



## Clarina Bezzola's Birthing into the Light

Intense, transformative works that meld fiber sculpture, performance art, poetry, and song. *by Rhonda Sonnenberg*

Transformation is the word that comes to mind with the work of artist Clarina Bezzola. To look at this thirty-five-year-old Swiss beauty with her lithe dancer's body and mien, her coltish gait and long brown hair, one might easily mistake her for a principal ballerina or a former *Vogue* model. Last spring, looking the part, she entered Le Petit Café, near her Brooklyn studio, wearing a knockout—and befittingly tactile—green shearling Vivienne Westwood coat, brown corduroy slacks, and a brown sweater. By way of introduction, over French toast and café au lait, we spoke first of innocuous things: children, siblings, and the de rigueur New York topic, real estate. Then, her art. The café's precious, sunny, open atmosphere fell away to something dark and tight as she spoke of her motivations as an artist, her compulsions, her desires.

An hour later, inside her studio, I watched a being transformed, as though some vivified Jungian process were at work. Bezzola was just days from her first full-length soprano performance in the opera *Rigoletto*, and she was nothing if not intense, practicing up to ten hours a day in the days before her solo debut. Her singing is life or death to her, as is her art. And her art is of one with her singing, her body movements, her subconscious. "I am a performer," Bezzola says, acknowledging that when she inhabits an unfolding consciousness from inside her textile forms, "I become something completely different."

Clarina Bezzola could be the emblem of the new fiber art.

THESE PAGES, ABOVE: *Lamentation (front and back)*, 2001; fabric, foam, chrome-plated steel, CD player, goat fur; 5¼' x 2' x 8'. Photos: David Byun, New York City. OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW: Sketch for *Lamentation*, 2001.

No longer limited even to three-dimensional structural forms, she creates a visual, emotional, philosophical, but most of all, psychological maelstrom by combining performance art, fiber sculpture, poetry, and song. Without her fiber sculptures, which are often hidden inside soft fabric cocoons or hard, resin, pod-like structures and then ejected—vomited almost, like a snake disgorging its prey—there would be no extended hideous guttural sounds, no German lieder to express birth, death, pain, transformation, fulfillment; and without the singing, the sculpture would stay mute—hence, worthless. In live performance and in video, one sees a Bezzola utterly transformed from an ingénue into a monster. Art can do this to certain people.

Like Carl Jung, the revolutionary twentieth-century Swiss psychotherapist and philosopher who broke with mentor Sigmund Freud, Bezzola devoutly believes we are dogged by societal strictures that force us to repress our feelings, our spirits, our sexuality, and in so doing separate us from nature, ourselves, and the "collective unconscious" of others. She believes this repression, which begins soon after the freedom of childhood, is an ultimately self-destructive means of our dealing with the "chaos" that surrounds us.