

NUMBERSAL COLONIAS

THE MAGAZINE FOR PROFESSIONAL MIGRANT ARTISTS

Is performance
a visual art?

Sometimes I find
a place to sleep

But I never dream

UNIVERSAL COLOURS



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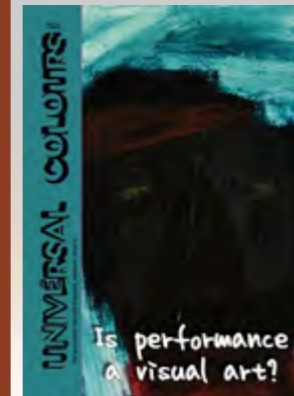
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Long time ago we used to have a saying, when the merchant bankrupted he search his old notebooks for some old loans or something that could save him. The new Finnish government is actually working under the same principal. Looking for the weakest economic link to catch, charge and then block them from all the funds. Of course first target is culture and an immigrant cultural organisation

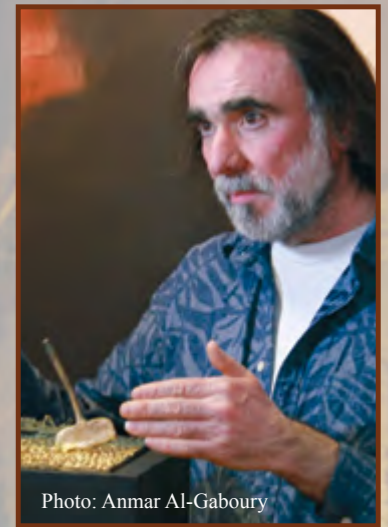
In Finland, where our organization is based and work, or better “try to survive” – yes, survive not live, because I do distinguish between these two verbs; living is different than surviving - in Finland we have been working for 18 years, harmonising the Finnish society with all the multicultural aspects of the society through cultural organisations. We were established after the EU entrance, we started our work voluntary - working or better “running for “nothing” - and our little organisations, EU-MAN and others, helped the Finnish society to enter a new century.

When the new Finnish government was formed, last April or even a little before that (during elections and campaigns), it was very clear that their policies were going to target immigrants. We should extinct; yes, that’s what they decided in a very indirect way. Therefore they decided to stop funding EU-MAN, 6D and tens of other organisations.

But that does not scare us - especially us - we will survive. Just like we survived the last 18 years. We can survive and continue our work, we are determine to fight these decisions. We opened a gallery in the cable factory (Finland largest cultural centre), we published online the magazine; this is actually the third issue, and we plan our future in a very good way.

Just to remind the decision makers again, that we began our work in 1997 when the True Finns Party was crawling like a baby. When governments - including Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen’s - were proud of our work and a lot of ministers were true supporters of what we did for Finland. When we kept saying that we serve Finland and not a government; when Helsingin Sanomat - the Finnish largest newspaper twice publish special reports about the EU-MAN, each time full page in the cultural section pages.

When we started we were like a boom. Yes, we were under the spotlight not on the margin. But now they think that they can marginalize us by cutting the little money we get. Yes it is little if you compare it with the funds they give to other organisations working for immigrants, but always led by Finns.



We do not distinguish ourselves from the Fins, I mean we are members the same society, but they do. They have a lot of categories and classifications which I personally have been suffering and straggling from with this EU-MAN project and I wrote about it many times.

Struggle is a big part of life, I do believe that. But not to the level that we will lose our dignity, our ethics and morals. Market policies do not know what is ethic, dignity and moral and that’s exactly what the new governments in Europe lack and implement since the American culture invade the world. And we, the normal people will reject it.

So Europe lived a golden era during the 1970s, 1980s and the beginnings of 1990s; but it ended September 11, 2001. Especially since the financial crisis, in 2008, the west and Europe have started moving to far-right policies, and now is growing a new era where Europe is like getting ready for a war.

And of course the weakest link of all this are the immigrants. Roma, Jews, Africans, Arabs, Muslims and other minorities. The financial crisis shown that the bankrupt merchant who went back to his old notebooks to see who did not pay him the pennies and collect them, he was hoping for more benefits; hoping to gain more money, he was actually greedy. But sadly for him it is just a wishful hope. In the meantime damage had happened to others.

Amir Khatib

daylight

2015 PHOTO AWARDS

Daylight is pleased to announce the results of the 2015 Daylight Photo Awards!

Winner: Katrin Koenning

The winner of this year's Daylight Photo Awards is Katrin Koenning for her project *Indefinitely*. Koenning will have her work featured in a solo show at Daylight Project Space, as well as in a digital showcase.

As Koenning describes in her statement: "*Indefinitely* is about love and a seemingly infinite space that is, in fact, filled to the rim with all kinds of things. The work is a long-term project documenting my family who live in many different corners of the world, and who together have come through cancer and suicide. *Indefinitely* is concerned with movement, time and story. The work is about space created by relocation, and the notion that this space is not a vacuum or void but rather the curator of new narratives. It's a space of the imaginary, holding everything. *Indefinitely* is my attempt at undoing distance."



Hepburn photographed by Norman Parkinson for Glamour Magazine, 1955
© Norman Parkinson Ltd/Courtesy Norman Parkinson Archive.

Audrey Hepburn

Till October 18 2015
National Portrait Gallery,
St Martin's Place, London

This fascinating photographic exhibition will illustrate the life of actress and fashion icon Audrey Hepburn (1929-1993). From her early years as a chorus girl in London's West End through to her philanthropic work in later life, Portraits of an Icon will celebrate one of the world's most photographed and recognisable stars.

A selection of more than seventy images will define Hepburn's iconography, including classic and rarely seen prints from leading twentieth-century photographers such as Richard Avedon, Cecil Beaton, Terry O'Neill, Norman Parkinson and Irving Penn. Alongside these, an array of vintage magazine covers, film stills, and extraordinary archival material will complete her captivating story.



Sean Scully

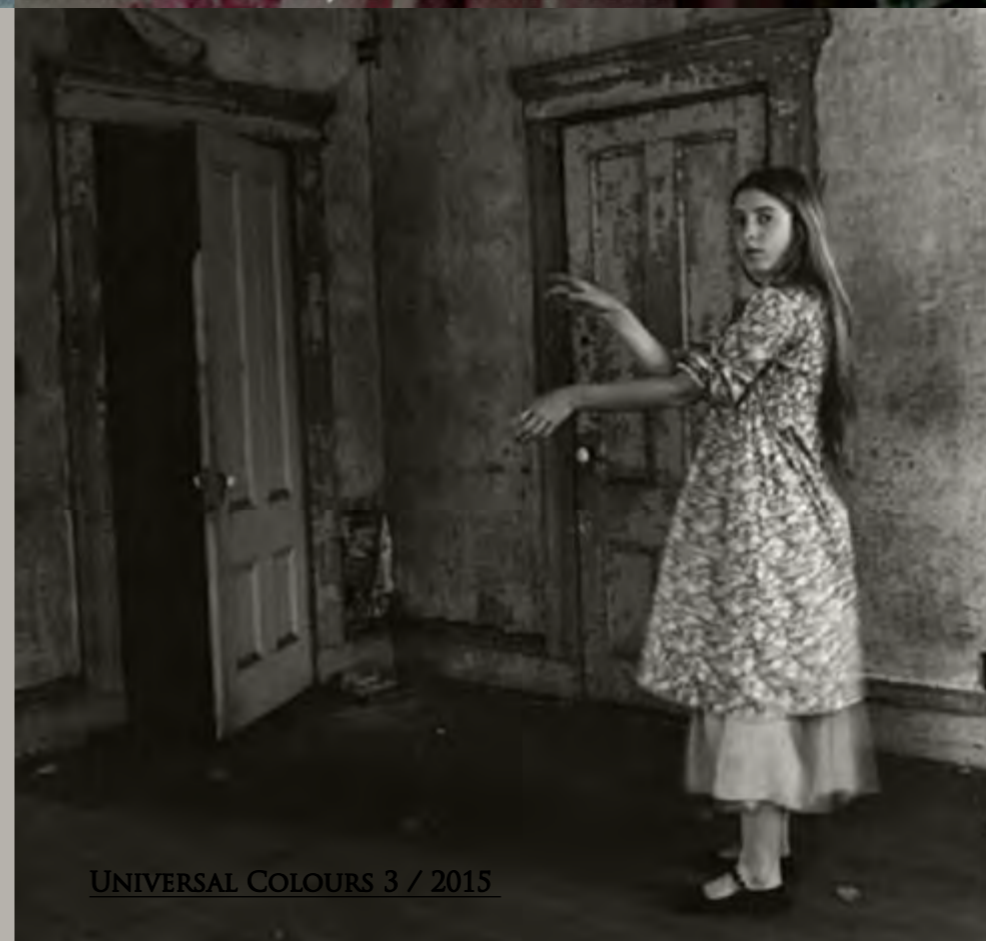
Till September 20, 2015
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Sean Scully at the National Gallery of Ireland marks the artist's 70th birthday. Born in Dublin, Scully, now living and working in New York, retains a powerful sense of Irish identity. He moved to New York at the end of the 1970s and established himself as one of the leading abstract painters of his time.

Responding to minimal art of the 1960s and 1970s, Scully has always striven to associate emotions and phenomena of the world into his art, resisting formalism while rigorously reducing the means he employs – a reduced palette of colours and restricting himself to patterns of vertical and horizontal stripes. Scully has always managed to introduce extraordinary variety into his paintings, while their titles often hint at associations with his life or surroundings.

This exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland charts the two decades, the 1980s and 1990s and juxtaposes paintings from that period with works, principally multi-part photographic sequences, made over the past decade. The exhibition brings together a group of major paintings on loan from Tate, Arts Council England, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Kerlin Gallery, as well as works on paper from a private collection.

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Francesca Woodman

September 5 till December 6, 2015
Moderna Museet
Stockholm - Sweden

The American photographer Francesca Woodman (1958–1981) created a body of fascinating photographic works in a few intense years before her premature death. Her oeuvre has been the object of numerous in-depth studies and major exhibitions in recent years, and her photographs have inspired artists all over the world.

Francesca Woodman began photographing in her teens and studied at the Rhode Island School of Design from 1975 to 1978. Her output is usually divided into periods, from her early works, her years as a student in Providence, Italy (1977-1978), the Mac Dowell Colony, and, lastly, New York from 1979 until she died. The collection she left behind consists of a few hundred gelatin silver prints, but she also tried other techniques, such as large-format diazotypes, colour photography and video.

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SEVEN



Dakar & Île de Gorée

September 3 till 27, 2015
Galleria Jangva
Helsinki Finland

In my youth, I had wonderful opportunities to travel around the world, accompanying my father on his business trips. Later, I visited Beijing in 1988 and Dakar in 1993 to name a few.

In Beijing I began to understand why China is called the "Middle Kingdom", the country is so immense that Finland shrinks to the size of a postage stamp on the world map. The country's ancient culture also inspires respect.

In Dakar the colorful culture is present everywhere; music plays and designs are beautiful. In Dakar, I did not long for concerts or art galleries!

Although the trips were relatively short and lasted at most 2 weeks, I was still able to document my experiences with my camera.

In my exhibition at Gallery Jangva, I will present photographs from Dakar and Île de Gorée, an island outside the city. I am also publishing three photography books from my travels:

Beijing 1988 - Tallinn 1989 - Dakar & Île de Gorée 1993



Franconard in Love

September 16 till
January 24, 2016
Grand Palais
Paris

According to the Goncourt brothers, the eighteenth century was an era of seduction, love and intrigue, and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) might have been its main illustrator, if not its main agent. Indeed, the inspiration of love runs through "Divine Frago's" protean and generous work, from his early bucolic compositions to the love allegories found in his later works. In turn gallant, libertine, daringly lustful or conversely concerned with new love ethics, his art spans half a century of artistic creativity with ardour and elegance, endlessly reinventing itself to better capture the subtle variations of emotion and love impulse. - See more at: <http://www.grandpalais.fr/en/event/fragonard-love#sthash.SCNnPEQ3.dpuf>

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Art in Berlin 1880–1980

December 31, 2015
Berlin Museum of Modern Art

The presentation from our collection to mark the museum's fortieth anniversary will be a multi-faceted tour through the art of Berlin from 1880 to 1980. It will range from paintings of the late 19th century, when the Kaiser reigned and tastes were largely determined by the moneyed classes, via Expressionism and the East European avant-garde to post-war modern architecture and the "wild" works of the Seventies. Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the collection, there will be lively dialogue between paintings, prints, sculpture, photography and architecture. The show will illustrate a diversity of artistic styles and credos, but also tensions, polarisations and fresh departures, which remain hallmarks of Berlin as an artistic hub. As a city of the modern age that is attracting more young international artists than ever before, Berlin is still a centre of permanent new beginnings.

An Elegant Society

Till October 4, 2015
Ashmolean Museum
Oxford

The work of Adam Buck, Regency portrait and miniature painter, provides a fascinating insight into the faces and fashions of this time. Buck's portraits of The Royals, landowners, Serving Officers and society hostesses, dressed in white muslin, seated or standing in fashionable interiors, brings the world of Jane Austen vividly to life. Jane Austen enthusiasts know Adam Buck's work better than most.



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Image Blockade



THE “IMAGE BLOCKADE” is a new body of work by Maayan Amir & Ruti Sela that focuses on the intersection between the visual, political, and legal. The works, made within the framework of the Exterritory project, explore the ties between sensory perception, insubordination, censorship, and advanced technology and their links to the control of images.

The works raise many questions such as: How is the sensory perception of those who are obliged to keep information confidential over time affected? What are the limits of transparency when it comes to activism and documentation? What happens when images that may incriminate their creators are withheld from public view through legal means and cannot be used as evidence?

The exhibition title, “Image Blockade,” is taken from a video that recently premiered at the New Museum Triennial in New York that focuses on a neurological experiment made in collaboration with Weitzman Institute scientists investigating the influence of prolonged exposure to classified material on individuals’ brains. This work will be on view at the CCA along with other new artworks and research by Exterritory.

Initiated by Amir and Sela in 2009, Exterritory is an ongoing art project dedicated to encouraging the theoretical, practical, and interdisciplinary examination of “extraterritoriality,” i.e. being excluded or exempt from the standard system of law within a designated area. The project uses the notion of extraterritoriality to critique power structures and re-imagine practical, conceptual, and poetical possibilities.

The works in “Image Blockade” move beyond the straightforward geographical and judicial notions of extraterritoriality as it pertains to people and spaces to consider

how the concept may be extended to regimes of information, representation, and practices that may produce “extraterritorial images.” The works presented at the CCA offer a riveting look at attempts to regulate images and what that might mean for shaping political worldviews today.

