

I Can Only Be Me: Ann Liv Young Plays Sherry

By Lizzie Feidelson

As part of this year's [American Realness Festival](#), held from January 10–20 at the Abrons Art Center, performer [Ann Liv Young](#) made regular appearances outside the venue in her Sherry Truck, offering free Sherry and pink lattes. Lizzie Feidelson visited paid a visit to Sherry on the last evening of the festival.

Two weeks ago, I climbed into the Sherry Truck for some free therapy. Ann Liv Young, her husband, two children (a toddler and an infant) and their dog huddled in the back of the van alongside Sherry's precarious display of vintage oddities, a folding table crowded with Simulac baby food formula and an espresso machine, and a small electric stove. I was the last client on the last day of a week-long "Sherry" performance outside the Abrons Art Center as part of the American Realness festival. Young wore pink moccasins and jiggled her cranky baby on one hip, while her husband prepared me a frothy pink "Baby-ccino" to drink.

"What can I help you with?" Young asked. She looked like she needed more help than I did. Young's young daughter also drank, and subsequently vomited, some "Baby-ccino" while her mother counseled me on my love life. Sherry's advice: take a week to think about it; distance can always help.

Young is most succinctly described as a shock artist: she has defecated onstage, rubbed rotting fish on the front row, and flung used tampons into the crowd. Sherry is her latest, and on the surface her tamest, creation. In a roving piece of performance art, Young travels the country inside her tricked-out Sherry Truck, dispensing free one-on-one or group therapy and \$3 lattes, wearing a platinum wig and larger-than-life smile.

Warming my hands by the electric stove, it was hard to remember that I saw Young perform as a very different Sherry during her last New York City performance at MoMA PS1. The "Sherry" stint at Abrons, visited by a hundred or so people over the course of the week, was one part of a

much larger work, one which involves a bizarre combination of sending up talk therapy and rigorously exploiting others' pain.

The September PS1 show began innocuously enough with several hours of open "Sherapy." Guests could browse a selection of secondhand baubles and relics from Ann Liv Young's past performances (including a shit-stained tulle dress from *Cinderella* (2010), boxed for purchase in a Plexiglas display case). Visitors could also receive therapy from Sherry for \$1 per 3 minutes. She sat on a low stool, with another, painted Sherry looming behind her, reclining on the side of her truck.

Then the show started with Young's signature too-loud mic. She began with a fake lowball: "Why are you here?" She asked us. Agreeable answers wafted forth. "Because I think it will be interesting!" "Because I want to see what you will do!"

"But why?" From the back row, someone called: "I'm here because I think you look misshapen." Sherry cocked her head and turned a glinting eye on the speaker, a young girl in a red dress who smirked and looked instantly regretful.

"My dress doesn't fit?" Sherry howled, rushing up the terrace steps. She was nearly nine months pregnant then. "Is that your defense when someone calls out to you in a public setting—to criticize their body type? Is that your tactic? Why is that? What are you doing? What is your message? Are you trying to tell me you don't care about what I'm doing?"

Sherry was behind me now, but the microphone noise surrounded us. I sat very still and didn't turn. The girl in the red dress seemed to be trying to ignore her, or maybe she mumbled, "I'm observing," because Sherry went on: "You're observing? You're observing but you're also participating, do you see that? Is it insecurity? What is it?"

She went on and on. One by one, bodies settled into the attack. People turned around in their seats to watch. Some began shouting out.

"Maybe she has nothing else to say!"

"I think it has to do with comfort!"

The girl in the red dress, visibly upset, made a stumbling, shamefaced bid for the exit. People cheered. "You don't think I'm being nice?" Sherry shouted. "Did you come here for a hippie

fest?” The microphone speakers peaked and buzzed, trailing the girl as she disappeared through the museum doors.

“What did you want me to do?” Sherry shrugged. “I can only be me. Isn’t that nice?”

John Waters once said that “If you could think of something that would get an NC-17 rating with no sex or violence, you would have the most radical movie of the year.” Sherry might not deserve an NC-17 rating, but she’s not for the kids. She subjected us all to our own ability to turn on one another in an instant—the only vulgarity on display during that show was that of our perhaps inadvertent willingness to feed on each other’s human vulnerability, and it was more than enough.

I thanked Sherry for her therapy as soon as I deemed it polite. “We’re outfitting the truck with solar panels,” Young told me as I put my shoes back on. She’s planning on taking the truck around the country for a “trailer park show,” and when she does, she wants her truck to be an example of clean, healthy living to the trailer park residents she visits. Despite acts of senseless verbal cruelty, Young seems just as willing to surprise her viewers with kindness, or at least consideration. My visit to the Sherry truck didn’t make me think of Young’s work as smarter, or more idiotic, than I did before (and I really can never decide which I think it is). But I couldn’t help it; I respect Young, a lot. I wish her well on her trip.

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