

T:BA:07

Urban Cowboy...in a Dress

Mama, don't let your babies grow up to be Larry Krone

Larry Krone was born in 1970 in Chicago but spent most of his younger years in St. Louis, a city he still recalls fondly. He recounts his early artistic development there: "In those days, I always thought that to be a real artist, you had to be a painter. But after a while I came to realize that painting wasn't my medium. I was more into craft books and funny drawings, and I was always using country music imagery in my artwork."

After moving to New York at age 19, he learned to play the ukulele and began making video art. "I became convinced that your most real emotions can be expressed through music," he says.

Gallery owners in New York who saw his visual work asked him to perform, introducing him to the stage. "At first I could only sing and perform when I was by myself, just me and the camera," he says, laughing about it now. "It wasn't meant to sound good at first; it was meant to sound kind of pathetic. It was more about ideas than musical quality."

What started as conceptual art soon evolved into sincere performance. Krone began writing his own music and singing at clubs downtown, working a variety of outfits into his set—"Roy Rogers costumes with rhinestones and fringe." His performances today maintain a conceptual element. "My themes have to do with revealing layers of a person, such as masculine and feminine, juvenile and sad."

Krone's layer-revealing technique often involves hiding glitzy costumes beneath rugged

daywear: the rhinestone cowboy lurking beneath the drab ranch hand, waiting for the spotlight to bring him out. He also performs in drag, "although I'm never convincing as a woman.... Sometimes I'll strip off my cowboy outfit and have a tight dress on underneath, or I'll strip down to my underwear," he says. "But when you're on stage, you're putting on a show, so even when I'm in my underwear, it's usually patched together with embroidery and rhinestones."

When he started out, Krone performed all covers. Today he has evolved to the point of performing mainly original material. For TBA he opens for local favorite Holcombe Waller, of whom he speaks highly, as he does his fellow TBA alumni from New York: Claude Wampler, Neil Medlyn and Taylor Mac. It's nice to see such solidarity in a community that can sometimes be highly competitive. Krone is the kind of guy you want in your corner: big-hearted, wearing the veneer of the underdog, the guy you want to win, against the odds.

In addition to his performance art and songwriting, Krone has long been a visual artist and has produced some highly original works of outsider art that have garnered him a good lot of critical attention. Among them: dolls made from his own wisdom teeth dressed in miniature hand-sewn costumes; an exhibition of country-music lyrics spelled out in human hair; and a "crazy quilt" using ever-smaller pieces of fabric to insinuate that its maker is, literally, crazy. He's had solo shows or taken part in group exhibitions in



Larry Krone performs mainly original material along with a few covers.

Toronto, Berlin, Mexico, Belgium and New York's prestigious Whitney Museum.

It makes sense, then, that TBA will also feature Larry Krone's *Campfire Exhibition*, for which he and a team of skilled volunteers will construct an Old West campsite to go with his elaborate backdrop of tinselly rain curtains, 25 feet high by 7 feet tall, constructed of hundreds of paper-thin sections of Mylar. This showpiece will be built up during the course of the festival and punctuated by performances before a fake campfire in the gallery.

"Anyone is invited to come in and help build the set," Krone says, opening the door to a fully interactive installation. "I want to have tumbleweeds, hay bales, alcohol and coffee to drink, and sing-alongs so people can join in."

But that's still not all the Larry Krone action Portland gets this month. Concurrent with his TBA appearances will be an exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery of works on paper from his *Love Is in the Air* series, all of which feature the title of one of Dolly

Parton's most famous songs—"I Will Always Love You"—handwritten repeatedly and obsessively over various images. Krone first exhibited at the gallery 10 years ago, making this something of a triumphant homecoming.

Krone seems to have a genuine soft spot for Portland (his brother lives here) and speaks fondly of its kookiest tourist attraction, the now-defunct 24-Hour Church of Elvis, which operated from 1985 to 2002 at three different locations and garnered national attention. "I loved the lady who gave the tour. I wanted to bring her out to New York and curate her into a show as a tour guide, but then she disappeared." (Recent reports have church founder and performance artist Stephanie G. Pierce working at a call center, designing toilet seat

covers in her spare time and perpetually plotting the return of the "church" in yet another location.)

Krone's interest in country music is completely genuine and runs through all his work, whether beneath stage lights or on gallery walls. "Some people expect me to do a sort of hokey sendup of country music or something ironic, and that's not what I do at all," he clarifies.

Somewhat ironically, though, he didn't listen to country in his childhood or teenage years, but only discovered it after moving to the big city. "I felt that I'd heard it before, like I'd been listening to it my whole life. It brought memories of home."

Krone fondly recalls many a night spent at a bar called the Village Idiot. "It was this kind of typical East Village bar; it wasn't trying to be from the South or anything, but they only had country on the jukebox. I had some of the best times of my life there. The beer was cheap, the place was filthy, and everyone got insanely drunk. And I loved the music."

He recalls thinking: "What's happening to me? Why am I responding so much to this music that's not supposed to be very good or intelligent?" His conclusion: "It's easy to like. A lot of people prefer to challenge themselves to like things that are more difficult, but country music enshrines all the basic things that are good and true and human." **JO**

LARRY KRONE opens for Holcombe Waller 8:30 p.m. Sept. 13 to 15 at Soday Lounge, 125 N.W. Fifth Ave. Admission is \$7 for PICA members or \$10 for nonmembers.

LARRY KRONE'S CAMPFIRE EXHIBITION is on display through Sept. 16 at Museum of Contemporary Craft, 724 N.W. Davis St.

LOVE IS IN THE AIR is on display through Sept. 29 at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.



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