

**TWO-WAY MIRROR**  
EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

# TWO-WAY MIRROR

## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Published by Daniela Beltrani  
© Copyright 2016 The Editor and Authors

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Two-Way Mirror*.

Editor: Daniela Beltrani  
Copy Editor: Nisa Ojalvo  
Authors: Artists, and Marilyn Arsem  
Layout: Nel Lim  
Translations from Chinese by Sophia Natasha Wei

Thanks to  
arts fund, OBJECTIFS, Emmeline Yong, Ben Yap, Chris Yap, Ezzam Rahman  
Marilyn Arsem, Paul Couillard, Nel Lim, Nisa Ojalvo, Silke Schmickl  
Sophia Natasha Wei, and all the artists.



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN: 978-981-09-9857-8

Copy /100.

## EXHIBITION DETAILS AND PROGRAMME

### TWO-WAY MIRROR

Exhibition of photography from performance art

Led by Daniela Beltrani

Objectifs – Centre for Photography and Film

Lower Gallery, 155 Middle Road, Singapore 188977

AñA Wojak, Cai Qing, Daniela Beltrani, Ezzam Rahman, Farah Ong  
Gabriela Alonso, Jürgen Fritz, Kelvin Atmadibrata, Koh Nguang How  
Lisa Bauer-Zhao, Manuel Vason, Marita Bullmann, Nisa Ojalvo  
Paul Couillard, Razieh Goudarzi, RED BIND, Sharon Chin  
Sophia Natasha Wei, Tara Goudarzi, Urich Lau, Varsha Nair, Watan Wuma

Exhibition	Friday 22 July 2016 to Saturday 13 August 2016	
Opening	Friday 22 July 2016	6:30pm to 9:30pm
Tour	Sunday 31 July 2016	2:00pm to 3:00pm
Performance art event	Saturday 6 August 2016	6:00pm to 10:30pm
Artist talks	Sunday 7 August 2016	1:00pm to 3:00pm
Tour	Saturday 13 August 2016	3:00pm to 4:00pm
Finissage Tea and cakes	Saturday 13 August 2016	4:00pm to 6:00pm

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

The Moon in the Water: Reflections on Performance Art and Photography by Daniela Beltrani	2
--	---

## ESSAYS

Performance Art Documents: An Apologia by Paul Couillard	13
The Photographer's Eye by Nisa Ojalvo	23

## PHOTOGRAPHS AND REFLECTIONS

AñA Wojak	28
Cai Qing	30
Daniela Beltrani	31
Ezzam Rahman	32
Farah Ong	34
Gabriela Alonso	35
Jürgen Fritz	36
Kelvin Atmadibrata	37
Koh Nguang How	40
Lisa Bauer-Zhao	41
Manuel Vason	42
Marita Bullmann	44
Nisa Ojalvo	45
Paul Couillard	46
Razieh Goudarzi	48
RED BIND	49
Sharon Chin	51
Sophia Natasha Wei	53
Tara Goudarzi	54
Urich Lau	55
Varsha Nair	56
Watan Wuma	58

<b>BIOGRAPHIES</b>	59
--------------------	----

## APPENDIX

THIS is Performance Art by Marilyn Arsem	84
--	----

## INTRODUCTION

### The Moon in the Water: Reflections on Performance Art and Photography

by Daniela Beltrani, performance artist

#### Contextualising *Two-Way Mirror*

According to the Cambridge Dictionaries Online, two-way mirror is “a mirror that can be used in the usual way from one side but is transparent from the other side and can therefore be used to watch people without them knowing.”<sup>[1]</sup>

In seeking an effective metaphor to use for a captivating title to the project, I resolved that this object was perfectly apt to describe the situation, which is at its very core. That is: whilst a performance artist is performing - drawn within one's own consciousness, aware of oneself, in space and time - a colleague is intent on watching (and taking photographs of) them perform. “It [performance art] forces me to pay attention, and to operate fully in the present,”<sup>[2]</sup> explains Marilyn Arsem in the artist statement on her website. Dramatically, the two stand one *vis-à-vis* the other, but one has cognition only of oneself, whilst the other has cognition of both.

