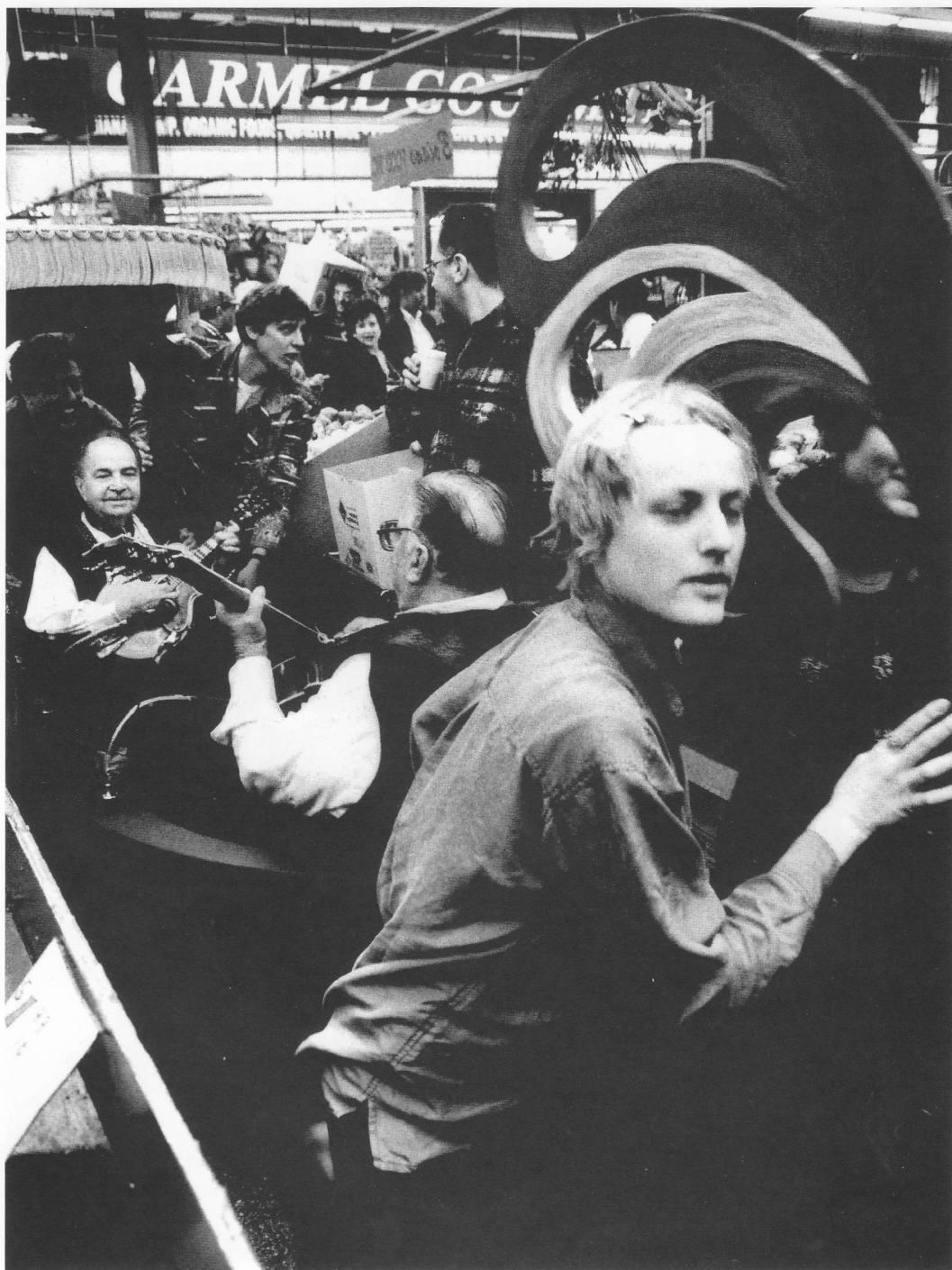


# WORKS OF HEART



## Building Village Through the Arts

LYNNE ELIZABETH  
SUZANNE YOUNG  
EDITORS



## An Artist Journeys Home

ANNIE RACHELE LANZILOTTO

Go home. Work with the mentalities you fled in your development. Wrestle your neighbors. Call out your ancestors.