About Exterritory:

The Exterritory project takes shape through art works, research, and varied interventions, collaborations, and public events. Exterritory has presented work and collaborated with numerous institutions, including the Kadist Foundation in Paris, HKW in Berlin, the Union of Comoros Biennial in Moroni, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and the New Museum in New York amongst many others. In 2011, Ruti Sela and Maayan Amir received the Young Artists award from UNESCO for their work on Exterritory. Research by Exterritory has been published in books by Sternberg Press (New York, Berlin) and *Multitudes* (Paris), and has been reviewed in academic journals and catalogs such as the *Colombia University Journal* (New York), *Transfer* (Oxford), *Camera Austria* (Vienna), and others. In 2015, an anthology on Exterritoriality edited by Amir and Sela will be published by Punctum Books (New York).

Exterritory is part of an ongoing collaboration between Sela and Amir whose collaborative work has been presented in exhibitions such as the Biennale of Sydney, the Istanbul Biennial, the Berlin Biennial, Manifesta 8, and at venues such as the Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, Jeu de Paume, Art in General, the Ludwig Museum, and the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, among many others. ■



The Omani plastic artist Nadira Mahmoud

An artist who was exhausted by colours

By: Amir Khatib

DURING MY VISIT TO MUSCAT, I had a chance to meet the Omani artist Nadira Mahmoud. I haven't ever met Nadira before. However, I heard a lot about her. She crowned her early journey in life with colours and lines, and a series of artistic participations and exhibitions in many Arab and European cities.

The plastic circle and the Emirati public had an opportunity to see the early stage of Nadira's plastic experience, when she held her first exhibition, in 1989, outside the Sultanate of Oman, in Sharjah, specifically, upon an invitation from the Department of Culture and Information in the Emirate. Nadira's experience developed and showed more artistic maturity with the development of her plastic activity, since she, two years later, in 1991, held an exhibition in Damascus as a response to an invitation of the Syrian Fine Arts Syndicate, to move, then, to Qairawan in Tunisia, Berlin, and to "the city of light", Paris, in 1994, where she participated in The Arab Women's Creativity Seminar, which was held at the Institute of the Arab world. After that, Nadira continued her solo and group exhibitions in Kuwait, Bahrain, Mexico, Beirut, Spain, Austria, Vienna, the National Museum of Women Arts in Washington, Amman, the Jordanian capital, and Cairo, in addition to her exhibitions in the Netherlands, Italy, Brussels and China.. Her last exhibition was in the hall of Salwa Zeidan, Abu Dhabi, two years ago.

Small museum

We met in her home, the facade of which was similar to most of the houses in Al Qaram neighbourhood, which is located on a high plateau on the outskirts of the Omani capital, Muscat. In this white painted house, I felt myself in the atmosphere of an Art Museum. Many paintings covered its walls. Monuments and statues, large and small, occupied the corners of the house, as well as those of its garden. My eyes tried to grasp the scene while moving rapidly between the paintings and the works of art scattered here and there.

I neither feel alienated, nor resort to compliments. The artist has a wonderful ability to break down the artificial barriers while communicating with her friends and guests, who are, usually, artists, poets, writers and journalists. In this house, she met the late poet Sargon Boulos, Naseer Shamma, Fadel Al-Azzawi, Roberto Chiles, Walid Awni, Awni Krumi, and dozens of artists, poets and critics.



In spite of what I know about Nadira's intimacy and generosity in her human relations, she is, however, scarce in communication with press and journalists. Since she obliged herself to live an optional isolation, in her beautiful house, devoting herself for meditation and painting, she, in my opinion, became an obvious example of the dedication for the sake of art.

It seemed that the artist noticed my confusion, when she initiated and asked me to accompany her for a tour around the house. Perhaps, she wanted, at the same time, to answer, indirectly, the dozens of questions that were jumping to my mind.

All the house walls, in the rooms and corridors, were filled with dozens of rare pieces of art, along with paintings by the most important Arab artists. For a moment, the intensity of the aesthetic scene that I faced, made me dizzy. I felt as if I were hovering in an unlimited space.

Out of everything I saw, the most amazing were not the elegance and the arrangement of the house, nor the large number of art works and paintings which are hanged on its walls and painted by famous Arab artists such as Fateh Al Mudarres, Albahjori, Dia'a Al-Ezzawi, Adi Al-Siwi, Shaker Hassan Al Saeed, Ismail Fattah Al Turk, Adonis, Shuaibiah, Naziha Saleem, Ala'a Bashir, Itil Adnan and Paul Gagarcian. The real surprise, for me at least, was in the character of this lady and her amazing and interesting love of art. She was speaking energetically, to explain or comment on a painting by Adonis, or on a work by Fateh Al Mudarres. Nadira knows a lot of things about the lives of the artists whose works she obtains, because she met them during her travels outside Oman.

The artist's visits to the art museums spread in the eastern and western capitals and cities, and her acquaintance with both, classic and modern experiences, gave her a critical and delicate sense toward everything she sees. She says that, in relation to art, she doesn't compliment, since the beautiful painting must catch sight at the first view.

When I asked her, what have you learned from your long wandering around the world of art? She answered bitterly: "one gets a sense of losing cultural balance when compares what we have in our countries, with things seen there. I keep wonder, what have we done comparing with this world, and with these great achievements, in all knowledge, architectural and religious fields, and with their artistic side, specifically".

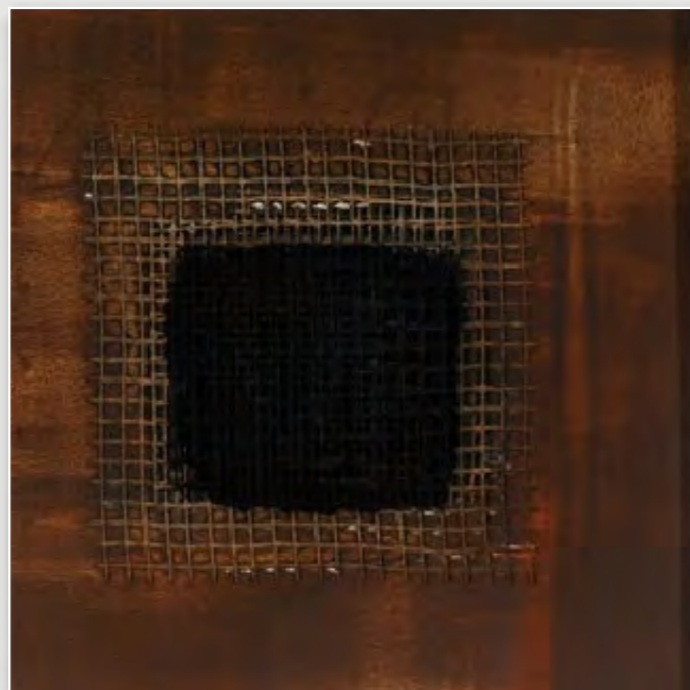
How does Nadira Mahmoud paint?

Nadira Mahmoud started her relationship with painting before she learn how to read and write. She says: "Once, one of my family members gave me a box of colours and sketch book, as a present. I don't remember now who was this person, but I remember well those moments, as if this happened in the near past." In those early days, her artistic awareness first fruits began to take shape. This was reflected through her admiration with the Iraqi artist Shaker Hassan Al Saeed's works, and the late Syrian artist Fateh Al Mudarres's, besides, their ideas about art and life.

When Nadira held the sceptre of art, and painted the first paintings, her touches seemed mature and her lines strong. She didn't received any education in art academies, rather, she found herself involved in studying law. She, obviously, spent a long time working hard to shape her own plastic style, through meditation. The artist has a natural tendency to isolation and seclusion. Keeping away from the academic education and determining her attitude toward the artistic process as a whole, will affect, necessarily, her attitude toward the world. In this sense, she realizes the speech of the Iraqi artist, Shaker Hassan Al Saeed: "The originality never comes as a result of adopting the technique or the style of quoting the heritage, but from discovering the nature of the artist's attitude in his time, and working, then, to build a new vision."

Nadira's works have a special flavour. This characterizes her early exhibitions in Muscat, Sharjah and Damascus, as well as her solo exhibitions that she held at a later stage in Cairo, Beirut, Britain and Germany. In all her works there is a warm spirit that launches signals full of ecstasy. The colours in her early works were hot, strong and excited, but later on, and by time, this surge calmed down to settle at calm shades, ranging between white, dusty and light brown, with degrees that rise quietly to end, in varying cases, at dark brown or grey. It is a quiet spirit, which is full of contemplation that touches mysterious aspects of the human soul, so, reminds with quavers of Al Hallaj and Ibn Arabi.

When I saw Nadira Mahmoud's recent paintings, I got a feel of peace. It was something like a drug tranquillity seeped into a hidden depth in the soul. In fact, the viewer stands in front of an abstract painting, which is free of the characters or any



references to any external subject, where there is no classical decorative and embellishing margin, used usually by the artists, to fill the blanks in their works, such as the inherited decorative themes or the different classical forms used in miniatures. Nadira pursues a completely different approach. She exercises a kind of heavy work, when she craves, scrapes off and burns the painting surface, as if she were looking for ancient monuments coming from the depths of the soul, not from the lives of those beings who pass through space and time, as Shaker Hassan Al Saeed had done in his murals. Because of her approach, Nadira's paintings became charged with an energy related to fragile and deep internal emotions. So, no wonder that the late Syrian artist Fateh Al Mudarres describes her works as "a spiritual prayer which is very similar to the creep of a magic sap in an invisible tree; perhaps, the tree of life."

Nadira looks at the painting as a structure, or as a perfect independent life, not as a sign or a hint to an external value. She deals with it, first, as a meditation, and then, as an expression of internal emotions. That's why she settles her perception according to this sense. So, she needs not illusion, any more, that is, she rejects to collude with a two-dimension surface, in order to create a third one.. I think she was able to provide a new and unique experience in the one-dimension theory, in the orbit of which, many Arab artists keep wandering, and unable, yet, to leave the zone of Shaker Hassan Al Saeed.

I told her: your works may seem difficult to be understood by a recipient who didn't receive a hard training to deal with such themes. She replied: "I agree with you. For a long time, the taste of the Arab recipient was exposed to distortion, the matter that led him to be unable to read the painting by his heart, but only by his eyes. The Arabic and Islamic decoration is an abstract art, in the modern concept, because it depends on repeated visual units, filled blanks and chromatography economy. However, you may be surprised when I say that most of those who acquire my works are foreigners, and from Germany and Japan, specifically."

Nadira's works, as a whole, are similar, in their performance, to a concerto that repeats one piece of music. But, seeing one, two or a hundred works, doesn't frustrate the viewer's eye, or stop its demand for the more. Her work stimulates the insight to keep meditating, and the soul to continue viewing. In each painting there is a tune,

which differs, to some degree, and consists to other, with the preceded or followed works. That's why, during her career, the artist's production, which continued for three decades, never exposed to violent structural coups or stylistic changes.

Nadira's abstractions carry with them a deep struggle against noise. When I asked her about the amazing chromatography economy, and her resisting for the colour's temptations, she said: "colours exhaust me. Look at my house, look at Muscat, at its mountains, valleys and desert, look at my clothes, everything is white or trying to be closer to white."

I realized that Nadira's painting is achieved according not only to the aesthetic logic, but also, to the logic of intuition toward work, which is almost close, in its rigor, to the logic of music. Thus, I wasn't surprised when she told me: "When I start working, I don't draw a single painting, but a group of paintings together. I know the details of each step, as if it were written in my mind. By my intuition, I know when I have to stop working. I don't collude with myself. I just have a law, which declares stop playing, the whole playing all together."

Riwaq Oman

The role of the Omani artist Nadira Mahmoud, did not stop at her artistic production, which comes as paintings and many exhibitions she held in the cities of the Arab Gulf, the Arab world and the world, but expanded to include persistent attempts to build a modern artistic taste in her country, Oman. According to her, the painting isn't just a wall decor, or a response to a hungry eye for repeated and familiar natural scenes. She mocks at the painting that contains mountains, plains, seas or a bouquet. Nadira says: "painting is not just a picture of something copied literally, to become an imitation of the photograph".

Nadira introduced a new and contemporary concept about the painting as a meditation and a deep craving in the soul. This awareness, that marked the life and work of the artist, resulted the establishment of the first "Gallery" for the Contemporary Arts in Muscat. She called it "Riwaq Oman". Thanks to this gallery, the artist put the Omani plastic scene in the heart of the contemporary Arab plastic movement, when Nadira exhibited the works of dozens of Arab pioneer artists, who founded the Arab Plastic Pyramid. So, I have no doubt that she inspired many Omani and Gulf artists, and



incited them not to stay at the surface, but to work deep in the painting.

There is no doubt that talking about Nadira Mahmoud's life and art needs a long pause. There are many details and stories, each one of them can constitute a full chapter of her long career in art and life. She is interested in photography, and has a huge archive of the photographs of places she visited all over the world, and for the important personalities she met. Moreover, she is interested, in sculpture and the structural art works, which can be materials of an upcoming exhibition, we hope to see soon. However, the most marvellous thing, for me, was the artist's fond of animals! In her house, I saw a little white dog and a group of cats!

I Left Nadira Mahmoud's house, but I felt as if I were still there. Something out of this house fixed to me. At the same time, I, probably, forgot a lot of things of my soul. ■



<http://hyperallergic.com/25076/wtf-is-performance-art/>

WTF IS PERFORMANCE ART?

By: Kyle Chayka



YOU MAY HAVE HEARD that James Franco and Lady Gaga are performance artists, that their careers themselves are art objects built up over a lifetime. You may also believe that your Uncle Bob farting the alphabet is performance art. And maybe it is! Really, it's up to you, there's no quick and easy chart to tell what is performance art and what isn't. Nevertheless, there are a few guidelines to follow when defining performance, in the context of the medium's history as well as its current practice. Despite what you've heard, there are good reasons that getting carried into the Grammys in an egg isn't really an act of performance art.

If we were to assign performance art a single defining characteristic, it would probably be the fact that a piece of performance art must be centered on an action carried out or orchestrated by an artist, a time-based rather than permanent artistic gesture that has a beginning and an end. Documentation of the performance might live on forever, from photos and artifacts to full video documentation, but the performance itself is ephemeral. If you were lucky enough to be in the audience, then what you witnessed was the true work of performance art. The rest of us are just seeing the leftovers, iconic as they may be.

Though art historians often cite Futurists and Dadaists among the first performance art practitioners, performance art first came into being as a discrete movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with early practitioners including artist-shaman Joseph Beuys, Fluxus artist Yoko Ono and “Happenings” creator Alan Kaprow. Yet just because these artists pioneered performance art doesn’t mean they only created performance pieces. Performance art isn’t defined by the artist’s career, but rather by the individual piece — a painter can make a performance and a performance artist can make a painting. Early performance pieces were very interdisciplinary events, mingling music, sculptural stage props, immersive installation and music. Kaprow’s 1959 “18 Happenings in 6 Parts” “involved an audience moving together to experience elements such as a band playing toy instruments, a woman squeezing an orange, and painters painting,” according to the artist’s 2006 obituary by New York Times art critic Holland Cotter.

