

not sending checks were inventive.

"They would range from 'My accountant is still reviewing the papers' to 'I have a cold that won't go away' to 'My horse backed up into the windshield of my car,'" Deitch remembers with amusement—and pain. "It was a humiliating and debilitating experience."

She was supposed to have raised \$600,000 at the end of a year in order to leave escrow, but since she didn't reach that goal, Deitch had to offer each of her investors the chance to take their money back. "But not one person withdrew," she says proudly, "and that's when I felt I was over the hump." It took her another year to obtain the rest of the money, and she then raised even more in order to upgrade the film's production values.

The result is an assured debut for the 40-year-old director. "Desert Hearts" sensitively captures the milieu—fifties' Reno is seen in both its tawdry gaudiness and stark desert beauty—and an assortment of very likable characters. As Vivian, actress Helen Shaver portrays the appropriate mixture of repression and awakening feeling; as Cay, newcomer Patricia Charbonneau brings to the role a lively attractiveness and a relaxed comfort in her sexual preference (that may, perhaps, be a generation forward-looking). And in an impressive supporting performance, Audra Lindley nearly steals the show as Cay's possessive stepmother, Frances, the dude ranch proprietor.

Although Deitch and screenwriter Natalie Cooper drastically changed the details of Jane Rule's novel, they remain true to the warm humanity typical of Rule's work. Like Rule, they portray a relationship between women with a casualness that allows the viewer to see it as being essentially no different from—and no less significant or acceptable than—the other loving relationships (mother/daughter, brother/sister, husband/wife, friends) in the movie.

Deitch says she feels lucky to have made the film (which will be distributed by the Samuel Goldwyn Company). One gets the sense that it was more pluck than luck that enabled Deitch to join this select sorority of women who have directed a feature. But the gambling metaphor still holds. Deitch beat the odds to make her first feature film, and now she looks like a good bet to be given a chance to make others. ■

*Michele Kort makes her cinematic debut in "Desert Hearts." She visited the Reno set and was given a walk-on part in a casino scene. Having recovered from the three-inch spike heels she wore for her role, she has returned to free-lance writing while awaiting another director's call.*



In her office, Allred takes tea with a set of antique jurists.

BONNIE SCHIFFMAN

# Activist Lawyer

Gloria Allred defies the "do-gooder" stereotype and practices her own brand of "performance law."

BY ZINA KLAPPER

**O**

IN A SUNNY, LOS Angeles noon, attorney Gloria Allred debarks from her telephone-equipped silver Porsche 928. A small group of women join her as she turns the corner. They march solemnly toward the knot of reporters waiting in front of the Right-to-Life League of Southern California headquarters. Allred arranges her group and—like a professional news

correspondent—indicates to the camera crew when she's ready to start the press conference she has called.

"Today we are challenging some of the practices and tactics of the antiabortion movement," she begins in ringing tones. She and her client are pressing suit against RLL, she explains, for their Yellow Pages advertisements for "counseling clinics" that provide free pregnancy tests, and are not identified as sponsored by the anti-choice movement. The tests are free, but the "counseling" consists of antiabortion arguments, and the use of the term "clinic," says Allred, is misleading advertising. They are asking not for a monetary award, but for the court to force RLL to change its adver-

tising practices and force the "clinic" not to administer the tests unless it has a licensed health care practitioner.

"Now," she concludes, "we will go up to the eighth floor and present the suit." She strides briskly away as the surprised reporters—who were already packing up—scramble to follow. When the elevator doors open upstairs, there's a moment of confusion, but Allred knows exactly where she's going. "To the left!" she commands and, once again, there's a crush as everyone spins around to keep pace with this small (five feet three), dark-haired woman. She stops in front of a door, reaches for the handle, and then pauses. There's a collective intake of breath and the sudden realization that none of us—including Allred—knows what's waiting on the other side. The camera operator has a chance to go for a

and shrill. Her tactics have included stringing a clothesline full of diapers across former Governor Jerry Brown's office when rumor had it that he would veto a stronger child-support payment law (he signed it soon afterward), and presenting a Birchite state senator with a chastity belt in honor of his sexual politics. Rarely does a week pass without her name appearing in the Los Angeles newspapers, or her face on the box; she gets national media attention, too, with victories such as the \$90,000 judgment on behalf of a Holocaust survivor harassed by a foundation that claims the Holocaust did not happen. Allred's press clips fill 24 scrapbooks. In a city where thousands vie daily for the media spotlight, she has succeeded at holding it with her flair for creating the dramatic stuff of which nightly news is made.