Before I felt compelled to elect performance art as my preferred artistic language, I was audience, and very enthusiastic at that. I began observing performances with the keenest interest, in Singapore in 2009. I clearly recall feeling completely exhilarated at the tangibly cathartic experience I had, after watching Lynn Lu's performance on 5 August 2009.<sup>[3]</sup> Lynn poured large amounts of sea salt on top of a block of ice, until it formed a sort of pyramid. She proceeded to slowly show the audience a sheet of paper on which she had written: “Think of a moment when the ground vanished from beneath your feet.” She then folded the sheet into a paper boat and placed it on top of the pyramid of salt, which, meanwhile, was silently eroding the block of ice. This is how my memory recalls that performance, quite likely inaccurately,<sup>[4]</sup> but with a vivid imagery

1 <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/two-way-mirror> (12 June 2016).

2 <http://marilynarsem.net> (13 June 2016).

3 The performance took place during the opening of the exhibition *The Air-Conditioned Recession: A Singapore Survey* at Valentine Willie Fine Arts, Singapore.

4 I recently read an enlightening book on cognitive errors, *The Art of Thinking Clearly* by Rolf Dobelli, London: Sceptre, 2013. From the list the author makes of the most common of them, I found two, which could also be employed in combination, when recollecting past performances we have witnessed. Essentially, with the *Story Bias* we tend to make up and tell a story out of the jumble of our life experiences, ultimately to make sense of them. So, it is important to bear this in mind and, therefore, to ask ourselves who is recounting the performance, what their intentions are, what they are omitting, and so forth. I believe this is what Amelia Jones refers to when she writes: “it is hard to identify the patterns of history while one is embedded in them. We “invent” these patterns, pulling the past together into a manageable picture, retrospectively.” Amelia Jones, “Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performances as Documentation,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 1997), 12.

With the *Falsification of History*, over time our recollections of past events are subtly and unexpectedly reworked in such a way that we adjust “past views to fit present ones” to “avoid any embarrassing proof of our fallibility.” In this case too, it is essential to consider that we are not machines and that our evolving souls readjust the various stories of our life in light of constantly updated developments and as such, we should allow for inherent inaccuracies, which build subconsciously over time and thus discourage ourselves from the unfounded belief in our infallibility. In this regard, discussing the journey from performance to pictures in the practice of Monika Günther and Ruedi Schill, Helen Koriath suggests that the relationship between the clear image and the past is not “fixed and that it is not possible to draw a clear line between reality and fiction.” Helen Koriath, “From performance display to pictures in memory – focused on the example of “Talking Hands by Monika Günther and

and strong emotional connection that almost makes me tear even today, because at the time I was unexpectedly made to recall the forgotten and painful moment in my life, when the ground did indeed vanish from beneath my feet. It was then that I was struck by the potentiality of performance art to reach out to the yearnings and struggles of the human soul.

In April 2010 I went further, and found myself compelled not only to photograph several performances from *Future Of Imagination 6*, held at the then Sculpture Square in Singapore, but also to jot down reflections which were surfacing concomitant to Black Market International and guest artists' collective *impromptu* performance, lasting six uninterrupted hours.<sup>[5]</sup>

In February 2011, within the open and nurturing setting of the Philippines International Performance Art Festival (PIPAF)<sup>[6]</sup> in Santiago, Philippines, Yuan Mor'O Ocampo gave me the opportunity and full support to test and express myself through performance art and since then, I never looked back. The research I had begun had deepened, and become more connected and authentic with the risk of exposing myself to its practice, to its failures and successes, to its *coram populi* learning process.

A few years later - having travelled extensively to many events and festivals in Southeast Asia, China and Europe, and having met numerous international performance artists - I began reflecting on my own practice as performance artist who feels compelled to take photographs of other performance artists, whilst these are performing.

Being part of a performance art event - often lasting several days - does not hinge solely on me turning up to present a performance, but on me *being there*: becoming part of a small *impromptu* community made of sensitive individuals who share their personal journeys, sometimes as artists and sometimes as audience, but always as human beings, in a dialogic and equal relationship, which entails feeling and understanding before judging and criticising; engaging in the dialogue that such an event naturally establishes; meeting other artists; watching their performances; listening to the audience feedback or questions; sharing time, food, living space, energy with others as a way of getting to know them; helping where it is needed, including taking photographs when expressly requested, and so forth. It is a splendid opportunity to partake art and life<sup>[7]</sup> alike. Art then can impact meaningfully our life and not live separately from it.