I gave myself this challenge and although the journey home was arduous, it's one I recommend. My story begins at my mother's stove, her aluminum pot of water boiling. *Sopra il forno caldo* – over the hot stove; the woman over the fire, tending to the food. Here is a hot spot, an open channel to all the world's spirit. She was making me a pasta for my birthday. She threw one bag of *penne* into the boiling water when there was a pounding knock at the door. Instinctively she grabbed a second bag, ripped it open for whoever was at the door surely would stay and eat, and as she tossed the pasta into the water she yelled my name and fell backwards into my arms. Her back was soaking wet. In that moment an aneurysm had split the wall of her ascending aorta. When she said, "I am fine. I just need to lay on the couch," we knew that something was mortally wrong. Within hours she was in the O.R., her heart beating

open in the surgical air. After the repair, a post-op staff infection gutted her sternum, creating an open chest wound the mass of a banana. Six weeks later she was off oxygen. Armed with jugs of sterile water, surgical gloves and bandages, face masks, tongue depressors and a tub of Silverdene (designed to promote new skin growth for burn victims), I drove my mother slowly home in a used Pontiac lemon that I'd bought with all we'd had just for this momentous escort, my mother's return into fresh air to her home. Six months into her recuperation, I said, "Ma, today's the day. We're going out. No doctors' appointments, just out! Whereva ya wanna go...." I expected her to say let's go to the water, let's see something beautiful. Her response shocked me, and changed my life and career.

"Arthur Avenue. Let's go to The Market." Yes, she chose the Bronx where we all grew up, the Bronx where all our relatives this side of the Atlantic were buried, the Bronx where we all had traumatized youths, the Bronx: our collective hearts' home. She reapplied her Pink Lightning lipstick and made the decision to leave the wheelchair in the trunk of the car for the first time. When I opened the door to the Arthur Avenue Retail Market she came alive in a way I had never seen. She was sixteen again; it could have been 1943 as she ambled amongst stacks of peppers, tasting from the grapes and open barrels of olives, and small hunks of *parmigiano reggiano*. She gained an edge in her attitude. She pointed at hanging *provolones*. She folded sprigs of parsley like money into her pocketbook. She was back. Enter Rachele Pettruzzelli Lanzillotto, an Italian-American Bronx woman who, though just getting on her feet, unearthed the power of how to interact, bargain, flirt, argue, sparkle, steal. She walked to the back of the market to Mike's Deli where she recognized the man behind the counter, Mike, the proprietor. They had interacted across that counter intermittently for over fifty years; he as a merchant, she as a shopper. He leaned over

the counter, a military portrait of El Duce on the wall between the hanging salamis behind him, and as if no time had passed he handed her a slice of *soppressata*, singing *ciao bella* with elongated “L” sounds. For my mother, his slice of *soppressata* had the memory-prodding magic of Proust’s madeleine. *Soppressata* was definitely not part of her strict keep-the-blood-pressure-low-to-stay-alive no-salt diet, yet she accepted the slice, put it on her tongue, and a rush of stories followed: memories of the chanting Bronx pushcart peddlers of her youth, how her father had once had an ice route on Arthur Avenue, her mother Rose’s knack for picking live spring chickens to roast and soup chickens for soup, grand statues from the feasts for Our Lady of Monte Carmelo. Here was a woman who had lived through the trauma of a near-death whammo! vascular catastrophe, had quit cigarettes and fatty meats in the matter of a day, and boom! the moment she steps foot on Arthur Avenue she is sucking on a slice of fat-speckled salami. It had taken us months to clear her lungs, weeks on a respirator. Now she was going to start her old arterially compromising habits again the first day she was out?