Other performances were more austere. Bueys’s 1974 “I Like America and America Likes Me” saw the artist stay in a gallery space for three days, wrapping himself in felt and sharing the space with a wild coyote. A piece of performance art doesn’t even necessarily need to have an audience; it just has to happen. Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta’s performances, many involving human figure-shaped depressions dug into outdoor landscapes, now only exist as photographs. No one was witness to the work save the camera and the photographer. Yet the photograph isn’t the art object; it’s actually almost incidental to the original act.

“It’s the action that’s the art, not so much the physical result,” says performance art curator and performance-only Grace Exhibition Space co-director Erik Hokanson. “A lot of times there’s little or no result other than what you walk away from the piece with thinking or feeling.” Another example of this would be German artist Anselm Kiefer’s early pieces in which the artist photographed himself giving the Nazi salute in landscapes around Europe. The photos are powerful, but it’s the act that reminds us of the still-sharp memory of Nazi Germany’s expansion through the continent. Notes performance artist and curator Peter Dohill in an email, “Performance art ... exists only within the time it is created, but is often viewed in perpetuity through documentation.”

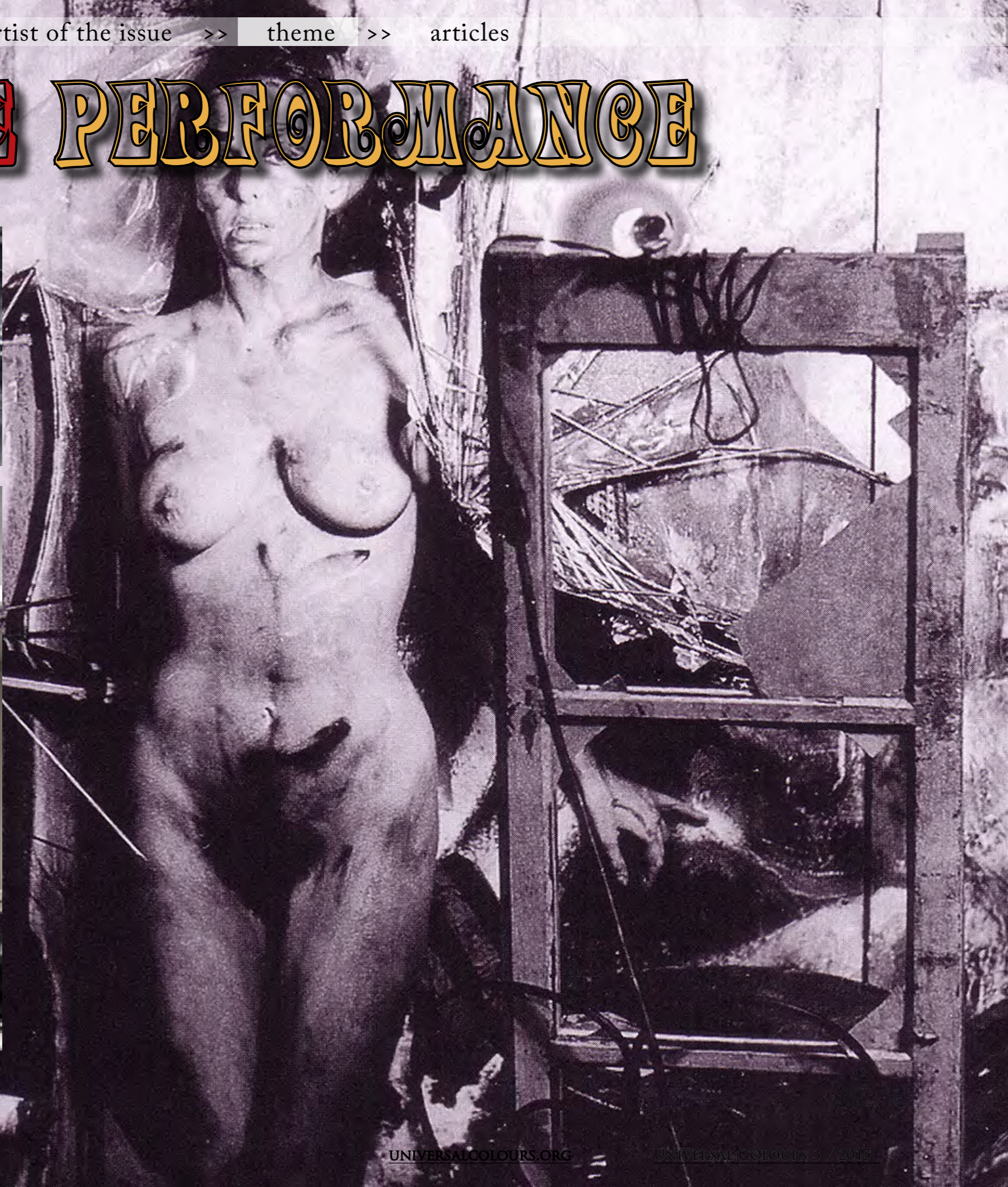
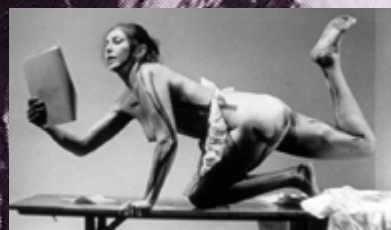
The idea of performance versus document has come into sharp relief as performance art has asserted itself as a medium. When a performance is documented and the resulting work becomes an art historical icon, should the photographer or the performer get the credit? A recent Museum of Modern Art exhibition asked the question. But again, performances don’t need documentation to be effective. A successful performance is “all about how well the artist is able to convey their idea,” Hokanson says.

So ask yourself: does Lady Gaga’s egg “performance” provoke any deeper thoughts about the act itself? Does playing at an alien-shaped piano in Alexander McQueen boots create any abstract symbolism? Does farting the alphabet have a lasting meaning beyond its ephemeral existence? Probably not. ■



PURE PERFORMANCE

By: Thanos Kalamidas



HAVING GROWN AND LIVED THE 1960S and 1970s I have the feeling that this chronological era identifies the best way the whole meaning of performance art. It was the era where poets didn't read their poem but performed them. They danced and acted on them. They used their hands and their body as a toll to simulate the verses.

This fast expanded in all forms of art that period, music was not just performing an instrument but it became a whole theatrical play and painting became a show where the actual act of painting became part of the painting. And despite all arguments there is a clear line between performance art and performing art. Performance is not the same as theatre or ballet.

Where at least for me this line is not clear is between actually doing performance art and trying to attract recognition, ten minutes of fame and in the end money. I think the best example is Marina Abramović who perhaps had a brilliant idea of a concept when she started but she actually ridiculed it herself by making it a forum for contemporary media celebrities.

I suppose best example will always be Carolee Schneemann, an American visual artist, known for her discourses on the body, sexuality and gender who mainly acted during 1970s. Carolee Schneemann performed "Interior Scroll" at Ashawagh Hall in Springs in 1975. The piece is now considered a benchmark in art history.

Carolee Schneemann took performance art to new levels actually putting the theoretical boundaries to its expressionism. Through her variegated activities in painting, filmmaking, video art and performance, in particular, Carolee Schneemann has always worked on the theme of women's self-determination, rejecting the idea of "his-story" narrated from a male viewpoint. Her exhibition "The Great Mother" crosses the history of the 20th century from a feminist perspective, amidst struggles for emancipation, transformations of sexuality and perception of the body.

Chinese Zhang Huan, a contemporary performance artist is part of the school Carolee Schneemann created and I'm sorry to say, a school Marina Abramović would like to be part of.

The best way to understand performance art is to let yourself perform it. Read a poem and let your body act to it, make a sketch and let your face act the expressions of your effect. Check Carolee Schneemann work and then you will somehow understand the concept in its purest form!

Performance visual art

By: Amir Khatib

THIS IS AN OPINION MORE THAN IT IS AN ARTICLE!

When the word “performance” comes to mind, everybody traditionally can see someone showing something with the movement of the body, or presented to an audience within a fine art context. Performance may be either scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated; spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation. The performance can be live or via media; the performer can be present or absent. It can be any situation that involves four basic elements: time, space, the performer’s body.

But why we consider or perform it within the visual context? It is, as I see it, in between mime theatre and the visual presentation, and because it is expressed by body movement, it is very close to the visual art.

If we see the history of this type of art, it is quiet new or one can say still people are debating about it if they consider it as an art or not, but I think that it is an art by itself and that gives a new type of art, but the question remain, why artists perform it with the visual art show?

As new comer to Europe I saw this type of art was in Turku, Finland the year 1993 or 1994 when I was studding at the Turku Art Academy at that time has some other name, anyway I get an invitation to go to some exhibition opening at some well-known gallery of the city.





Some celebrity artist was showing his works as I went while the show had gather a big audience. I watched the artist performing wearing a cleaner's cloths, I did not understand it then but I thought that he imitate Dally or someone who want to be strange.

The artist was walking between the audience, greeting them when he saw me, immediately he said in English welcome sir and left away. After while he took an empty glass of wine and clink on it to attract the attention of the audience as they all do in such parties.

He put the glass aside and start to sweep the flour, walking between the audiences and welcoming them as if he did nothing special or nothing has happened. Yes, after 5 minutes he finished and we were normally back to drink wine and enjoy the rest of the evening.

That type of art should be recognized as its own art, even though I was for long wondering why the artist himself was performing it.

I think this came during the 80s or the end of the 80s, people tired of seeing just exhibitions, without any happening, just some speech here or there; artists were looking for a movement or in other word to move the openings ceremony to something else, but without knowing that they did create a new type of art, the did. ■

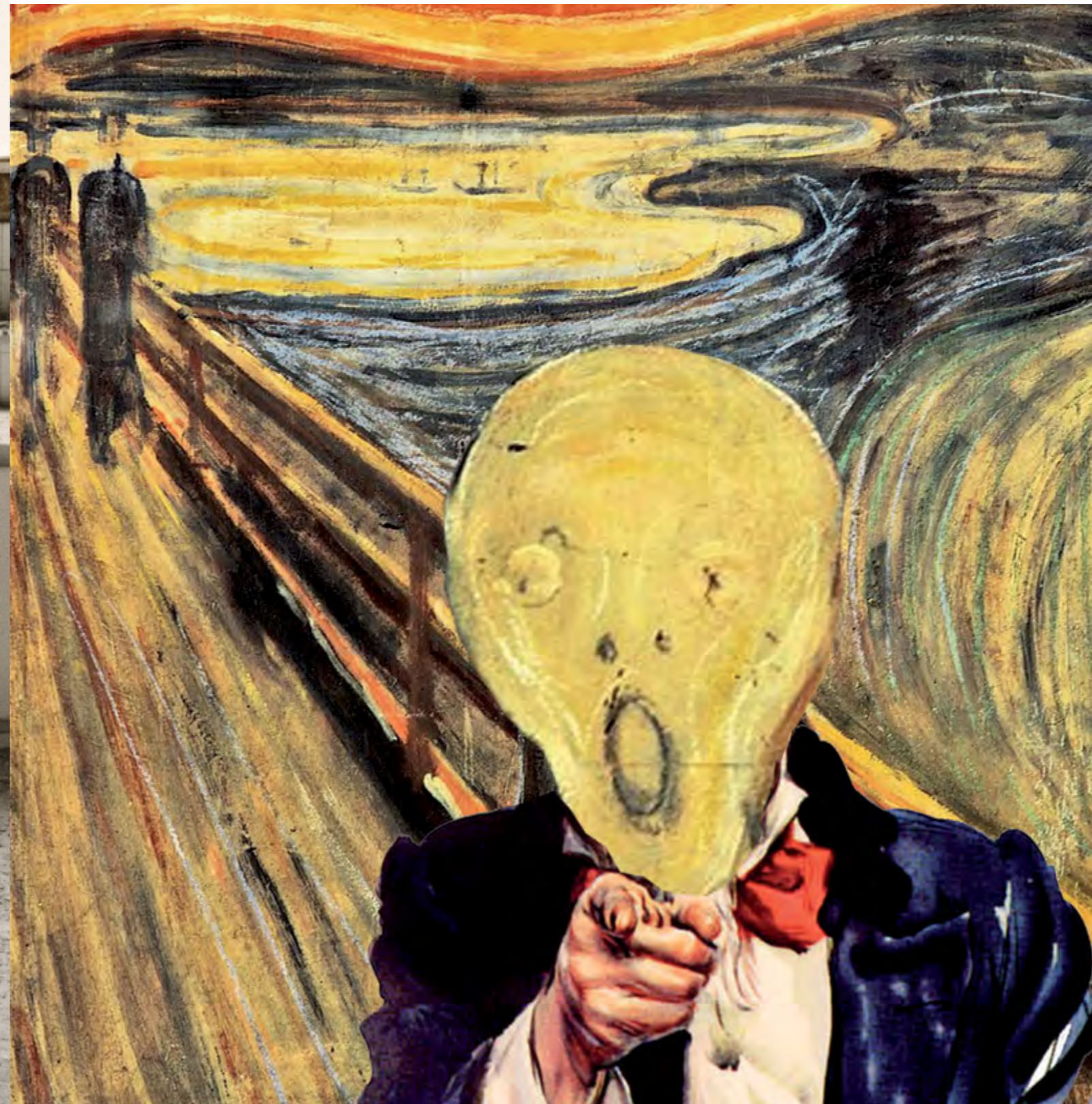



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Performance Art in history

Performance is a genre in which art is presented “live,” usually by the artist but sometimes with collaborators or performers. It has had a role in avant-garde art throughout the 20th century, playing an important part in anarchic movements such as Futurism and Dada. Indeed, whenever artists have become discontented with conventional forms of art, such as painting and traditional modes of sculpture, they have often turned to performance as a means to rejuvenate their work. The most significant flourishing of performance art took place following the decline of modernism and Abstract Expressionism in the 1960s, and it found exponents across the world.

Performance art of this period was particularly focused on the body, and is often referred to as Body art. This reflects the period’s so-called “dematerialization of the art object,” and the flight from traditional media. It also reflects the political ferment of the time: the rise of feminism, which encouraged thought about the division between the personal and political and anti-war activism, which supplied models for politicized art “actions.” Although the concerns of performance artists have changed since the 1960s, the genre has remained a constant presence, and has largely been welcomed into the conventional museums and galleries from which it was once excluded.

The foremost purpose of performance art has almost always been to challenge the conventions of traditional forms of visual art such as painting and sculpture. When these modes no longer seem to answer artists’ needs - when they seem too conservative, or too enmeshed in the traditional art world and too distant from ordinary people - artists have often turned to performance in order to find new audiences and test new ideas.

