

ARTFORUM

Mary Beth Edelson CREATIVE TIME

by Kirby Gookin
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For three months, a blazing pink banner that read “COMBAT ZONE: Campaign HQ Against Domestic Violence” hung across the facade of a SoHo storefront. With its two independent entryways, one opening onto Broadway’s array of cut-rate kitchenware, shoe, and electronic warehouses and the other onto SoHo, *COMBAT ZONE* straddled the worlds of the art-viewing elite and the everyday pedestrian.

Conceived and coordinated by artist Mary Beth Edelson, the multimedia installation was a reaction to what the artist considered the public apathy surrounding the Lorena Bobbitt case. Edelson felt that the media desensitized the public to domestic violence by sensationalizing the husband’s castration. Rather than crying victim (a tactic that has met with little sympathy in the art world, as evidenced in the plethora of negative responses to the 1993 Whitney Biennial), *COMBAT ZONE* empowered women through direct action. The center became a meeting place for those in need of information or counseling. In addition to various advocacy services for adult, teenage, and homeless women, the center offered self-defense workshops as well as “gender-sensitivity” sessions for men in an effort to curb the incidence of domestic violence. These programs were presented in combination with general information services offered through on-line computer networking, video displays, books, and posters.

COMBAT ZONE can be viewed as part of a larger feminist art project, past and present, that supports such grass-roots actions as public demonstrations against rape and domestic violence—those orchestrated by Suzanne Lacy and others since the ’70s, for example, or the exposés of the art world posted on the streets by the Guerrilla Girls. Part of Creative Time’s continued support of alternative public art projects, *COMBAT ZONE* helped to reassert art’s potential for creating a dialogue with the public on critical issues. Although there are plans to continue developing the *COMBAT ZONE* project in the future, a telephone help-line (1-800-621-HOPE) remains active today.