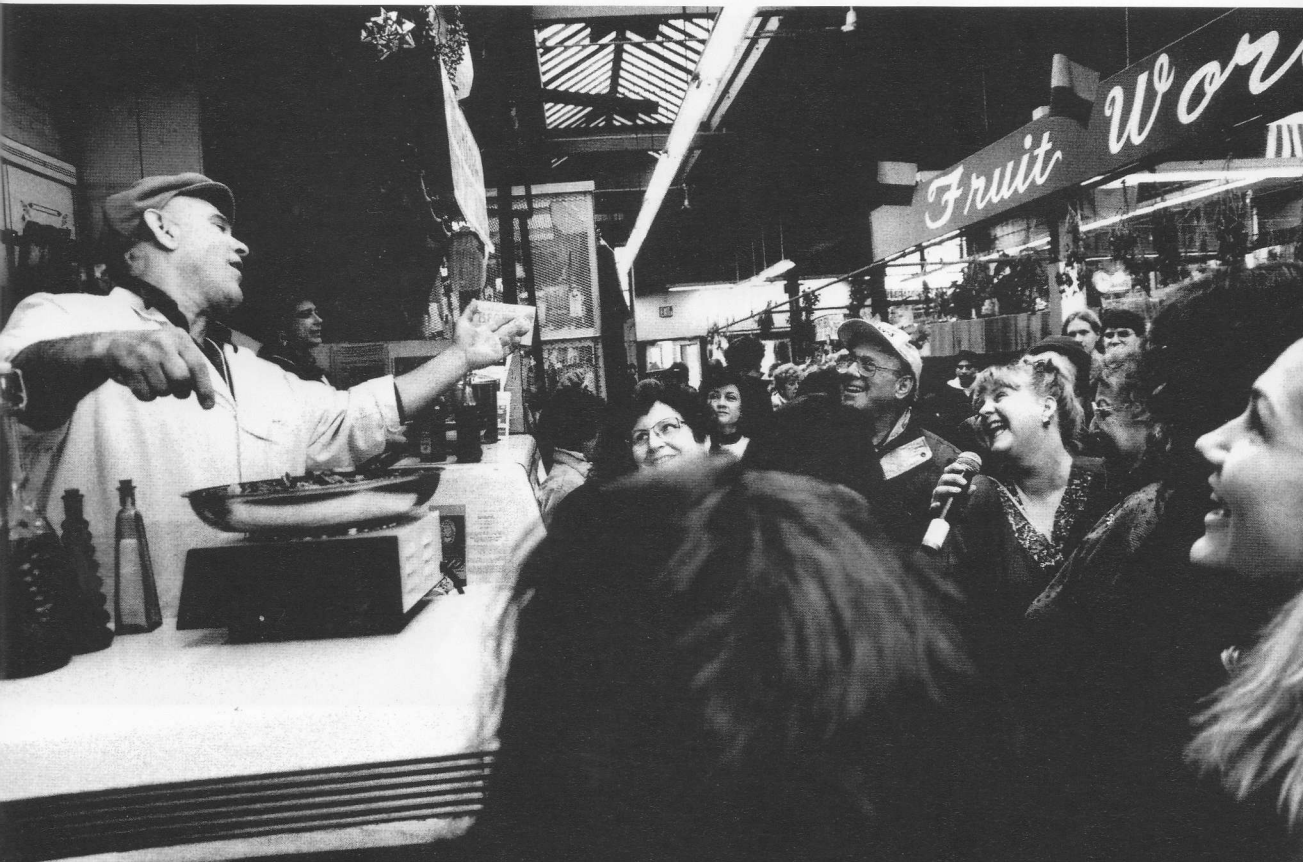
“Only here,” she reassured me, “I’d never eat it anywhere else.” What was going on here? And she wasn’t the only one. As she chatted with other shoppers, soon there were three of them, all who had the familiar paper tape crosshatch on their sternums peeking out of their V-neck shirts gripping the scars from their recent bypass surgeries and valve replacements. They were here to do their walking in The Market, their *passeggiata*, to feel alive; sampling life at Mike’s Deli with childish smiles. What magic and trust was transmitted over these countertops? What faith? I watched the way the merchants and shoppers leaned over, creating a vital intimacy; the countertops morphed into confessionals, into stages. People were interacting! The Market was alive for me in a way that theater had ceased to be. We went

back several times and the visions and stories simmered within me. I was touched with the spirit of the pushcart peddler. Years later this would manifest as performance.