Performance art borrows styles and ideas from other forms of art, or sometimes from other forms of activity not associated with art, like ritual, or work-like tasks. If cabaret and vaudeville inspired aspects of Dada performance, this reflects Dada’s desire to embrace popular art forms and mass cultural modes of address. More



recently, performance artists have borrowed from dance, and even sport.

Some varieties of performance from the post-war period are commonly described as “actions.” German artists like Joseph Beuys preferred this term because it distinguished art performance from the more conventional kinds of entertainment found in theatre. But the term also reflects a strain of American performance art that could be said to emerge out of a reinterpretation of “action painting,” in which the object of art is no longer paint on canvas, but something else - often the artist’s own body.

The focus on the body in so much performance art of the 1960s has sometimes been seen as a consequence of the crisis in conventional media. Faith having collapsed in media such as painting, creativity ricocheted back on to the artist’s own body. Some saw this as a liberation, part of the period’s expansion of materials and media. Others wondered if it reflected a more fundamental crisis in the institution of art itself, a sign that art was exhausting its resources.

The performance art of the 1960s can be seen as just one of the many disparate trends that developed in the wake of Minimalism. Seen in this way, it is an aspect of Post-Minimalism, and it could be seen to share qualities of Process art, another tendency central to that umbrella style. If Process art focused attention on the techniques and materials of art production, so did aspects of performance. Process art was also often intrigued by the possibilities of mundane and repetitive activities; similarly, many performance artists were attracted to task-based activities that were very foreign to the highly choreographed and ritualized performances in traditional theatre or dance. ■

Performance art ...a problematic term

By: Ali Najjar

IBELIEVED THAT the art of performance, let's call it performing with multiple elements - time, place, the flesh, the audience - is located on the edge of the known artistic creations of the present era. It actually places us in a conceptual of confusion, a field lost in its own being which is not without ingenuity and often loses the principals of an artwork. Its clear-cut based on the general effects of renderings contemporary art.

Often not without some exploitation from the media. And as much as the elements lose their borders, they also establish a new taste of a cross-border action. An area in which many of the creations and their disciplines represented. Often exceed them herein lies about our freedom of knowledge in a field drilling for appropriate terms inside its humanitarian acts.

Maybe if we had introduced the term as a technical effectiveness to live, we may had been more appropriate. But then we would also be non-true; it does not include some of the activities in this technically-oriented universe, despite the focus on the human element generally as the raw material. Performance today covers most enactments, whether in enclosed private spaces, in public or in the open.

Based on this concept, we can evoke the theatre Noh, which the Japanese established in the fourteenth century, within the era of these performances, after strip it of its connotations indicative existence. Or perhaps the activities of the demobilized gestural as long as the demobilized from within. Or even implicit psychological inspiration provided renderings or social connotations, which are exotic dearly. Dialogue as well as personal and public suggestions and versatility in leading this invention of the motor efficiency, or audio that are often performed within the ritual vexatious, or convention, in a bid to restore or evoke certain technical patterns and forms, to serve process performance and to form a hybrid appearance.

In performance art we are looking at the people, not the production. Keeping only what milestone archiving moot. Archiving is not an art, but if you lose the archival and turn it into performance. Even if that performance turns out to be film a video. That might lose the human element. But from this point the act becomes a subject for a moment, facing the recipient or surprise the audience, which is an integral part of the subject and its function. Not just a supplement, or a secondary component. This does not mean that the involvement of other elements don't complement or help.

All the arts are subject to performance today. Detailing for the progress of their productions. But I think that not all performance are art, for example, painters with impressionistic nature, don't accomplice their mission without an element of rebellion. In addition reach for motives of the modernist movement, in the late nineteenth century, which lasted for more than a decade. And what if the art belongs to the academic culture of the bourgeoisie. Impressionism moved away, dismantled in favour of the view, the rebel studio specifications and "realistic" bourgeois action.

Academics evoked the outside to inside the studio. Thus entered the kinetic factors others in the artwork industry, blowing a quick brush, another element of the performing elements, and the pursuit of optical climate features of changes, and the exploitation of the snapshot photographic mechanically movement, the fourth element. Impressionism did not performed a school or a technical pattern itself. But it was an important factor that raised from the elements and the independence of its philosophy. It was not performing in the flesh, but it was a physical tool.

The passage of the twentieth century took the largest performance space in the works of Dada and the Surrealists, down to the French performance artist of today (Yves Klein) in the middle of the century. Performance art is also there in the abstract expressionism in the western half of the globe with Pollock and others. And it may turn into performance art Circus Arts if it was a worth expressive cultural communicative.

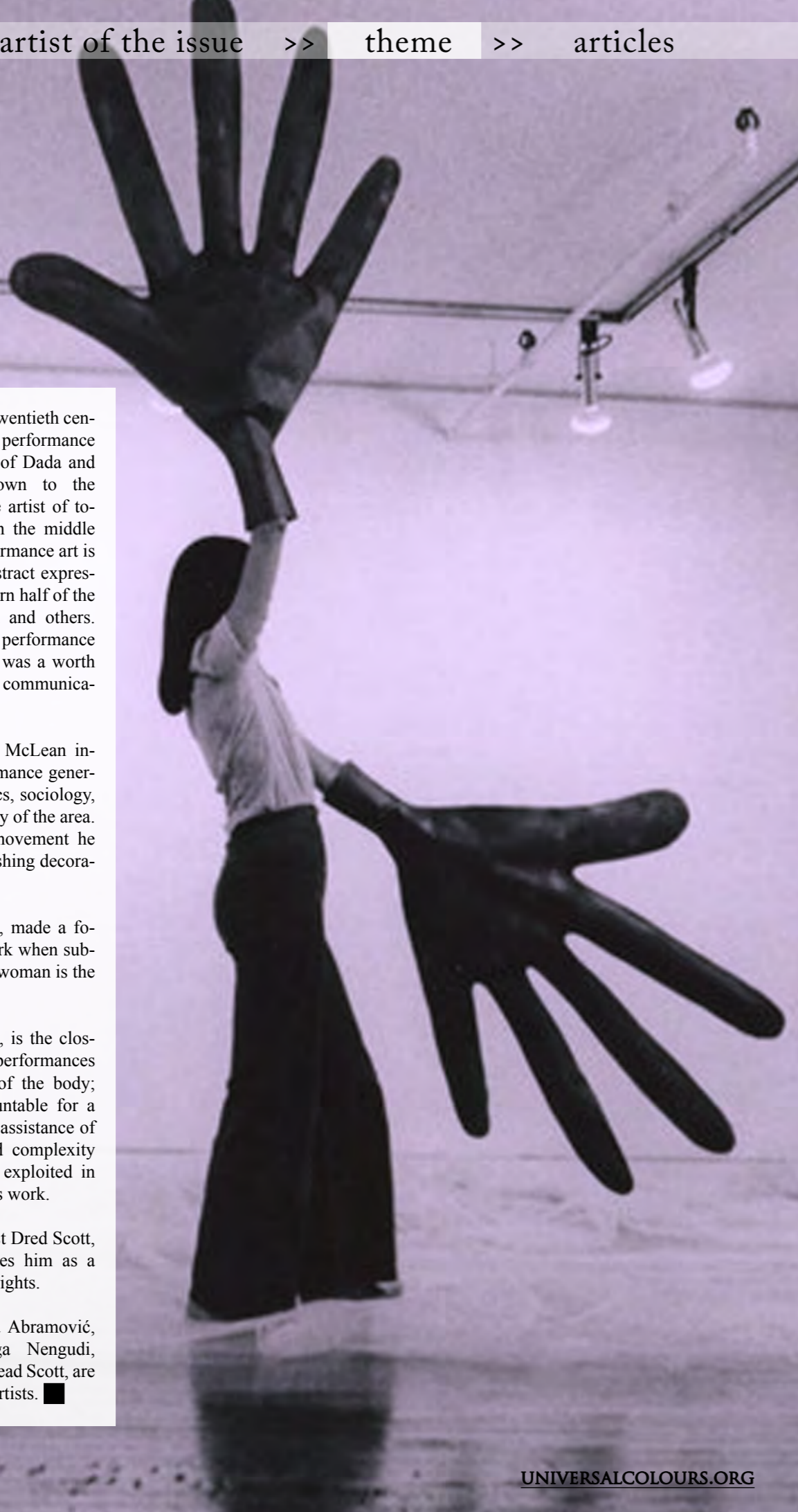
In Scotland, Lester McLean includes in his performance general issues, like politics, sociology, ethics, and the beauty of the area. With the help of movement he tries scenes of furnishing decorative elements.

Swedish, I Bernson, made a focal point for her work when submerge as fluid. The woman is the focus of her work.

US artist John Kurt, is the closest to the artist performances through the stress of the body; connected insurmountable for a long time. With the assistance of the multiplicity and complexity of sources that are exploited in the production of his work.

Perhaps the US artist Dred Scott, performance qualifies him as a defender of human rights.

Yves Klein, Marina Abramović, Zang Huan, Senga Nengudi, Anna Berndtson, Dred Scott, are more performance artists. ■



TREAT THE
EARTH WELL.
IT WAS NOT
GIVEN TO YOU
BY YOUR
PARENTS,
IT WAS
LOANED
TO YOU
BY YOUR
CHILDREN

When Art Intersects With Life

By Dr. Virginia B. Spivey

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/global-culture/conceptual-performance/a/performance-art-an-introduction>

MANY PEOPLE ASSOCIATE PERFORMANCE ART with highly publicized controversies over government funding of the arts, censorship, and standards of public decency. Indeed, at its worst, performance art can seem gratuitous, boring or just plain weird. But, at its best, it taps into our most basic shared instincts: our physical and psychological needs for food, shelter, sex, and human interaction; our individual fears and self-consciousness; our concerns about life, the future, and the world we live in. It often forces us to think about issues in a way that can be disturbing and uncomfortable, but it can also make us laugh by calling attention to the absurdities in life and the idiosyncrasies of human behavior.

Performance art differs from traditional theater in its rejection of a clear narrative, use of random or chance-based structures, and direct appeal to the audience. The art historian RoseLee Goldberg writes:

Historically, performance art has been a medium that challenges and violates borders between disciplines and genders, between private and public, and between everyday life and art, and that follows no rules. *

Although the term encompasses a broad range of artistic practices that involve bodily experience and live action, its radical connotations derive from this challenge to conventional social mores and artistic values of the past.

Historical Sources

While performance art is a relatively new area of art history, it has roots in experimental art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Echoing utopian ideas of the period's avant-garde, these earliest examples found influences in theatrical and music performance, art, poetry, burlesque and other popular entertainment. Modern artists used live events to promote extremist beliefs, often through deliberate provocation and attempts to offend bourgeois tastes or expectations. In Italy, the anarchist group of Futurist artists insulted and hurled profanity at their middle-class audiences in hopes of inciting political action.

Following World War II, performance emerged as a useful way for artists to explore philosophical and psychological questions about human existence. For this generation, who had witnessed destruction caused by the Holocaust and atomic bomb, the body offered a powerful medium to communicate shared physical and emotional experience. Whereas painting and sculpture relied on expressive form and content to convey meaning, performance art forced viewers to engage with a real person who could feel cold and hunger, fear and pain, excitement and embarrassment—just like them.

Action & Contingency

Some artists, inspired largely by Abstract Expressionism, used performance to emphasize the body's role in artistic production. Working before a live audience, Kazuo Shiraga of the Japanese Gutai Group made sculpture by crawling through a pile of mud. Georges Mathieu staged similar performances in Paris where he violently threw paint at his canvas. These performative approaches to making art built on philosophical interpretations of Abstract Expressionism, which held the gestural markings of action painters as visible evidence of the artist's own existence. Bolstered by Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock in his studio, moving dance-like around a canvas on the floor, artists like Shiraga and Mathieu began to see the artist's creative act as equally important, if not more so, to the artwork produced. In this light, Pollock's distinctive drips, spills and splatters appeared as a mere remnant, a visible trace left over from the moment of creation.

Shifting attention from the art object to the artist's action further suggested that art existed in real space and real time. In New York, visual artists combined their interest in action painting with ideas of the avant-garde composer John Cage to blur the line between art and life. Cage employed chance procedures to create musical compositions such as *4'33"*. In this (in)famous piece, Cage used the time frame specified in the title to bracket ambient noises that occurred randomly during the performance. By effectively calling attention to the hum of fluorescent lights, people moving in their seats, coughs, whispers, and other ordinary sounds, Cage transformed them into a unique musical composition.

The Private Made Political

Drawing on these influences, new artistic formats emerged in the late 1950s. Environments and Happenings physically placed viewers in commonplace surroundings, often forcing them to participate in a series of loosely structured actions. Fluxus artists, poets, and musicians likewise challenged viewers by presenting the most mundane events—brushing teeth, making a salad, exiting the theater—as forms of art. A well-known example is the “bed-in” that Fluxus artist Yoko Ono staged in 1969 in Amsterdam with her husband John Lennon. Typical of much performance art, Ono and Lennon made ordinary human activity a public spectacle, which demanded personal interaction and raised popular awareness of their pacifist beliefs.

In the politicized environment of the 1960s, many artists employed performance to address emerging social concerns. For feminist artists in particular, using their body in live performance proved effective in challenging historical representations of women, made mostly by male artists for male patrons. In keeping with past tradition, artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke and Valie Export displayed their nude bodies for the viewer's gaze; but, they resisted the idealized notion of women as passive objects of beauty and desire.



Through their words and actions, they confronted their audiences and raised issues about the relationship of female experience to cultural beliefs and institutions, physical appearance, and bodily functions including menstruation and childbearing. Their ground-breaking work paved the way for male and female artists in the 1980s and 1990s, who similarly used body and performance art to explore issues of gender, race and sexual identity.

Where Is It?

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, performance has been closely tied to the search for alternatives to established art forms, which many artists felt had become fetishized as objects of economic and cultural value. Because performance art emphasized the artist's action and the viewer's experience in real space and time, it rarely yielded a final object to be sold, collected, or exhibited. Artists of the 1960 and 70s also experimented with other “dematerialized” formats including Earthworks and Conceptual Art that resisted commodification and traditional modes of museum display. The simultaneous rise of photography and video, however, offered artists a viable way to document and widely distribute this new work.

Performance art's acceptance into the mainstream over the past 30 years has led to new trends in its practice and understanding. Ironically, the need to position performance within art's history has led museums and scholars to focus heavily on photographs and videos that were intended only as documents of live events. In this context, such archival materials assume the art status of the original performance. This practice runs counter to the goal of many artists, who first turned to performance as an alternative to object-based forms of art. Alternatively, some artists and institutions now stage re-enactments of earlier performances in order to recapture the experience of a live event. In a 2010 retrospective exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, for example, performers in the galleries staged live reenactments of works by the pioneering performance artist Marina Abramovic, alongside photographs and video documentation of the original performances.