for the job after a six-hour lie-detector examination that included questions about her sex life, contraceptives, and menstrual cycle; the decision favoring Allred's client will help protect the privacy of job-seekers across the nation. Her proposals on law—including her testimony favoring an antipornography ordinance—are solicited by local politicians.

But Allred is best known for her tenacity in tackling the seemingly smallest infringements of women's rights—those daily irritants that most of us shrug off. She successfully took on a dry-cleaning firm that charged higher prices for laundering women's oxford shirts than men's, telling reporters, "Women have a right to go to the cleaners without losing their shirts." When the rest of L.A. was bubbling with Olympic fever, she and partner Michael Maroko went to bat for a female concert pianist who was not permitted to audition for the male piano corps. (The attorney for the L.A. Olympic Organizing Committee said that, because the section would play a tribute to "George Gershwin—the man," they would be clad in tuxedos, and therefore be all male. Allred and her client protested on the courthouse steps, dressed in tuxedos. Though she wasn't successful in the first round, she's currently appealing the case.) She successfully sued on behalf of two lesbians who were refused entrance to a reserved "romance booth" at Papa Choux, an expensive L.A. restaurant. The owner vowed that if Allred won, he'd close the booths—she did and he did. (See "Gazette," September, 1984.) She helped a male feminist who was denied the right to apply for a position on Santa Monica's Commission on the Status of Women on the basis of his sex, and the city changed its policy in response. She is now representing a woman who was requested to leave a Beverly Hills restaurant for breast-feeding her baby, and also a rape victim who was not provided with the morning-after pill because she was treated at a Catholic hospital.

Joan Patsy Ostroy, a partner in the firm of Ostroy and Truby, and a former president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, says of Allred, "She doesn't shrink from being outrageous, or from doing things that would embarrass some of us, and it works for her. Just knowing she's involved sometimes frightens the opposition effectively."

But Allred is not without critics, even among feminists. Echoing the most common complaint, San Francisco attorney Rosemary French says, "Some of the things she stands for are great. But I



close-up of her hand on the knob. She turns it.

The receptionist, who looks to be in her sixties, says that the director is out. She seems to immediately accept Allred's authority over the situation. "Should I—do I have to take these?" she asks about the legal papers Allred hands her. The two confer softly and then exchange thank-yous. The encounter is over in seconds.

Traveling back down, Allred finally cracks a smile, and it's suddenly plain that, until this moment, she's been tightly wound. It's also plain that the risks of actions like these are her idea of a good time, as she chuckles, "Well *that* was a trip into the eye of the tiger." (At press time, Allred is preparing for a preliminary hearing of this suit.)

Allred's manner today has been one of a kindly but strict school principal. Nonetheless, this controversial feminist activist attorney has gained an image of being confrontational, abrasive, strident,

Says Allred, "I know how I come across, and it's exactly what I intend. I get a precious ten or twenty seconds from the media, and I want the listeners to catch my point. I *want* to strike terror into the hearts of antifeminists. I don't want them to think that it's okay with me that some injustice is being done." Defending actions such as picketing outside the courthouse of a judge who made a sexist crack during a rape trial, she says, "I call that political organizing, not grandstanding."

Supporters agree that the media can be a powerful ally, and they also cite important precedent-setting cases that she has won. She has successfully pressed suit against Los Angeles County for the sheriff's practice of shackling and chaining pregnant inmates during labor and delivery, and against the city of El Segundo for quizzing applicants on their sexual histories. In a case that established legal precedent, she represented an aspiring officer who was turned down

have a problem with her priorities. Coming from my perspective as a poverty lawyer, I can't see giving the issue of expensive restaurants that hand women menus without prices on them priority... so many other things are more important."