After a year of caretaking my mom, I shaved my head and headed downtown to recreate my life. I found a job, a lover, a subplot and a shrink. I performed my first solo theater piece, "Confessions of a Bronx Tomboy," based on her near death. Next followed a series of works that drew on The Market imagery. "Pocketing Garlic," commissioned by Franklin Furnace, opened with a chorus of garlic peddlers, and was centered around the act of my mother and grandmother tucking garlic and parsley in their pockets, refusing to pay money for what was essential to life. Then *Dancing in the Streets* put out a call for artists to create "site-specific community-based performance" in New York City. Here was my chance to heighten the daily drama of The Market by adding a layer of performance art.

I researched the late 1930s, when New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia built over one hundred city markets to get the immigrant pushcart peddlers off the streets in time for the World's Fair. He outlawed hawking and squawking, put a roof over their heads and dubbed the peddlers "merchants." Fifty-odd years later, three of these markets still functioned, selling food. I set out to bring "hawking and squawking" back through performance, and create what I heard as the street opera of pushcart peddling. The project was awarded a grant for research and development. The first thing I did was return to The Market with photographer Andrew Perret, buy two cappuccinos at Café al Mercato and hang out. I needed to observe and be observed. By my second visit the merchants knew what I would order. I watched and listened and got my toes wet in the fine art of Bronx interaction. The Market was an indoor piazza. I climbed back into my Bronx skin and my southern Italian heart. Dramatic interaction was the order of the day.

I bought another cappuccino and asked how one rents a stall in the market. The arts grant gave me the opportunity to be on equal footing with the merchants by renting “space” in “time.” I went to the butcher counter and had my first of many talks with Mike Rella, the president of The Market, right over his counter. Rella had a passion for the history of The Market. He rented me a vacant fruit stand seventeen feet wide for three dollars per foot per week. Acrobats, opera singers, jugglers, painters, performance artists of all stripes gravitated to this chance to perform with people amongst fruits and vegetables with the pounding of meat cleavers echoing through their work. A baby grand piano was lent to the project, and I had it trucked up and tuned on site. Just hearing a piano being tuned amidst the gorgeous pyramids of shiny red peppers, yellow onions, the peeling papyrus-like white garlic was moving. “The Opera Stand” was born.



We got to work. I staged my Grandma Rose to demonstrate how to make the *cavateel*. She was ninety-six and no one was as adept at shaping the pasta and flipping the nascent *cavateel* off their fingertips. Her fingers were grasshoppers. Artist Audrey Kindred began to collect the outer layer of onion skins the merchants peeled and threw away to keep their onions looking young and fresh on the stands. She developed a technique of making masks by feathering red and yellow onion and white garlic skins. This stirred curiosity from the shoppers, some of whom would join her. Mike's Deli and Peter's Meat Market offered free plates of *provolone* and *mozzarella* and olives and finger sandwiches for passers-by. The senior shoppers from Mount Carmel Senior Center on 186th Street parked their pushcarts at our stand and started singing, and the gorgeous conflicts began. One fruit merchant blasted his radio once shoppers started singing. My aesthetic was to embrace the cacophony as an expression of pluralism, in fact to find drama there. When butcher Mario Ribaldo belted tenor arias, the other butchers pounded their cleavers saying the singing was going to his head and he better keep his mind on his work. Despite some resentments at the change we were imposing as outsiders to the community, distrust because we weren't "selling" anything, and the fact that our crowds were clogging the aisles and blocking their regular shoppers from getting to their stands, the merchants voted a few weeks later to give us the space for the piano rent free. As our initial funding was running out, this was a boon. We had a core



ANNIE LANZILLOTTO AND GRANDMA ROSE PETTRUZZELLI TELLING THE "SISTEMAZIONE" OR PROPER WAYS TO EAT GARLIC.



MARIO RIBAUDO OF MARIO'S  
MEAT MARKET. PHOTO BY  
ANYA HITZENBERGER.



following of senior shoppers who would await our arrival every Saturday. Here they sung out loud in the place they had shopped their whole lives. Ninety-six-year-old shoppers sang together with merchants and downtown artists. It was this trio formation that inspired me.