Don't Try This At Home

New strategies, variously described as situations, relational aesthetics, and interventionist art, have recently begun to appear. Interested in the social role of the artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija stages performances that encourage interpersonal exchange and shared conversation among individuals who might not otherwise meet. His performances have included cooking traditional Thai dinners in museums for viewers to share, and relocating the entire contents of a gallery's offices and storage rooms, including the director at his desk, into public areas used to exhibit art. Similar to performance art of the past, such approaches engage the viewer and encourage their active participation in artistic production; however, they also speak to a cultural shift toward interactive modes of communication and social exchange that characterize the 21st century. ■

Noises off: What's the difference between performance art and theatre?

By Chris Wilkinson

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/jul/20/noises-off-performance-art-theatre>

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ SAYS she hates theatre because it's fake, but surely audiences understand the nature of theatrical illusion? "To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake: there is a black box, you pay for a ticket, and you sit in the dark and see somebody playing somebody else's life. The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. It's a very different concept. It's about true reality." These are the combative words of the self-proclaimed "grandmother of performance art", Marina Abramović. She spoke them recently, while promoting a retrospective of her work that was going to take place in New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Now for starters, you might wonder why, if she hates theatre so much, she's contributing to a book called *Theatre and the Body*. But aside from this, is what she is saying actually true? Chris Goode recently attacked these comments, describing them as "hateful". He was prompted by the performance company *Improbable's* new version of *Lifegame* at the Lyric. This show, he argues, makes the "standard issue Live Art rejection of theatre ... seem not much more than stupid". And this leads him on to make the case that the conventional trappings of the theatre – a proscenium arch, and audience sat watching in the dark – are by no means antithetical to the creation of work which is truly radical.



You could even argue that it is these precise conventions – which strike Abramović as so artificial – that give theatre its power. After all, as Dan Reballato has pointed out here recently, audiences are not stupid, and are perfectly capable of understanding the nature of theatrical illusion.

In fact, when an audience is required to see something as both real and unreal simultaneously there arises a creative and imaginative tension that enables us to transcend the mundanity of real life, and which can create a kind of playfulness. This is an idea that is well articulated in a short essay by Jimmy Stewart (no, not that one) that Tassos Stevens recently posted on his blog: "Play is make believe at the double. I look at something and I first see what it is, or at least what I believe it is, be it Simon Russell Beale, a banana, February 14th. But then I make believe what if that what is were something else: Hamlet, a revolver, the feast of St Valentine. What if. What is. We're playful when we hold two spheres of belief in our brains overlapping. Humans are really good at it."

In other news, the Forest Fringe is continuing to unveil its program of work for its upcoming festival in Edinburgh. In a significant departure from previous years they are now going to be curating three "making days": "Part scratch, part workshop, part discussion, each making day is a chance for a group of artists to explore a different way of making live performance." The days will be led by an impressive array of practitioners – from Melanie Wilson to Adrian Howells – and their aim is to encourage creativity and long-term collaboration. It's a fantastic idea, and one that demonstrates why Forest Fringe's contribution to the otherwise unrelentingly cut-throat atmosphere of the Edinburgh Fringe continues to be so vital.

Finally, have you ever wondered what it might have looked like had Harold Pinter earned his living designing video games? Of course you have. Well the answer to this can be found via Matt Freeman's blog, where he has posted this video of Harold Pinter's *Duck Hunt*, performed as part of Brick theatre's *Game Play* festival. On the basis of this evidence, it's surely a huge relief that Pinter kept his talents focussed squarely on the stage. ■

In defense of performance art

By Guillermo Gómez-Peña

http://www.pochanostra.com/antes/jazz_pocha2/mainpages/in_defense.htm

FOR TWENTY YEARS, JOURNALISTS, audience members and relatives have asked me the same two questions in different ways: What “exactly” is performance art? And, what makes a performance artist be one, think and act like one? In this text, I will attempt to answer these questions elliptically by drawing a poetical portrait of the performance artist standing on a map of the performance art field, as I perceive it. To be congruent with my performance praxis, while attempting to answer these thorny questions, I will constantly cross the borders between theory and chronicle; between the personal and the social realms; between “I” and “we,” in hopes to come across some interesting cross-sections and bridges. I will try to write with as much passion, valor and clarity as I can and for non-specialized readers, but take heed: the slippery and ever-changing nature of the field makes it extremely hard to define in simplistic terms. As Richard Schechner told me after he read an early version of this text, “The ‘problem,’ if there is a problem, is that the field ‘in general’ is too big and encompassing. It can be, and is, whatever those who are doing it say it is. At the same time, and for the same reason, the field ‘in specific’ is too small, too quirky, too much the thing of this or that individual (artist, scholar) who is doing the doing.” In this sense, in this text I will attempt to articulate “my thing.”

Since I object to master discourses, specially those involuntary ones engendered by my own psyche, I am fully aware that my voice within this text is but one in a crowd of subjectivities. By no means am I attempting to speak for others, establish boundaries and checkpoints in the performance field, or outlaw any art practice that is not captured by my camera. If the reader detects some conceptual contradictions in my writing, --especially in my strategic use of the dangerous pronoun “we” or in my capricious placement of a border--, I beg you to cut me some extra slack: I am a contradictory Vato, and so are most performance artists I know.

To finish this introduction, I wish to politely thank Richard Schechner Carolina Ponce de Leon, Marlene Ramírez-Cancio and Nara Heeman for having so intelligently challenged earlier versions of this text suggesting that I open more doors; and Rebecca Solnit, and Kaytie Johnson, for their incommensurable patience while revising my awkward syntax and conceptual inconsistencies. Future versions of this text will include responses and interventions by other colleagues.

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE

I.-THE MAP

First, let’s draw the map.

I see myself as an experimental cartographer. In this sense I can approach a definition of performance art by mapping out the “negative” space (as in photography not ethics) of its conceptual territory: Though our work sometimes overlaps with experimental theater, and many of us utilize spoken word, stricto sensu, we are neither actors nor spoken word poets. (We may be temporary actors and poets but we abide by other rules, and stand on a different history). Most performance artists are also writers, but only a handful of us write for publication. We theorize about art, politics and culture, but our interdisciplinary methodologies are different from those of academic theorists. They have binoculars; we have radars. In fact, when performance studies scholars refer to “the performance field”, they often mean something different; a much broader field that encompasses all things performative including anthropology, religious practice, pop culture, sports and civic events. We chronicle our times, true, but unlike journalists or social commentators, our chronicles tend to be non-narrative and polyvocal. If we utilize humor, we are not seeking laughter like our comedian cousins. We are more interested in pro-



voking the ambivalence of melancholic giggling or painful smiles, though an occasional outburst of laughter is always welcome.

Many of us are exiles from the visual arts, but we rarely make objects for display in museums and galleries. In fact, our main artwork is our own body, ridden with semiotic, political, ethnographic, cartographic and mythical implications. Unlike visual artists and sculptors, when we create objects, they are meant to be handled and utilized without remorse during the actual performance. We actually don’t mind if these objects get worn out or destroyed. In fact, the more we use our performance “artifacts,” the more “charged” and powerful they become. Recycling is our main modus operandi. This dramatically separates us from costume, prop and set designers who rarely recycle their creations.

At times we operate in the civic realm, and test our new personas and actions in the streets, but we are not “public artists” per se. The streets are mere extensions of our performance laboratory, galleries without walls if you will. Many of us think of ourselves as activists, but our communication strategies and experimental languages are considerably different from those utilized by political radicals and anti-globalization activists.

We are what others aren’t, say what others don’t, and occupy cultural spaces that are often overlooked or dismissed. Because of this, our multiple communities are constituted by aesthetic, political, ethnic, and gender rejects.

II.-THE SANCTUARY

For me performance art is a conceptual “territory” with fluctuating weather and borders; a place where contradiction, ambiguity, and paradox are not only tolerated, but also encouraged. Every territory a performance artist stakes, including this text, is slightly different from that of his/her neighbor. We converge in this overlapping terrain precisely because it grants us special freedoms often denied to us in other realms where we are mere temporary insiders. In a sense, we are hardcore dropouts of orthodoxy, embarking on a permanent quest to develop a more inclusive system of political thought and aesthetic praxis.

“Here,” tradition weighs less, rules can be bent, laws and structures are constantly changing, and no one pays much attention to hierarchies and institutional power. “Here,” there is no government or visible authority. “Here,” the only existing social contract is our willingness to defy authoritarian models and dogmas, and to keep pushing the outer limits of culture and identity. It is precisely in the sharpened borders of cultures, genders, métiers, languages, and art forms that we feel more comfortable, and where we recognize and befriend our colleagues. We are interstitial creatures and border citizens by nature— insiders/outsideers at the same time—and we rejoice in this paradoxical condition. In the act of crossing a border, we find temporary emancipation.

Unlike the enforced borders of a nation/state,

those in our “performance country” are open to welcome nomads, migrants, hybrids, and outcasts. Our performance country is a temporary sanctuary for other rebel artists and theorists expelled from mono-disciplinary fields and separatist communities. It’s also an internal place, a fernhah, invented by each of us, according to our own political aspirations and deepest spiritual needs; our darkest sexual desires and obsessions; our troubling memories and relentless quest for freedom. As I finish this paragraph I bite my romantic tongue. It bleeds. It’s real blood. My audience is worried.

III.-THE HUMAN BODY

Traditionally, the human body, our body, not the stage, is our true site for creation and materia prima. It’s our empty canvas, musical instrument, and open book; our navigation chart and biographical map; the vessel for our ever-changing identities; the centerpiece of the altar so to speak. Even when we depend too much on objects, locations, and situations, our body remains the matrix of the piece.

Our body is also the very center of our symbolic universe—a tiny model for humankind (human-kind and humanity are the same word in Spanish, humanidad)— and at the same time, a metaphor for the larger sociopolitical body. If we are capable of establishing all these connections in front of an audience, hopefully others will recognize them in their own bodies.

Our scars are involuntary words in the open book of our body, whereas our tattoos, piercings, body paint, adornments, performance prosthetics, and/or robotic accessories, are de-li-be-rate phrases. Our body/corpo/arte-facto/identity must be marked, decorated, painted, costumed, intervened culturally, re-politicized, mapped out, chronicled, and documented. When our body is ill or wounded, our work inevitably changes. Frank Moore, Ron Athey and Franco B have made us beautifully aware of this.

Our bodies are occupied territories. Perhaps the ultimate goal of performance, especially if you are a woman, gay or a person “of color,” is to decolonize our bodies; and make these decolonizing mechanisms apparent to our audience in the hope that they will get inspired to do the same with their own.

Though we treasure our bodies, we don’t mind constantly putting them at risk. It is precisely in the tensions of risk that we find our corporeal possibilities and raison d’etre. Though our bodies are imperfect, awkward looking and frail, we don’t mind sharing them, bare naked, with the audience, or offering them sacrificially to the video camera. But I must clarify here: it’s not that we are exhibitionists (at least not all of us). In fact, it’s always painful to exhibit and document our imperfect bodies, riddled with cultural and political implications. We just have no other option. It’s like a “mandate” for the lack of a better word.

*Richard Schechner problematizes my body ar-

gument: (If the human body is the ultimate site of performance), “where do you put ‘virtual’ artists who operate only on the web using Avatars or wholly digitized beings?” Richard raises a hairy predicament: should we consider the ‘virtual bodies’ real?

IV.-OUR “JOB”

Do we have a job?

Our job may be to open up a temporary utopian/distopian space, a demilitarized zone in which meaningful “radical” behavior and progressive thought are hopefully allowed to take place, even if only for the duration of the piece. In this imaginary zone, both artist and audience members are given permission to assume multiple and ever changing positionalities and identities. In this border zone, the distance between “us” and “them,” self and other, art and life, becomes blurry and unambiguous.

We do not look for answers; we merely raise impertinent questions. In this sense, to use an old metaphor, our job may be to open the Pandora’s box of our times—smack in the middle of the gallery, the theater, the street, or in front of the video camera and let the demons loose. Others that are better trained—the activists and academicians—will have to deal with them, fight them, domesticate them or attempt to explain them.

Once the performance is over and people walk away, our hope is that a process of reflection gets triggered in their perplexed psyches. If the performance is effective (I didn’t say “good,” but effective), this process can last for several weeks, even months, and the questions and dilemmas embodied in the images and rituals we present can continue to haunt the spectator’s dreams, memories, and conversations. The objective is not to “like” or even “understand” performance art; but to create a sediment in the audience’s psyche.

V.-THE CULT OF INNOVATION

The performance art field is obsessed with innovation and age, especially in the so-called “West,” where innovation is often perceived as synonymous with transgression, and as the antithesis of history. Performance defines itself against the immediate past and always in dialogue with the immediate future—a speculative future, that is. The dominant mythology says that we

are a unique tribe of pioneers, innovators, and visionaries. This poses a tremendous challenge to us performance locos and locas. If we lose touch with the rapidly changing issues and trends in “the field,” we can easily become “dated” overnight. If we don’t produce fresh and innovative proposals, constantly reframe our imagery and theories, and rewrite our photo captions, so to speak, we will be deported into oblivion, while thirty others, much younger and wilder, will be waiting in line to replace us.

The pressure to engage in this ongoing process of reinvention (and in the U.S. of “repackaging”) forces some exhausted performance artists out of the rat race and others into a rock-and-roll type lifestyle—without the goodies and exaggerated fame, that is. Those who survive may very well feel like frustrated rockers. There’s absolutely nothing romantic about it. Only a handful are granted the privilege, like Bowie or Madonna in the equally merciless world of pop, of having several reincarnations.

*Brazilian performance artist Nara Heeman responds: “I see the need of being ‘connected’ to the field. But I feel quite sad with the perspective of being caught inside the cage of having to produce in order not to be forgotten. I believe that if we define ourselves as performance artists within the highest category we can reach, we might get stressed with the demands of the market. But if we define ourselves just as living beings this concern could become secondary.”

VI.-IDENTITY SURVIVAL KIT

Performance has taught us an extremely important lesson: we are not strait-jacketed by identity. Our repertoire of multiple identities is in fact an intrinsic part of our survival kit. We know very well that with the use of props, makeup, accessories and costumes, we can actually reinvent our identity in the eyes of others, and we love to experiment with this unique kind of knowledge in everyday life. In fact, social, ethnic, and gender bending are an intrinsic part of our daily praxis, and so is cultural transvestitism. To give the reader an example: when my Chicano colleagues and I cross international borders, we know that to avoid being sent to secondary inspection, we can wear mariachi hats and jackets and

instantly reinvent ourselves as “amigo entertainers” in the eyes of racist law enforcement. It works. But even then, if we are not careful, our fiery gaze and lack of coolness might denounce us.

