proof mask, Ramona turned up in London, Canada as owner of a string of body-parts jewellery stores. Lamb penis necklaces, goat-scrotum purses, nipple earrings, that sort of thing. The word on the street, however, suggested that it was not in the best of interests to become one of her clients as occasionally, a customer would step into her shop and not come out again. The whistle blew after a much-loved and highly respected celebrity, known for being known, failed to show for a gallery-hanging of her mirrors. Other celebrities, equally known for being known, some only to each other, thought it the most profound exhibit in years and couldn't take their eyes off the works. All the pieces sold within an hour, many for record prices. When the critic for Tate magazine asked for an interview with the celebrity-artist, the gallery owner recalled that he hadn't seen her since earlier that day. She'd mentioned that she would be going shopping for a diamond-encrusted umbilical cord as a celebratory thing to announce her pregnancy. She

would be back in an hour. Just a quick stop at the "Gallstone". 1986. That pregnancy would have produced a being that would be around 14 years of age.

If it was still alive.



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