I began to instigate interactions as a practice and thought of myself as an Interaction Practitioner; directing trios of merchants, shoppers, and invited artists into scenarios. I would ask the artist to react to the scenario in such a way as to keep the ball in the air, keep the dramatic momentum moving, keep everybody physically safe and spiritually engaged. The artist's role was to instigate, to listen, to ignite performance, to provide a microphone for merchants and shoppers, to bring the scenarios to a level of dramatic intensity. We were guests in a workplace where families had spent decades, in some cases, generations. Cultivating a respect for that fact among my cast and crew was primary, and not without incident.

We attended weekly merchants' meetings, traveled with merchants on their four a.m. shopping treks to the Hunts Point Cooperative Market, the New York City Terminal Produce Market and the Bronx Terminal Market. We became audience to the merchants' daily routines, and cultural investigators in the history of their lives. Arts grants followed. Commissioning funds from Dancing in the Streets and a Rockefeller Foundation Multi-Arts Production Grant and support from the Puffin Foundation allowed us the autonomy to create.

In instigating scenarios and arguments from the fabric of oral history and daily life, I called upon my own grandiose absurdities, magnifying the visions I perceived in the community after listening to many stories for over a year. Scenarios and short scripted arguments were inspired by direct observation and interviews. My method was to

load the environment in ways that provoked drama. Through experimentation I learned performance facts I could count on during a show. I felt like a scientist experimenting with phototropism; I could load the environment with events that would naturally cause reactions in the organism. The Market was alive. The sound of a balloon popping would cause the butchers to pound their cleavers and shout a deep abdominal “Oh!”; the presence of period photographs of the neighborhood gave the diaspora of old timers who made pilgrimages to The Market a catalyst for memories of old stories and songs; a free platter of sharp *provolone* would gather a crowd in one place faster than any other technique of arranging and moving groups of people; placing theatrical seating in front of the butcher counter gave the message clearly to watch transactions as drama; a checkered strip of linoleum dance floor rolled out between the fruit aisles gave shoppers a runway to dance on while they shopped. Although inspired by history and drawing on centuries of marketplace theater, my priority was to dream and create surreal images: installations of text on wood slats which otherwise showed food prices; text on garlic; text on eggs; installation of a giant pocketbook with parsley and text sprouting out of it; video meditations of Grandma’s peasant technique of breaking eggs; collages of images from merchant families’ lives on hand trucks, née altars; luminary pushcarts expressing the shopper’s fancy feeling of the *passeggiata*; getting dressed up to promenade; a Venetian-style

LYRIC SOPRANO IMANI  
Q’RYN, WITH MANDOLIN-  
ISTO SERAFINO GERVINO,  
ABOVE TRAPEZE ARTIST  
TANYA GAGNÉ. PHOTO BY  
ANYA HITZENBERGER.





MARIO RIBAUDO OF MARIO'S  
MEAT MARKET. PHOTO BY  
ANDREW PERRET.

gondola on wheels to transport a revered elderly mandolin/accordion/guitar band up and down the fruit and vegetable aisles; a balcony above the crowd to provoke speeches from the merchants; the slow dance of passing heavy watermelons from dancer to shopper to dancer to shopper clear across the market to where they were cut and served.

Marketplace productions happened during regular business hours. Our scenarios were interruptions in the routine flow of shopping. For three winters from 1996 to 1998 we performed “How to Cook a Heart” on Valentine’s Day. This grew from the daily rhythm of butcher Mario Ribaudo of Mario’s Meat Market’s business day that included a dormant period where he would rest his head on his counter. After many talks with Mario, tapping into his dilemmas, nostalgia, dreams and desires, I invited trapeze artist Tanya Gagné to come up to the Bronx and work with

him. Ribaudo taught Gagné how to clean tripe. We cut a pipe over Mario’s counter to make room for Gagné’s trapeze bar. Gagné designed a series of strong warrior poses on his countertop and trapeze moves hovering over his stand. Gagné’s stunning solo work over Mario’s butcher case full of offal—intestines, tripe, Sicilian peasant specialties such as *fegatini*, *schemeral* (intestines wrapped around spleen stuffed with cheese and parsley) and of course hearts, heads, tongues, livers and bull penises—accompanied Ribaudo’s singing and cooking. I set up an electric frying pan, spotlight and microphone atop Ribaudo’s counter for him to cook his lamb hearts and sing tenor arias and peasant ballads. Gagné stunned The Market into silence, the cash registers ceased to ring for seven minutes, as





freezers. As a strategy to literally bring this “to light” I asked Rella if we could enhance the images by hanging lights over the meat freezer and collaging bigger and bolder images of meat cuts interspersed with women’s bodies. We ripped the pin-ups so illustrations of meat cuts shone through the images of women, thus magnifying the message of the butchers’ freezer collages. Then we walked audiences through the rear freezer section to acknowledge it, bring it out of the shadows.