VII.-THE IRREPLACEABLE BODY

Our audiences may experience vicariously, through us, other possibilities of aesthetic, political and sexual freedom they lack in their own lives. This may be one of the reasons why, despite innumerable predictions over the past thirty years, performance art hasn’t died, nor has it been replaced by video or made outdated by new technologies and robotics. Stelarc’s early 90’s warning that the body was becoming “obsolete” turned out to be untrue. It is simply impossible to “replace” the ineffable magic of a pulsating, sweaty body immersed in a live ritual in front of our eyes. It’s a shamanic thing.

This fascination is also connected to the powerful mythology of the performance artist as anti-hero and counter-cultural avatar. Audiences don’t really mind that Annie Sprinkle is not a trained actress or that Ema Villanueva is not a skillful dancer. Audiences attend the performance precisely to be witnesses to our unique existence, not to applaud our virtuosity.

Whatever the reasons, the fact is that no actor, robot, or virtual avatar can replace the singular spectacle of the body-in-action of the performance artist. I simply cannot imagine a hired actor operating Chico McMurtrie’s primitive robots, or reenacting Orlan’s operations. When we witness Stelarc demonstrating a brand new robotic bodysuit or high-tech toy, after fifteen minutes we tend to pay more attention to his sweating flesh than to his prosthetic armor and perceptual extensions. The paraphernalia is great, but the human body attached to the mythical identity of the performance artist in front of us, remains at the center of the event. Why? I just don’t know.

Recently, Cuban performance artist Tania Bruguera has embarked on an extremely daring project: abolishing her physical presence during the actual performance and therefore defying her own performance mythology. She asks curators to find in advance a “normal person,” not necessarily connected to the arts, to replace her during the actual performance. When Tania arrives to the site she exchanges identities with the chosen person becoming



a mere assistant to his/her wishes. Curators are flipping out.

TURNING THE GAZE INWARD

VIII.-AT ODDS WITH AUTHORITY

Yes. I am at odds with authority; whether it is political, religious, sexual, racial, or aesthetic, and I am constantly questioning imposed structures and dogmatic behavior wherever I find it. As soon as I am told what to do and how to do it, my hair goes up, my blood begins to boil, and I begin to figure out surprising ways to dismantle that particular form of authority. I share this personality trait with my colleagues. In fact, we crave the challenge of dismantling abusive authority.

Perhaps because the stakes are so low in our field, paired with the fact that we are literally allergic to authority, we never think twice about putting ourselves on the line and denouncing social injustice wherever we detect it. Without giving it a second thought, we are always ready to throw a pie in the face of a corrupt politician, give the finger to an arrogant museum director, or tell off an impertinent journalist, despite the consequences. This personality trait often makes us appear a bit antisocial, immature or overly dramatic in the eyes of others, but we just can’t help it. It’s a visceral thing, and at times a real drag. I secretly envy my “cool” friends.

IX.-SIDING WITH THE UNDERDOG

We see our probable future reflected in the eyes of the homeless, the poor, the unemployed, the diseased, and newly arrived immigrants. Our world overlaps with theirs.

We are often attracted to those who barely survive the dangerous corners of society—hookers, winos, lunatics, and prisoners are our spiritual brothers and sisters. We fell a strong spiritual kinship with them. Unfortunately, they often drown in the same waters in which we swim—the same waters, just different levels of submersion.

Our politics are not necessarily ideologically motivated. Our humanism resides in the throat, the skin, the muscles, the heart, the solar plexus and the genitalia. Our empathy for social orphanhood expresses itself as a visceral form of solidarity with those peoples, communities, or countries facing oppression and human rights violations; with those victimized by imposed wars and unjust economic policies. Unfortunately, like Ellen Zacco recently pointed to me, “(we) tend to speak for them, which is quite presumptuous.” I cannot help but to agree with her.

X.-A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH

The cloud of nihilism is constantly chasing us around, but we somehow manage to escape it. It’s a macabre dance. Whether conscious or not, deep inside we truly believe that what we do actually changes people’s lives, and we have a real hard time being cool about it. Performance is a matter of life or death to us. Our sense of humor often pales next to our sobriety when it comes to committing to a life/art project. Our degree of commitment to our beliefs at times may border on fanaticism. If we suddenly decide to stop talking for a month (to, say, investigate “silence”), walk non-stop for three days (to reconnect with the social world or research the site-specificity of a project), or cross the U.S.-Mexico border without documents to make a political point, we won’t rest until we complete our task, regardless of the consequences. This can be maddening to our loved ones, who must exercise an epic patience with us. They must live with the impending uncertainty and the profound fear of our next commitment to yet another transformative existential project. Bless the hearts and hands of our lifetime compañeros/as—always waiting for us and worrying about us. And the risks we take in the name of performance, aren’t always worthwhile.

XI.-NECESSARY AND UNNECESSARY RISKS

Though we are always risking our lives and physical integrity in the name of art, we rarely kill ourselves and definitely we never kill others. In twenty years of hanging out and working with performance artists, I have never met a murderer; I have only lost three colleagues to the demons of suicide, and two to miscalculation during an actual performance.

In the process of finding the true dimensions and/or possibilities of a new piece, some of us stupidly have put ourselves, or our audience at risk, but somehow nothing extremely grave has happened yet. Knock on wood. I quote from a script:

“Dear audience, I’ve got 45 scars accounted for; half of them produced by art & this is not a metaphor. My artistic obsession has led me to carry out some flagrantly stupid acts of transgression, including: living inside a cage as a Mexican Frankenstein; crucifying myself as a mariachi to protest immigration policy; crashing the Met as El Mad Mex led on a leash by a Spanish dominatrix. I mean (to an audience member), you want me to be more specific than drinking Mr. Clean to exorcise my colonial demons? or, handing a dagger to an audience member, & offering her my plexus? (Pause)“My plexussssss...your madness,”

--I said, and she went for it, inflicting my 45th scar. She was only 20, boricua, & did not know the difference between performance, rock & roll & street life. Bad phrase, delete..”

XII.-EMBODIED THEORY

I quote from my performance diaries: “Our intelligence, like that of shamans and poets, is largely symbolic and associative. Our system of thought tends to be both emotionally and corporeally based. In fact, the performance always begins in our skin and muscles, projects itself onto the social sphere, and returns via our psyche, back to our body and into our blood stream; only to be refracted back onto the social world via documentation. Whatever thoughts we can’t embody, we tend to distrust. Whatever ideas we can’t feel way deep inside, we tend to disregard. In this sense we can say that performance is a form of embodied theory...”

“Despite the fact that we analyze things obsessively and under multiple lights, when push comes to shove, we tend to operate through impulse (rarely through logic or convenience), and make decisions based in intuition, superstition, and dreams. Because of this, in the eyes of others, we appear to be very self-involved, as if the entire universe revolved around our psyche and body. Often our main struggle is precisely to escape our subjectivity—the imprisonment of our personal obsessions and solipsistic despair—and performance becomes the only way out. Or rather, the way for the personal paradigm to intersect with the social...”

*Post script: I re-read this section and get angry with myself. I sound like a fucking 19th century bohemian.

XIII.-EVERYDAY LIFE

If I were to anthropologize my everyday life, what would I find?

I quote from a series of personal e-mails with a Peruvian friend who struggles to understand “what is my everyday life like in San Francisco.”

“Dear X: The nuts and bolts of everyday life are a true inferno. To put it bluntly, I simply don’t know how to manage or discipline myself. Typically, I am terrible with money, administrative matters, grant writing, and self-promotion—and often rely on the goodwill of whoever wishes to help. I have no medical or car insurance. I don’t own my home. I travel a lot, but

always in connection to my work, and rarely have vacations, long vacations, like normal people do. I am permanently in debt, but I don’t mind it. I guess it’s part of the price I have to pay to not be permanently bothered by financial considerations. If I could live without a bank account, a driver’s license, a passport, and a cell phone, I would be quite happy, though I am fully aware of the naiveté of my anarchist aspirations. Many of my colleagues here are in a similar situation. What about performance artists in your country?

...No, my most formidable enemy is not always the right wing forces of society but at times, my own inability to domesticate quotidian chaos and discipline myself. In the absence of a 9-to-5 job, traditional social structures, and the basic requirements of other disciplines (i.e., rehearsals, curtain calls, and production meetings in theater, or the tightly scheduled lives of dancers or musicians), I tend to feel oppressed by the tyranny of domesticity and get easily lost in the horror vacui of an empty studio or the liquid screen of my laptop. Sometimes, the screen of my laptop becomes a mirror, and I don’t like what I see. Melancholy rules my creative process.

...Performance is a need. If I don’t perform for a long period of time, say three or four months, I become unbearable and drive my loved ones crazy. Once I am on stage again, I instantly overcome my metaphysical orphanhood and psychological fragility and become larger-than-life. Later on at the bar, I will recapture my true size and endemic mediocrities. The irreverent humor of my collaborators and friends contributes to this ‘downsizing process.’

... My salvation? My salvation lies in my ability to create an alternative system of thought and action capable of providing some sort of ritualized structure to my daily life...and of course, my Chicano sense of humor...No, I take it back. My true salvation is collaboration. I collaborate with others in hopes of developing bridges between my personal obsessions and the social universe.

...True. I’m kind of...weird in the eyes of my neighbors and relatives. I talk to animals, to plants, and to my many inner selves. I love to piss outdoors and get lost in the streets of cities I don’t know. I love make up, body decoration, and flamboyant female clothing. I love

to cyborgize ethnic clothing. Paradoxically I don’t like to be stared at. I am a living, walking contradiction. Aren’t you?

... I collect unusual figurines, souvenirs, chatchkes, and costumes connected to my ‘cosmology,’ in the hope that one day they might be useful in a piece. It’s my ‘personal archeology,’ and it dates back to the day I was born. With it, wherever I go, I build altars to ground myself. And these altars are as eclectic and complex as my personal aesthetics and my many composite identities.

...Why? I am extremely superstitious, but I don’t talk much about it. I see ghosts and read symbolic messages everywhere. Deep inside I believe there are unspoken metaphysical laws ruling my creative process, (everything is a process to me, even sleeping and walking), my encounters with others, and the major changes in my life. My shaman friends say that I am ‘a shaman who lost his way’. I like that definition of performance art.”

XIV.-DYSFUNCTIONAL ARCHIVES

Performance artists have huge archives at home but they are not exactly functional. In other words, “the other histories of art” are literally buried in humid boxes, stored in the closets of performance artists worldwide. And—let’s face it—most likely no one will ever have access to them. Much worse, some of these boxes containing one-of-a-kind photos, performance documents, rare magazines, and master audios and videos, frequently get lost in the process of moving to another home, city, project, or lover—or, to a new identity. If every art and performance studies department from every university made the effort to rescue these endangered archives from our clumsy hands, an important history will be saved, one that rarely gets written about precisely because it constitutes the “negative” space of culture (as in photography not ethics).

XV.-CLUMSY ACTIVISTS

With a few venerable exceptions (Tim Miller, Rodessa Jones, Felipe Ehrenberg, Suzanne Lacy, Keith Hennessy and a few others), performance artists make clumsy political negotiators and terrible community organizers. Our great dilemma here is that we often see ourselves as activists and, as such, we



attempt to organize our larger ethnic, gender-based, or professional communities. But the results, bless our hearts, are often poor. Why? We get easily lost in logistics and pragmatic discussions. Besides, our iconoclastic personalities, anti-nationalistic stances and experimental proposals often put us at odds with conservative sectors within these communities. However, we never learn the basic lesson: organizing and negotiating are definitely not our strengths. Others, better skilled, must help us organize the basic structure for our shared madness—never the other way around.

We are much better at performing other important community roles such as amateurs, reformers, inventors of brand-new metafiction, choreographers of surprising collective actions, alternative semioticians, media pirates, and/or “cultural DJ’s.” In fact, our aesthetic strategies (not our coordinating skills) can be extremely useful to activists, and they often understand that it is in their best interest to have us around. I secretly advise several activists. Others, like Marcos and Superbarrio who are consummate performance activists, continue to inspire me.

XVI.-PHYSICAL BEAUTY

We are no more or less beautiful or fit than anyone else, but neither are we average looking. Actors, dancers, and models are better looking, sportsmen and martial artists are in much better shape, and porn stars are definitely sexier. In fact, our bodies and faces tend to be awkward looking; but we have an intense look, a deranged essence of presence, an ethical quality to our features and hands. And this makes us both trustworthy to outlaws and rebels, and highly suspicious to authority. When people look into our eyes, they can tell right away— we mean it. This, I may say, amounts to a different kind of beauty.

XVII.-CELEBRITY CULTURE

Celebrity culture is baffling and embarrassing to us. Luckily, we never get invited to the Playboy mansion, or to parties at our embassies when we are on tour. If we go to the opening of the Whitney Biennial, most likely we’ll either get bored, or overwhelmed, really fast. Despite our flamboyant public personas and our capability to engage in so called “extreme behav-

ior,” we tend to be shy and insecure in social situations. We dislike rubbing shoulders (or genitals) with the rich and famous, and when we do it, we are quite clumsy—spilling the wine on someone’s lap, or saying the wrong thing. When introduced to a potential funder or a famous art critic, we either become impolite out of mere insecurity or remain catatonic. And when our “fans” compliment us too much, we just don’t know how to respond. More likely we will disappear instantly into the streets or will hide in the nearest restroom for an hour.

XVIII.-AN URBAN LEGEND

At times, our performance universe can be threatening to our loved ones. Our perceived “extreme behavior” on stage, paired with our frequent association with sexual radicals, social misfits, and eccentrics, can make our loved ones feel a bit “inadequate” or “lightweight” next to our performance universe. To complicate things even more, the highly sexualized energies and naked bodies roaming around the space before a performance can easily become a source of jealousy for our partners who often have a hard time differentiating between the real and the symbolic. The great paradox here is, despite our (largely symbolic) sexual on-stage eccentricities, and our willingness to perform nude, we tend to be quite loyal and committed to our partners and family. Our kinkiness is an urban legend, and pales in comparison to that of talk show guests and Catholic priests.

PERFORMANCE VIS A VIS THEATER, THE ART WORLD & THE MAINSTREAM

XIX.-PERFORMANCE AND THEATER

I must first acknowledge the important contributions of experimental theater (the Living Theater, The Performance Group, Jodorowsky, etc.) and of happenings (Kaprow, Fluxus) to the development of performance; as well as the most recent influence that performance art has had over theater, every time theater is in crises. Having said this, I will now attempt to venture into the dangerous border zone between theater and performance. Despite the fact they often occupy the same stage, there are some

fundamental differences. Virtuosity, training and skills are highly regarded in theater; whereas in performance, originality, topicality and charisma are much more valued.

