

All Kindsa Rites

Walk into P.S. 122

for Scott Heron's *The Goat Story* and you almost stumble over a low altar based on gold-draped stools. An assemblage of an altar. I catalogue tin cans sprouting grass, candles, wine, nine silver stars, two plastic birds, four fake-feathered birds, shot glasses, a pineapple, a coconut, bean threads, a small ceramic fountain (miked), one Rawson Brook Farm milk bottle, bejeweled and gilded structures that might be tiny Thai temples, oranges, two candy canes, and three clear plastic bowls of water—one with a flashlight suspended over it. A marvel. (I'm leaving out a lot, and I haven't even begun to talk about the rest of the room.)

I hardly need the press-release prose that tells me Heron "recognizes the absurdity of human existence and resolves to find beauty, humor, and meaning from the arbitrary." Wandering through a maze of apparent non sequiturs, Heron has cast himself as explorer in a bizarre world that subjects him to transformations; or perhaps he's in charge of a topsy-turvy Mass. Just guessing. I like speculating on him as a wacky/serious pomo Jungian Martha Graham sort of fellow. There's even a Symbolic Moment when a windup scuba diver is set swimming in one of the bowls—doggedly bumping its edges, never giving up.

The work is extremely fastidious—everything precise within its overall slipperiness. Heron's an arresting performer, with his lean, sharp-cheekboned face and skinny body whose marked musculature calls to mind a plastic mannequin designed to educate us about the body. When he dances, he's nimble and stabbing and bendable, never soft around the edges. In one scene, he's blue-lit (by magically David Herrigel), sitting at a little table wearing a puffy shower cap, extravagantly dialing the air above a touch-tone phone in order to converse

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BY DEBORAH JOWITT

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A man, a Pan: trickster Scott Heron in *The Goat Story* at P.S. 122

in German with one "Wolfgang," to whom he describes P.S. 122 and tries to explain what a performance artist is, finally going into squealy raptures over German chocolate. He becomes a shadow puppet framed in a huge moon of light. Green-wigged, with grass pants, he's a sort of Pan—an antic creature who suddenly manages to sing a lovely madrigal with musician-artist Leslie Ross, who inhabits her sizable forest of instruments.

With the engagingly untheatrical style of a '60s Happenings artist, Ross

meanders, piping, among hanging strips of metal, bottle racks, fans, cans, and I don't know what, all of which she's turned into a silvery thicket. She captures and amplifies the soft clangor that's a far cry from the dread bassoon farts she plays earlier in the evening. Best of all, she's attired (for part of the time, anyway) in an amplified cagedress full of finches and canaries, her naked body visible through two cages that stand for breasts and one that forms a ballooning skirt.

Heron is abetted on his (dare I say

it?) quest by Linda Austin, who functions as an austere stage manager in a pink suit (I thought I heard Heron say, "Chanel") and red high heels, who moves and rearranges things, often charging across in a Groucho crouch; she also clogs noisily on a little board. Michael Portnoy plays an extraordinary anguished guardian angel, contorting his pale body, devouring a flower, mouthing terrible truths, and having little fits of craziness amid the audience.

There are hints of holy water and grave-wrappings being pulled off and magic spells and primal screams. High intelligence mates with cosmic nuttiness. Heron's a very interesting guy. In 1992, he handcuffed himself to a little table and sat on First Avenue 12 hours a day every Monday in May, gradually becoming an installation, defined by his activity. In *The Goat Story*, he winds himself tighter, pulls himself out of hats, sneaks through keyholes, and, maybe, is born again.

TOM BRAZIL