I wrote short scripts based on market oral histories. We played behind the counters, in the aisles, on top of the freezers, in the streets and on neighbors’ balconies. I played Ribaudo’s wife arguing with him about why he refused to teach the butchering business to one of his three daughters. Acrobat Hope Clark worked with *mozzarella* maker David Greco, creating ways to stretch a bridge of freshly made mozzarella fourteen feet long over the aisle of shoppers while Clark hung upside-down from the building’s steel beams and pipes. I also set Clark in the neighborhood park a few blocks away. Again, our methodology was for her to hang out there; she began to swing on the bars

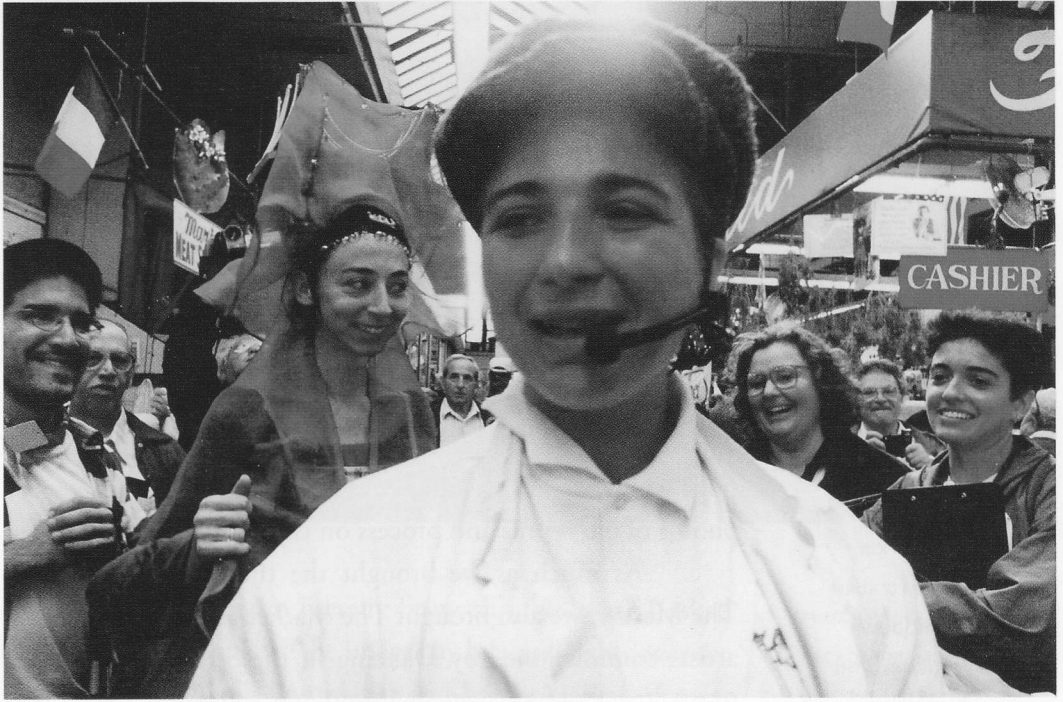
PERFORMANCE ARTIST PENNY  
ARCADE AND MERCHANT  
GIUSEPPE LIBERATORE  
ON THE BALCONY TELLING  
LIFE STORIES AND CALLING  
THE NAMES OF FOODS. PHOTO  
BY ANYA HITZENBERGER.

and do handstands. People of all ages gravitated to her to watch and she expertly invited them to join her, creating gymnastic classes in the park. This work grew into a performance and procession that gave local children, who were not from families that traditionally shopped in the market, a way into the market. On production day, the children carried pumpkins down the block in procession behind me—I was playing the Ghost of the Pushcart Peddler, named “Chimaroot” (fingers like ginger root). Barefoot with a rickety wooden pushcart, I led the crowd into the market through the garbage garage turned photo gallery. Thanks to Materials for the Arts, who provided black velvet stage wings, we hung Andrew Perret’s and Anya Hitzenger’s photos of our works and process on the red brick garage walls.