Even the most experimental and antinarrative forms of theater which don’t depend on a text have a beginning, a dramatic crisis (or a series of), and an end. A performance “event” or “action” is just a segment of a much larger “process” not available to the audience, and in this sense, stricto sensu, it has no beginning or end. We simply choose a portion of our process and open the doors to expose the audience to it.

Most Western theater structures (even those of ensemble theaters and rebel theater collectives) tend to be somewhat hierarchical with a specialized division of labor (the leader or visionary, the best actors, the supporting actors and the technical team each taking care of their specific task); whereas the structure of performance tends to be horizontal, decentered, and constantly changes. In performance, every project demands a different division of labor. And when we do solo work, we become the producer, writer, director, and performer of our own material. We even design the lights, the sound and the costumes. There’s nothing heroic about this. It’s just the way it is.

In most theater practice based on text, once the script is finished, it gets memorized and obsessively rehearsed by the actors, and it will be performed almost identically every night. Not one performance art piece is ever the same. In performance, whether text-based or not, the script is just a blueprint for action, a hypertext contemplating multiple contingencies and options, and it is never “finished.” Every time I publish a script, I must beware the reader: “This is just one version of the text. Next week it will be different.”

Rehearsals in the traditional sense are not that important to us. In fact, performance artists spend more time researching the site and subject matter of the project, gathering props and objects, studying our audiences, brainstorming with collaborators, writing obscure notes and preparing ourselves psychologically, than “rehearsing” behind closed doors. It’s just a different process.

On stage, performance artists rarely

“represent” others. Rather we allow our multiplicity of selves and voices to unfold and enact their frictions and contradictions in front of an audience. “To ‘re-present’ would mean to be ‘different’ from what we are doing.”—Says Nara Heeman. “Our embodied knowledge and images are only possible because they are truly ours.” Whether we are trained or not (most of the time we aren’t), this separates performance artists dramatically from theater monologists performing multiple characters: When Anna Deveare-Smith, Elia Arce, or Eric Bogosian “perform” multiple personas, they don’t exactly “represent” them or act like them. Rather, they slightly morph in and out of them without ever disappearing entirely as “themselves.” Perhaps they occupy the space between acting and being themselves. At one point in their lives, certain theater monologists like Spalding Grey and Jesusa Rodriguez, decide to cross the thin line into performance in search of extra freedom and danger. We welcome them.

Clearly, there are many exceptions to the rule on both sides of the mirror; and there are many mirrors around.

*Schechner bewares me: “I would say that some distance needs to be made theoretically separating theatre that presents dramas (plays) from theatre that is ‘direct’ or presents the performer without plays. Also that in drama theatre the actors are usually not also the authors; while in performance art the performers are almost always the authors.”

XX.-TIME AND SPACE

Notions of time and space are complicated in performance. We deal with a heightened “now,” and “here,” with the ambiguous space between “real time” and “ritual time,” as opposed to theatrical or fictional time. (Ritual time is not to be confused with slow motion). We deal with “presence” and “attitude” as opposed to “representation” or psychological depth; with “being here” in the space as opposed to “acting;” or acting that we are being. Schechner elaborates: “In performance art the ‘distance’ between the really real (socially, personally, with the audience, with the performers) is much less than in drama theatre where just about everything is pretend -- where even the real (a coffee cup, a chair) becomes pretend.” In this sense, performance is definitely

a way of being in the space, in front or around an audience; a heightened gaze, a unique sense of purpose in the handling of objects, commitments and words and, at the same time, it is an ontological “attitude” towards the whole universe. Shamans, fakirs, coyotes, and Mexican merolicos understand this quite well. Most drama actors and dancers unfortunately don’t.

Like time, space to us is also “real,” phenomenologically speaking. The building where the performance takes place is precisely that very building. The performance occurs precisely in the day and time it takes place, and at the very place it takes place. There is no theatrical magic, no “suspense of disbelief.” Again, the thorny question of whether performance art exists or not in virtual space remains unanswered.

XXI.-THE ART WORLD

Our relationship with the Art World (in capitals) is bittersweet, to say the least. We have traditionally operated in the cultural borders and social margins where we feel the most comfortable. Whenever we venture into the stark postmodern luxury of the mainstream chic—say to present our work in a major museum—we tend to feel a bit out of place. During our stay, we befriend the security guards, the cleaning personnel, and the staff in the educational department. The chief curators watch us attentively from a distance. Only the night before our departure will we be invited for drinks.

Mainstream art institutions have a love/hate relationship with us (or rather with what they perceive we represent). Whenever they invite us in, they are always trembling nervously, as if secretly expecting us to destroy the walls of the gallery, scratch a painting with a prop, or pee in the lobby. It’s hard to get rid of this stigma, which comes from the days of “the NEA 4,” (1989-91) when performance artists were characterized by politicians and mainstream media as irresponsible provocateurs and cultural terrorists. Every time I complete a project in a big institution, the director pulls me aside the day before my departure and tells me: “Guermo [intentional spelling], thanks for having been so... nice.” Deep inside, he may be a bit disappointed that I didn’t misbehave more like one of my performance personas.

XXII.-DEPORTED/DISCOVERED

The self-proclaimed “international art

world” is constantly shifting its attitude toward us. One year we are “in” (if our aesthetics, ethnicity, or gender politics coincide with their trends); the next one we are “out.” (If we produce video, performance photography or installation art as an extension of our performances, then we have a slightly better chance to get invited more frequently). We get welcomed and deported back and forth so constantly that we have grown used to it. In twenty-two years of making performance art, I have been deported at least seven times from the art world, only to be (re)“discovered” the next year under a new light: Mexican, Latino or Hybrid Art? “Ethno-techno” or “Outsider Art”? “Chicano cyber-punk” or “Extreme culture”? What next? “Neo-Aztec hi-tech post-retro-colonial art?”

The fact performance artists don’t produce sleek objects for display makes it hard for the commercial art apparatuses, and the critics who sanction it, to justify our presence in mainstream shows and biennials. And it is only when the art world is having a crisis of ideas that we get asked to participate, and only for a short period of time. But we don’t mind being mere temporary insiders. Our partial invisibility is actually a privilege. It grants us special freedoms and a certain respectability (that of fear) that full-time insiders and “art darlings” don’t have. We get to disappear for a while and reinvent ourselves once again, in the shadows of Western civilization. They don’t.

XXIII.-MARGINALIZING LINGO

Nomenclature and labeling have contributed to the permanent marginalization of performance art. Since the 1930s, the many self-proclaimed “mainstream art worlds” in every country have conveniently referred to performance artists as “alternative,” (to what, the real stuff?) “peripheral,” (to their own self-imposed “center”) “experimental,” meaning “permanently in the process of testing,” or “heterodox”(at mortal odds with tradition). If we are “of color,” (who isn’t?) we are always labeled as “emerging,” (the condescending human version of the “developing countries”) or as “recently discovered,” as if we were specimens of an exotic aesthetic tribe. Even the word “radical,” which we often use ourselves, gets utilized by the “mainstream” as a red-light, with the perilous subtext: “handle at your own risk.”*

These terms keep pushing the performance art field towards the margins of the “legitimate” one—the market-based art world—the big city from which we constitute the dangerous barrios, ghettos, reservations, and banana republics. Curators, journalists and cultural impresarios visit our forbidden cities with a combination of eroticized fear and adventure-some machismo. One or two of us, lucky outsider sofisticados, may be discovered this time by Documenta, Venice or Edinburg.

*Since September 11, the connotations and implications of this marginalizing terminology have increased considerably. Words such as “radical,” “transgressive,” “revolutionary,” and “rebellious” have been tainted overnight with the blood of generic “terrorism,” and with the connotations of “evil” in the Bush doctrine.

XXIV.-ART CRIMINALS

Performance artists get easily criminalized. The highly charged images we produce, and the mythologies that embellish our public personas, make us recognizable targets for the rage of opportunistic politicians and conservative journalists looking for blood. They love to portray us as either promiscuous social misfits, gratuitous provocateurs, or “elitist” good-for-nothing bohemians sponsored by the “liberal establishment.” Unlike most of my colleagues, I don’t entirely mind this mischaracterization, for I believe it grants us an undeserved respectability and power as cultural anti-heroes.

Conservative politicians are fully aware of the unique power of performance art. And when funding cut time arrives, performance is the first one to go. Why? They claim it is because we are “decadent,” “elitist,” or (in the U.S.), “un-American.” In fact US Republicans love to portray our work as some kind of bizarre communist pornography, but—let’s face it—the fact is that these ideologues know it is extremely hard to domesticate us. When a politician attacks performance art, it is because he gets irritated when he sees his own parochial and intolerant image reflected upside down in the mirror of art. The horrible faces of Helms, Buchanan, and Guliani immediately come to mind.

XXV.-THE MAINSTREAM BIZARRE

A perplexing phenomenon has occurred in the past seven years: the blob of the mainstream has devoured the lingo and imagery of the much touted “margins”—the thornier and more sharp-edged, the better—and “performance” has literally turned it into a sexy marketing strategy and pop genre. I call this phenomenon “the mainstream bizarre.” High Performance, the legendary magazine, is now a car motto; the imbecile conductor of MTV’s “Jack Ass” and sleazebag Howard Stern both call themselves “performance artists;” and so do Madonna, Iggy Pop and Marilyn Manson. Performative personalities and mindless interactivity are regularly celebrated in “Real TV,” talk shows and “X-treme sports.” In fact, everything “extreme” is now the norm.

In this new context, I truly wonder how can young and new audiences differentiate between the “transgressive” or “extreme” actions of Annie Sprinkle, Orlan, or yours truly, and those of the guests of Jerry Springer? What differentiates “us” from “them?” One might answer, “content”. But, what if “content” no longer matters nowadays? Same with depth.

Are we then out of a job? Or should we redefine, once again, for the hundredth time, our new roles in a new era? After reading this text, writer Rebecca Solnit asked me: “What is then the future of performance art as the boundaries of transgression move ever outward and as some of the boundaries of identity begin to blur even in the mainstream? How do you step across the line when the line moves and melts?” I have no idea. Caught between the old marginalizing lingo, and the new “everything shocking goes” type of ethos of the mainstream bizarre, the field is badly in need of restaking its territory, and redefining the now dated binary notions of center/periphery; and mainstream/subcultural. Perhaps one useful strategy might be for us locos and locas, to occupy a fictional center and push the dominant culture to its own truly undesirable margins.

XXVI.-THORNY QUESTIONS

Every time a journalist from a large paper or a commercial radio station interviews me, the conversation goes, more or less like this:

Journalist: “Is performance art something relatively new?” GP: “Every culture has a space allocated to the renewal of tradition and a space for contestation and deviant behavior. Those who occupy the latter are granted special freedoms.

Journalist: “Can you elaborate?”

GP: “In indigenous American cultures, it was the shaman, the coyote, the nanabush who had permission to cross the dangerous borders of dreams, gender, madness, and witchcraft. In Western culture this liminal space is occupied by the performance artist, the contemporary anti-hero and accepted provocateur. We know this place exists and we simply occupy it.”

Journalist: “So what is the function of performance art? Does it have any?”

GP: (Long pause) “Performance artists are a constant reminder to society of the possibilities of other artistic, political, sexual or spiritual behaviors, and this, I must say, is an extremely important function.”

Journalist: “Why?”

GP: “It helps others to re-connect with the forbidden zones of their psyches and bodies and acknowledge the possibilities of their own freedoms. In this sense, performance art may be as useful as medicine, engineering, or law; and performance artists as necessary as nurses, schoolteachers, priests, or taxi drivers. Most of the time we ourselves are not even aware of these functions.”

Journalist: “But what does performance art do for you?”

GP: “For me?(Long pause) It is a way to fight or talk back, to recapture my stolen civic self, and piece together my fragmented identity.”

Journalist: “Do you think about these big ideas everyday, all day long.?”

GP: “Certainly not. Most of the time I’m just going about my everyday life; you know, writing, researching, getting excited by a new project or prop, paying bills, recuperating from the flu, waiting anxiously for a phone call to get invited to perform in a city where I have never been...”

Journalist: “I’m not being clear: what I want to know is what has performance art taught you.?”

GP: “Ah, you want a soundbite, right? OK. When I was younger, performance taught me how to talk back. Lately, it is teaching me to listen to others.” ■



Food on Show

A show called Food: dal cucchiaino al mondo (from the spoon to the world) is gracing the gorgeous spaces of MAXXI (the National Museum for the Twenty-first Century Arts) until November 8th. The theme is the relationship between food and space, examined through increasingly wider frames of reference: from the body to the world, and from the home to the street and the city. The exhibition showcases works from artists, photographers, and architects that exemplify the complex role producing, cooking, and eating food play in our lives. Short videos illustrate projects in urban agriculture from Florence to Nairobi, with ample consideration dedicated to the social and political aspects of food systems, as well as to their impact in terms of sustainability. The concept of landscape - and in particular agricultural landscape - emerges as a lens to examine the connection between human communities and their environments, not only in the rural world but also in the growing metropolises around the world. ■

Highlights



Environmental Street Art

Have you ever thought about global warming and what it is doing to our planet? Like how it's hurting many of our animals, especially polar bears, how it affects us, people, and how it is heating up Earth. Well, we should help and make a change for our planet and for the poor animals that are suffering. This street art due to its size and content really makes people think about global warming and other important issues. ■

fARTissimo

By Thanos Kalamidas

Performing prejudice matters

Artist, often victims of prejudice, have been – at least most of them – against any kind of prejudice and racism. Sadly our societies cannot say the same. Racism has been a major social issue for too long and unfortunately instead of decreasing it actually has become more tense with policemen and officials racial profiling, harassing, arresting or shooting based on colour, on hairstyle or beard. This has to stop yesterday, last year, last century. Period. There is no excuse anymore. Period.

Tim Okamura, born 1968 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, is a contemporary Canadian painter known for his depiction of African-American and minority subjects in urban settings, and his combination of graffiti and realism. His work has been featured in several major motion pictures and in London's National Portrait Gallery. He was also one of several artists to be shortlisted in 2006 for a proposed portrait of Queen Elizabeth of England.

Urban life and hip-hop has influenced not only Okamura's subject matter in his paintings, but some of its musical concepts –sampling, combining new beats and classic grooves- also affected his approach to image-making: sampling excerpts from art history and world mythology, blending classical techniques of oil painting with the spontaneity of spray painted graffiti, combining the academic "realism" of his portrait and figure painting with modern graphics and contemporary urban environments.