As for claims that she takes on the trivial, Allred replies: "I've never had a case dismissed as frivolous or without merit. Some people thought, for example, that the Sav-On Stores case was silly—when we sued because they had labeled aisles for 'Boys Toys' and 'Girls Toys.' But others wrote us to say, 'I'm an early childhood educator, and I think your victory was enormously significant.'"

"People need to be educated so that they can move beyond sex stereotypes," she continues, explaining that she does take on some cases partly to raise public awareness of an issue, but only when there's a reasonable chance of success. Have there been any heartbreaking losses? "I've shed a few tears," she admits and then, waving a finger, adds quickly, "but never in front of those cameras."

When she began practicing law, says 43-year-old Allred, "I had no idea of the extent of the discrimination against women." Born Gloria Rachel Bloom, the daughter of a door-to-door salesman and a full-time homemaker, Allred attended the University of Pennsylvania. She married during her sophomore year, gave birth as a junior (her daughter, Lisa, now attends Yale Law School), and filed for a divorce before graduation. She earned a master's degree in English education at New York University and taught first at a predominantly black, all boys school in her native Philadelphia, and later at high schools in Watts. She became an organizer for the Los Angeles teachers union, and then attended Loyola University Law School. Meanwhile, she married again—this time to manufacturer Bill Allred. In 1976, soon after passing the bar, she formed her current partnership with classmates Nathan Goldberg (number one in their class) and Maroko, whom she describes as "committed feminists, as well as being among the best and the brightest." (Alan Ribakoff joined the partnership in 1981.) The practice they've now built employs 13 attorneys, five of them women. "I believe being a feminist should be a requirement for all attorneys," adds Allred, "and all judges. Because if you're not a feminist, you're a bigot—and a bigot doesn't belong in the courtroom or on the bench."

The waiting room to the offices occupied by Allred and her colleagues is

luxurious, and its period furnishings are not without wit: a reproduction shows an 18th-century huntswoman, on horseback, cracking her whip as she jumps a hedge. A crowd of baffled-looking men hover on the sidelines. The title is "Well Done."

Dressed in a velvet ensemble, Allred fits into these surroundings. She talks about the latest client she and partner Goldberg have taken on, a young woman named Rita Milla who alleges that, as a teenager, she was seduced by seven Roman Catholic priests, one of whom she claims fathered her child. She is suing the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for clergy malpractice in the first suit of its kind. Allred is still trying to locate the seven priests to serve them with the suit and she is appealing a first-round loss on her case against the archdiocese.

With an oratorically flavored passion, Allred, the tireless advocate, declares: "This is one of the greatest injustices I've ever heard, and yet more than

one attorney turned Rita down—one was afraid to take on the church and thought the case was too messy. It's a classic case of a sole woman taking on an older, authoritarian male who is backed by a large entity."

For Allred, it is not only the most recent of many assaults upon powerful male institutions: her most important case, she says, is always the one of the moment.

"Burn out?" She echoes the question. "No, I don't do that. It's a question of expectations and pacing, and I know it's a long battle. My personal goal is to continue to work for women's rights—that benefits me, personally, because I'm a woman. I'd like to help other women find their strength, too," she says, adding, "Whenever a woman tells me, 'Keep up the good work,' I say, 'Okay, I will, if in your own life, you will too.'"

*Zina Klapper is a Los Angeles-based writer.*

# The Art Biz

## A handful of women artists and dealers are finally hitting the big time.

BY HARRIET LYONS

**A**T 28, VIDEO ARTIST, painter, and photographer Sarah Tuft appears to have it made. Despite the fact that her work embraces feminist themes, it is still shown in galleries, it does get reviewed, and even her mother understands it. Not long out of school herself, Tuft has already landed a college teaching job. And while she is hardly a composite of the woman artist in the year 1985, woman artists celebrating similar successes are no longer as rare as hen's teeth. Tuft is the essence of what veteran street artist Betsy Damon calls "a new generation of women artists who are more determined not to accept either labels or sexism."

With an M.F.A. in painting and photography from Pratt Institute, Tuft has shown at several prestigious Washington galleries and at the new wave spaces



Art dealer Barbara Ingber.