


Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Eve Babitz and Me

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, May 8th, 2019

When I read [a review](#) by Lili Anolik of *Hollywood's Eve*, subtitled “[Eve Babitz](#) and the Secret History of L.A.,” I immediately bought it because I was friends with Evie for several years, from 1974 to 1982. When I got around to reading the book, it brought back fond memories of those years, the 1970s in L.A., when many of us—young artists, photographers, actors, filmmakers, writers, comedians—knew each other. We would hang out at gallery openings, at [WET magazine](#) parties, and at Ports, the restaurant on Santa Monica Blvd at Formosa Ave that Evie made into her own special place. For famous Hollywood people who frequented Ports, [read this 2012 article by Colman Andrews](#).

 It was Colman Andrews, then editor of *Coast* magazine, who gave me my first photo assignment in 1974. I photographed some of the 100 Best Places in California. One of my favorites was Fazzi, the Italian grocery store on Western Ave. My friend Don Peterson photographed the cover.



Fazzi, photo by Elisa Leonelli 1974

For Evie's favorite places, read [Eve Babitz's guide to Los Angeles](#) as compiled by *LA Curbed* in 2017. One of Evie's cherished haunts was the Chateau Marmont, the hotel on the Sunset Strip, where she spent several days holed up with a lover she calls Renzo, during the April 1992 uprising following the Rodney King trial.

While taking a class with [Robert Heineken](#) at UCLA in 1975, I created a nightmarish photo sequence titled “[Insect Fear](#).” Evie insisted that the four B&W prints had to be included in *Manifest LAX*, an art magazine she put together with art director [John Van Hamersveld](#).



Elisa Leonelli as Lulu 1978

In 1978, I invited Evie to a screening of *Lulu*, the art film directed by [Ronald Chase](#) from Frank Wedekind's plays *Earth Spirit* (1892) and *Pandora's Box* (1904), that also inspired [G. W. Pabst's 1929 silent movie](#) starring Louise Brooks and [Alban Berg's 1937 opera](#). For the story of how I played Lulu, you may [read my article](#) about a 2015 production of Berg's *Lulu* at the Met.

Evie liked our *Lulu* so much that she wrote a long review, planning to submit it to a magazine, which she never did, but she gave the manuscript to me. This is where I read about how we met, which I do not remember. “The first night I met Elisa, we drank a bottle of champagne at a nightclub opening.” She included me in “a tradition of ambitious Italian women,” like Lina

Wertmuller, Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren, Giulietta Masina, “who don’t care what they’re supposed to do, they do what they want to do.”




Eve Babitz and Paul Ruscha. 1976. photo by Elisa Leonelli

What I do remember is that, when we met, Evie was an “item” with Paul Ruscha, younger brother of artist Ed Ruscha. In 1976 I asked Paul to use his skill with graphic design and calligraphy to draw the back of my business card, a self portrait of myself as the Queen of Spades. Read [Paul Ruscha’s Full Moon](#) (2006).



Evie gifted me signed copies of all of her books: *Eve’s Hollywood* (1974), *Slow Days, Fast Company* (1977), *Sex and Rage* (1979), *L.A. Woman* (1982). I had not read *Black Swans* (1993), so I bought it and read it now. I enjoyed it immensely, as much as I had loved Evie’s other books that are all about her own life and experiences in Los Angeles. I found the same sharp wit and unique point of view that characterize Evie’s writing and her personality. I remember her most cutting remarks always being accompanied by a sly laugh. I did hear Evie speak at a writers panel that year, 1993, at UCLA’s LA Book Fair, and said hello.

 The last time I saw Evie was in 2011 at the Hammer Museum, after an on stage interview about the Los Angeles art scene in the 1960s, when in 1963 Evie was famously photographed nude playing chess with Marcel Duchamp. She replied to a question about Ports, “I could bring all my friends there and they would feel at home.” I do recall a great party Evie held at Ports for her 35th birthday. You may watch a video of that Hammer event [at this link](#), see an older and sober Evie talk and laugh and reminisce about her wilder days. Paul Ruscha was at the Hammer as well. It was good to see them both, still friends after all those years. Happy Birthday Evie!

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 8th, 2019 at 4:29 pm and is filed under [Photography](#), [Fiction](#)

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