Opinion

If Abramovic Had Any Cred at All, It's Totally Gone Now

Performance art, to me, is like poetry—when it's good, I adore it, and think that nothing else could have ever communicated those very specific thoughts, those intense longings and anger, those confusing and often simple emotions, so precisely. But I also hold the belief that the majority of performance art, like most poetry, just plain sucks. Usually, it just prompts me to figure out the most polite and fastest exit strategy.

So I don't hate all performance art. But I have to say, Marina Abramović has been aggravating me big time for a while now. This week, though, the "grandmother of performance art" didn't just lose me—she pissed me off.

In her interview with Spike Art Magazine published the other day, she whined that she was "disappointed" with rapper/producer Jay Z, husband of Houston's beloved

mega-star Beyoncé, about the video "Picasso Baby," stating, "I am very pissed by this, since he adapted my work only under one condition: that he would help my institute. Which he didn't." Apparently, she felt that Jay Z fell through on his promise to make a big donation to the new Marina Abramović Institute.

Marina is very sensitive and was really, really hurt, adding, "I will never do it again, that I can say. Never. I was really naive in this kind of world. It was really new to me, and I had no idea that this would happen. It's so cruel, it's incredible. I will stay away from it for sure. ■"



THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS ON PUBLIC ARTS FUNDING

By **Andreas Joh. Wiesand**

<http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/compendium-topics.php?id=174>

IS IT PURE COINCIDENCE THAT, 5 years after the General Assembly of UNESCO adopted its Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, one of the cornerstones of this document is already put into question by many of the signatory states? I'm referring to their "sovereign right to formulate and implement cultural policies" that include, in particular, "measures aimed at providing public financial assistance" and "establishing and supporting public institutions" (Art. 5 and 6). To defend this principle - or "exception culturelle" - against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and others who insist on a pure free-market system without financial action or interference on the part of public authorities, may indeed become redundant if it is not invigorated by corresponding practice. Recent severe cuts affecting cultural budgets in a number of European countries seem to point in that direction. On the other hand, we cannot really speak of a uniform trend here: many countries and cities actually report increases, despite (or even because!) of the global financial crisis...

In 2009, the CultureWatchEurope platform of the Council of Europe conducted a survey among Member States on funding trends for culture, asking also about possible strategies to safeguard cultural budgets in times of crisis. Results of the survey, covering 21 countries, were summarized as follows: "13 of 21 countries envisage an overall reduction of budgets for culture and heritage as a possible short or medium term consequence of the financial crisis, and one country partial reductions. 52 % (11 countries) envisage cuts in budgets of major cultural institutions, and nine mention reductions to subsidies of independent art and cultural organisations. Twelve countries envisage cuts to cultural infrastructure projects. On the other side, eight countries could imagine additional finance for infrastructure projects to stimulate employment, whilst only 17% (5 countries) could see an increase in the investment in creative industries to help generate employment.

The saving policy in cultural institutions may be implemented at the expense of reducing the number of activities and events, and diminishing quality, impacting on the consumption of culture and decreasing possibilities for Europeans to participate in cultural life."

However, the trend does not seem to work in the same manner across Europe. The CultureWatchEurope survey demonstrated already that some countries, e.g. Finland, France or Slovakia, actually planned to financially stabilise the cultural sector. As described in the Report, "in Luxembourg some new projects will be launched earlier than initially envisaged, in order to strengthen the cultural sector during the crisis."

At the 2010 CultureWatchEurope Conference in Brussels, Péter Inkei (The Budapest Observatory) sketched a broader picture

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/cwe/Effects_Inkei_EN.pdf] of the effects that the economic crisis might have on the European cultural landscape, including on the different branches of the arts and cultural industries. For him, "the real issue is to find out whether the effects will lead to fundamental, lasting changes in Europe's cultural environment." He concludes:

"We can hope less and less for the simple re-establishment of the status quo. Is then the crisis evidence of a crucial, decisive period in the life of western civilisation, an end of an era, the phasing out of some of the basic features of capitalism, especially its liberal, postmodern variant? If this is the case, then the question is not just how culture will survive the transition period, but rather whether culture is an actor in these historic transformations."

Back to the state of public budgets: The monitoring data that are available from the Council of Europe/ERICarts Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe [Chapter 6.1 and 6.3 in the Country Profiles] are based - for methodological reasons and in order to sustain comparability - on official statistics, both from the national and regional/local levels. The inevitable consequence is that these are, in most cases, two or three years old. More recent data are, nevertheless, provided by some of the authors as indicators of latest trends: They show, for example in the Czech Republic and in Portugal (state level), that in some countries cuts came already into effect before the global crisis really started to influence national public budgets. Legally established arts funding bodies did not escape the current austerity measures as demonstrated in the country profile from Ireland, where the Arts Council faces a 12% reduction of its budget.

Another, more descriptive overview of the situation in different European countries was published, in October 2010, by SICA, the Dutch Centre for International Cultural Activities. It arrived at a pessimistic outlook:

"None of the countries is currently in a position to provide a full picture of the impact of the economic crisis on cultural budgets. Cultural platforms, networks and observatories, including Lab for Culture and IFACCA, are monitoring developments, but much of the information available dates from the first half of 2009. Even then, prospects were far from positive, but the general expectation was that the subsidised sector in particular would see only limited effects. One year on, the situation appears to have worsened although hard evidence is still thin on the ground. What is certain is that cuts have been announced across the board, but these have not all been implemented so far. The sword of Damocles is threatening the whole of European culture and in some countries it is hanging from a particularly thin thread in view of the (impending) elections.

Cost-cutting can be direct or indirect. Almost everywhere, ministries are cutting their subsidy schemes for cultural institutions. At the same time, cultural budgets are threatened by cuts in the

government funds used primarily by lower government authorities to finance their cultural policy, as is the case in the Netherlands with the Municipalities Fund (Gemeentefonds). Local government authorities face difficult decisions: should libraries stay open? If so, the swimming pool must be closed. For politicians, culture is just one of many areas where savings can be made. Those in favour of government support for the arts are few and far between and tend to keep their heads down when every vote counts."

Experienced observers [Christopher Gordon and Peter Stark in a supplementary report to the House of Commons inquiry into "The Funding of the Arts and Heritage", November 2010] describe similar negative tendencies from the UK, where the share of public resources attributed to culture - which has increased over the last 15 years, but now experiences dramatic 25-30% cuts following the last elections - focuses increasingly on major institutions and activities based in London, at the expense of the rest of the country. This case as well as the budget policies for the arts and/or media announced after recent elections in the Netherlands and in Hungary even suggest that some of the cuts are less a result of the financial crisis and more one of political or ideological preferences (as pointed out in the title of a report on the Dutch situation, published July 8, 2011, by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: "High culture? That's just a leftist hobby").

While cuts in public budgets for culture are, obviously, on many agendas, there are other countries which currently even report an increase, despite the financial crisis. A new report - Results of a 2011 Survey with Governments on Culture Budgets and the Financial Crisis and Culture - presented by Péter Inkei in April 2011 at the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Culture indicates that the impact of the crisis on public budgets for culture is indeed less uniform than expected. 9 out of 21 countries with comparable results stated, between the years of 2009 and 2011, losses in their regular budget plans ranging from -4% (Austria) to -26% (Greece). On the other hand, 9 countries actually reported increases in their financial appropriations for the arts and heritage, ranging from +5% (Belgium, French Community) to +38% (Ukraine). In three countries, the regular budgets remained approximately at their previous level.

For example, increased revenues from lotteries in Finland enabled an augmentation of the current budget of the Ministry. Less surprising is that the government of oil-rich Norway tries to maintain its self-proclaimed goal of spending 1% of its budget for culture - one of the highest per capita in Europe. One could add the German example where, at least on the national level, the Federal budget for culture has constantly increased during the past decade and again in 2011, since the State Minister for the Arts and Media at the Chancellor's Office succeeded to secure a 27m Euro or 2.4% raise. Clearly, things look different in some German cities and on the regional level (Länder), which account for a much larger share of the overall cultural budget. Here and in other countries, cuts tend to hit non-established activities harder than those that are budgeted regularly. On the other hand, as could recently be seen in Hamburg, prestige infrastructures such as the new Elb-Philharmonie - planned during the "fat" years mainly for the purpose of "city branding" - can have cruel effects also for the city's traditional arts institutions such as theatres and museums.

Let's stay, for a moment, at the local level: At its Turku Forum in March 2011, the Eurocities network discussed a survey that was conducted earlier this year. 16 cities answered the survey, including Bergen, Bologna, Copenhagen, Dortmund, Dresden, Ghent, Gijon, Gothenburg, Helsinki, Krakow, Leipzig, Nantes, Newcastle, Novi Sad, Rotterdam and Torino. The main result has been that in a majority of these cities, the cultural budget did not significantly change or even rose from 2008 to 2011; only 4 cities reported a decrease. While the future of public funding is

seen a bit less optimistic, the general experience during the past difficult years has been that the cultural budgets did not experience disproportional cuts, on the contrary: in many cities the share for culture in the overall city budgets - ranging between 3% (Rotterdam) and 14% (Nantes) - actually rose. This should indeed be the yardstick to use in future discussions about budget developments, whether on local, national or European levels.

Needless to say, budget figures such as those just mentioned do not exclude sudden emergency cuts of public expenses. For example, recent amendments prepared by the Slovenian Government foresaw cuts in the budget for culture amounting to € 38 million (or 18%). While in this case, protests and intense lobbying will probably result in less dramatic reductions in September 2011, a general problem mainly in parts of Central and Eastern Europe seems difficult to solve, especially in the performing arts: How could public institutions - which are often artistically "static" and still state-controlled - come to better terms with a growing and more vivid, but financially weak, independent arts scene, as is increasingly the case in some Western countries (which have of course other problems to solve, including but not limited to the current economic functionalisation of the arts or the massive growth of fund-seeking initiatives during the last three decades)?

On the one hand, this would involve solving legal, administrative and fiscal issues, including granting more artistic and financial autonomy also to public institutions as well as reducing the number of "state servants" with lifetime contracts. On the other hand, the whole concept of public service in the arts and media may have to be revisited, however without endangering important infrastructures and its main mission: the provision of professional quality output that contributes to both identity and innovation in a society, independently of political or market constraints. Clearly defining cultural financing as a positive task of national governments, which is to be shared with local / regional authorities and complemented by project funding from private or European sources as well as entrepreneurial activities in their own right (e.g. in the book, music or art market or in film production), may help to clarify things further, particularly if this will be backed up by professionalisation strategies.

Assessing the overall trends and proposed remedies, we cannot escape two conclusions:

First, the ongoing financial crisis cannot be taken as an excuse for above-average cuts in the arts and heritage (under the motto: "All do it, so let's do it too"). We clearly see quite a number of state and city governments acting "countercyclical", because they know that a diverse and productive cultural environment can provide the spirit and important tangible contributions towards overcoming the present difficulties faced by governments, civil society and economic players.

Secondly (and probably more important): The future of cultural budgets clearly depends on the backing "culture" is able to get from larger parts of the population and, consequently, in political circles. Where cultural policy is not firmly rooted in the multiple demands of the public - or where the arts are still being conceived as "elitist" - and where the important role of arts, media and heritage activities for the social, educational and economic development of a society is not fully recognized, a change for the worse cannot be excluded, even after the current financial storm calms down.

As Péter Inkei reminded us, a change for the better may only be achieved if artists and other cultural professionals, together with an informed 'culture public', accept to play a more active role on the diverse political stages. ■

Energetic Mixture and Insecurity

By Avtarjeet Dhanjal

BRITAIN AS AN EX-COLONIAL POWER, according to Salman Rushdie, never de-colonised its thinking and its language, as Germany deliberately went through the process of de-Nazification after the Second World War. As a result some ugly thoughts of 'us and them' still lingers on in the deep corners of the British psyche, and occasionally raise its head here and there.

West Midlands known as Black Country was a powerhouse of the empire and home of heavy industry. The work was dirty, very few locals were ready to take it on; British governments of the time had to bring in migrant labour from the commonwealth countries.

Initially, single men came here with the idea to work for few years, and to return and live in their own countries. Slowly one by one these migrant workers started to bring their families.

Most migrant workers worked in factories, sometimes 7 days a week, were hardly seen on the street; but when their wives and children arrived; with their different colour of the skin and different clothing became very visible on the streets and in the schools, and with the time migrant population increased and in some area it reached a substantial percentage of the population.

It certainly frightened many such as Enoch Powell then a Tory Member of Parliament. In April 1968 Powell made his controversial 'Rivers of Blood speech' in which he warned of massive civil unrest if mass immigration of black and Asian commonwealth inhabitants continued. Powell died in 1998, nearly half a century later his controversial speech still makes the Black community nervous with insecurity.

The passing of time offers its own healing remedies. Half a century later the second and third generation of these migrant has not only become an integral part of the society but it generates a dynamic creative energy to make whole vibrant.

Last week a friend of mine who teaches Philosophy and Cultural Politics at Wolverhampton University recommended me to attend the opening of an exhibition of photographs by Komlail Achall at the 'Asylum Gallery in Wolverhampton, a town only twenty miles from Birmingham. (August 14, 2015, <http://www.theasylumartgallery.com/#!underlying-perspectives/cr19> "UNDERLYING PERSPECTIVES")

Wolverhampton, once a non-descriptive place except its bi-cycle industry, in 1960s was the constituency of the Enoch Powell, is now generating its own creative energy making the whole culture a multi-cultural vibrant mixture. Or one can put it this way that this new generation of the non-white population, is generating its own creative energy that is where the Asylum gallery and Komlail Achall and her series of photographs fits in.

According to the brief, "The exhibition presents the face of multiculturalism and evidences the everyday lives of people in city centres, a visual representation of roles and rituals played out in popular culture.



The photography portrays postcolonial identities within urban life and shows a multitude of Diasporas, hidden contradictions and tensions between societies based on many political opinions and positions."

The juxtaposition of Vogue and other examples of high cultural overlapped with chaddur clad migrant women in the black and white images of Achall, was very refreshing. It may be something in the air of Wolverhampton that Enoch Powell, who a first class Greek scholar from Cambridge could also hold such controversial thoughts those he expressed in his famous speech 'Rivers of Blood'.

Today the British people, I should rather say 'Tory leaders' are falling into a very similar mode of insecurity as Enoch Powell did in 1968.

Recent headlines illustrate the point better than my own words.

(Sky News 23 April 2015)

Britain is to send one of the largest ships in the Royal Navy to help deal with the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean.

Last Drop

The Guardian August 09, 2015

David Cameron shares the foreign secretary's concerns about millions of African migrants threatening the UK's standards of living, Downing Street has said.

I wonder how much creative energy these migrants in Calais hold which UK will miss?????

Famous Indian scholar and professor at the Harvard University Homi K. Bhabha summed up the energetic mixture of cultures and values in his brief description, "We find ourselves in the moment of transit where time and space cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion."

Avtarjeet Dhanjal August 2015



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