As much as we brought the theater community to The Market, we also brought The Market to the theater, when artists commissioned by *Dancing in the Streets* were invited to perform at The Guggenheim’s Works & Process series. This exchange helped merge our worlds and gave a professional artist’s context to the work. I created a cast of twenty, including

LOCAL YOUTH PUMPKIN  
PROCESSION FROM D’AURIA  
MURPHY SQUARE, DOWN  
HUGHES AVENUE, INTO THE  
ARTHUR AVENUE RETAIL  
MARKET. PHOTO BY ANYA  
HITZENBERGER.





merchants, shoppers and artists to recreate the market in the Guggenheim. Ribaudó wore his bloodiest butcher's apron, underdressed in a tuxedo for his transformation scene from butcher to tenor. Grandma Rose had her stage debut at ninety-six years old. She played the Garlic Queen, dressed as she asked to be, in a wedding gown and garlic headdress, playing the oldest shopper in the market and improvising what she does best, haggling with the merchants over the prices of food.

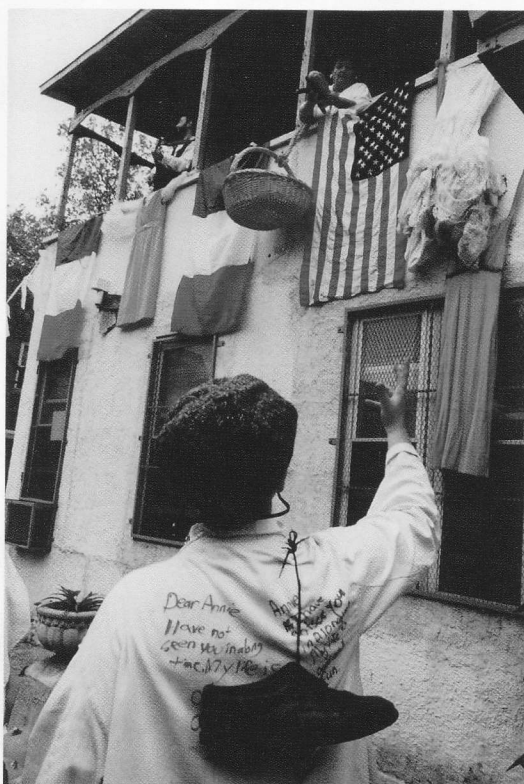
On Mothers Day 1997, we created a spring performance entitled, "Mammamia! You'll Never Get a Straight Answer Again!" In the fall we culminated our works with "*a'Schapett!*" (wiping the plate clean with the heel of the bread and savoring the end of the meal). That's what I was doing, savoring the juices of what was left of the culture I'd been steeped in. After the project's funding ended, we worked for the local business

ANNIE LANZILLOTTO,  
ARTIST VALERIE STRIAR.  
PHOTO BY ANYA  
HITZENBERGER.



association organizing street festivals and continuing to bring art into The Market and other local businesses. The merchants called us to join them in various events, from morning news features to the pivotal day when the first fast food restaurant was opened on Arthur Avenue. We came up and added drama to the locals who were protesting—I organized the chant “Viva Broccoli Rabe!” I had learned to believe in food, to believe that, as Audrey Kindred put it best, “When you eat the food of your ancestors, all the blood comes rushing down through the ages.” ♥

ANNIE LANZILLOTTO AS  
“CHIMAROOT” THE PUSH-  
CART PEDDLER, CALLING  
UP TO HUGHES AVENUE  
RESIDENT PUPPETA’S  
BALCONY, WHERE  
GUITARIST CHRIS  
CARBONE SERENADES.  
PHOTO BY ANYA  
HITZENBERGER.



*Community building is not just about  
housing, although we are doing that.  
It's not just about gardens,  
but that's an important backbone here.  
It's not just about education.  
It's all of that . . .  
but we must remember the heart.*

– Lily Yeh, founder  
The Village of Arts and Humanities  
Philadelphia



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