

Miss Steak— And Other Beauties

For 60 summers, contestants, each wearing a slinky bathing suit and a sweet smile, have competed in the Miss California pageant in Santa Cruz. Now Santa Cruz has a second pageant—the Myth California protest pageant, a street spectacle that challenges beauty contests. The event has grown from four protesters in 1980 to a band of about 1,000 women and men during this year's event, held in June to coincide with the official pageant.

During the first mock contest, protesters threw hunks of ribboned meat at the heels of Miss California contestants and also dressed as caricatures of beauty queens in spike heels, gaudy dresses, and heavy makeup. They

added shiny sashes labeled "Miss Used," "Miss Informed," and "Miss Directed." One protester, "Miss Steak," modeled a 35-pound gown of scalloped bologna and olive loaf with a hot-dog neckline garnished with parsley. "Judge Meat, not Women," demonstrators chanted.

This year's three-day pageant took a new tack with the theme "Positive Images of Women." The founder of the National Federation To Aid Fat Americans wore a shocking-pink bikini with the slogan "We Will Not Hide." A 13-foot sculpture of an Egyptian moon goddess, her arms triumphantly upraised, led the parade with the banner "She Is for Herself."

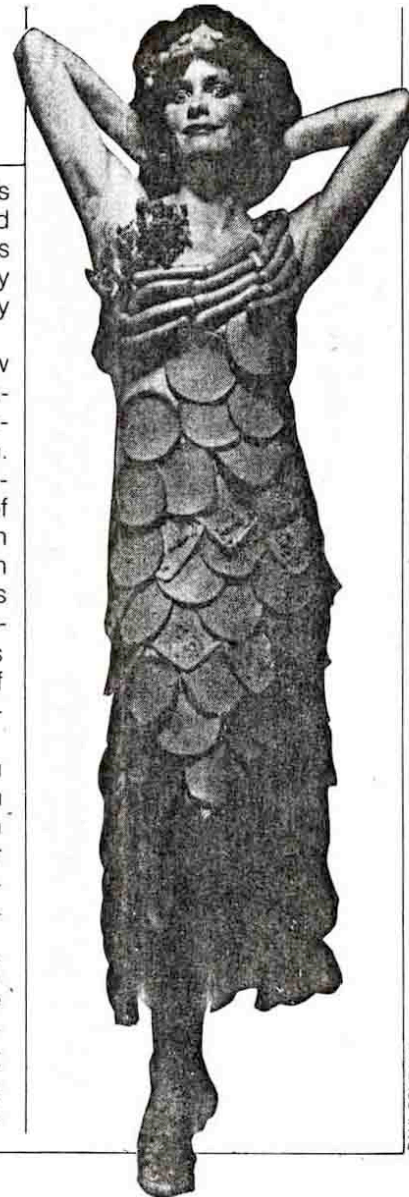
Meanwhile, at the Miss California pageant, representatives of the Anti-Sexist Men's

Political Caucus held hands on the stage and chorused "Men Resist Sexism." As Miss California was crowned, they were removed by security guards.

"We feel it's time to show who we are instead of mimicking what we hate," says protest organizer Ann Simonton. "The moon goddess, for example, embodies a lot of strength and power. Women should celebrate the strength and beauty of their diversity as human beings and not be reduced to Miss California's beauty-contest version of women as competitive, ever-smiling pieces of meat."

Simonton, a top model in New York and California from 1967 to 1979, joined forces in 1981 with fellow protester Nikki Craft, a ceramist who organized the first Myth California pageant.

Together Simonton and Craft have been arrested more than 24 times for misdemeanors, acts of "nonviolent civil disobedience" (including tearing up newsstand copies



PAUL SCHRAUB

of *Hustler* magazine—a protest aimed at awakening women to the destructiveness of violent pornography). As members of the Preying Mantis Brigade, they have succeeded in stopping the sale of *Hustler* in 25 stores.

By bringing attention to the insupportable role of women as beauty queens or sex objects, Simonton and Craft feel that they are utilizing their anger in a useful, educational way.

"The fact that men can judge women," says Simonton, "assumes that women enjoy this treatment. The pageants are nothing more than a collection of body parts. The images aren't just insulting to our sensibilities, they're actually threatening to women's lives. I believe that through our protests we're teaching women and children to identify sexual harassment and fight back."

—Elizabeth M. Howard