It is during the exposure to the local and international performance art circuits that I met the 21 artists whom I have invited to take part in this project, in my vest of participating colleague, and not as *super partes* curator, with an agenda to substantiate. I was clear that - although initiating this project with a core idea – my essential intention was simply to stimulate in all the artists an individual self-reflection on our shared practice and

Ruedi Schill, “*mobile album / international, 03 / performance, body, fiction*, (autumn 2014), 55.

5 Later on, I elaborated that writing into an essay for the catalogue of *Future Of Imagination 7*, held at Goodman Arts Centre in 2011, by the title *Gazes, Glances and Glimpses: Observations and reflections on collaborations in Performance Art*, <http://www.foi.sg/foi7/>.

6 Performance artist Yuan Mor'O Ocampo established PIPAF in 1999. For an overall view of prominent performance art festivals in Southeast Asia up to 2010, I refer the reader to Thomas J. Berghuis, *Art into Action: Performance Art Festivals in Asia* <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaologue/Details/915> (13 June 2016).

7 The two different paradigms are at the core of Roi Vaara's 1997 video *Artist's Dilemma*, on <https://youtu.be/J5qQ66NBF5w> (13 June 2016).

then initiate a series of dialogues that could allow us to understand more deeply the phantasmic and elusive essence of performance art through our differing practice of and relationship with photography.

“The histories of time-based media haven’t been written by any museum or art-historical curriculum yet,” stated Stuart Comer, chief curator of the Department of Media and Performance Art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York,<sup>[8]</sup> in 2014. Should they (be written by museums or art-historical curricula)? The performance art studies field is more recent and less abundant than art history and I believe that artists have the right as much as the responsibility to contribute to it, wherever so predisposed, at the very least on par with historians, critics, curators, who – after all – work only with concepts and theories without getting *their hands dirty*. And moreover, one of the first art historians was, unsurprisingly, an artist, Giorgio Vasari. In life, nothing can replace direct experience. Except for Amelia Jones,<sup>[9]</sup> of course.

It is with this sense of responsibility that I embarked on realising this project, two years ago.

### Some reflections on performance and photography

Before it became referred to as Performance Art, the practice of artists “who use their own bodies as the material of their activity”<sup>[10]</sup> and “as their primary medium of expression”<sup>[11]</sup> was known as, *inter alia*, in the 1970s USA, *Bodyworks*. This expression was then used by the curator Ira Licht and the museum’s director Stephen Prokopoff, as title for what may well be the “first American museum exhibition devoted to a survey of the work and attitudes that have come to be known as *Bodyworks*,”<sup>[12]</sup> in 1975 in Chicago. Understandably, the artist Laurie Anderson - who was invited to present a performance in conjunction with the show - at the time remarked how the exhibition consisted of “pieces of paper on a wall, photographs, notes, tapes... But in fact, *no bodies were there*. Only paper.”<sup>[13]</sup>

8 The quote is taken from the article “MOMA’s new curatorial guard” by Hilarie M. Sheets posted on 10 January 2014 Artnews website, <http://www.artnews.com/2014/10/01/momas-new-curatorial-guard/> (13 June 2016). In 2006, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, established the Department of Media, which in 2009 was expanded to include Performance Art under the curatorship of Klaus Biesenbach. Biesenbach led many initiatives which contributed to promote performance art with the public of MoMA and MoMA PS1.

9 Endorsing Peggy Phelan’s laconic statement that “Performance’s only life is in the present,” I refer the reader to pages 146 to 152 of chapter 7 (The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction) of her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

I have already expressed my disapproval of Amelia Jones’ position in her paper “Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performances as Documentation,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 1997), with a reference in my essay “Uncovering Poiesis in Performance Art,” in *Venice International Performance Art Week: Hybrid Body - Poetic Body* (Venice: VestAndPage Press, 2014), 75 and 76.

10 The quote is by the late Stephen Prokopoff in the foreword of the catalogue to the exhibition *Bodyworks*, curated by Ira Licht, and held between 8 March and 27 April 1975 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, of which he was at the time director.

11 The quote is from Ira Licht’s essay *Bodyworks* of the eponymous exhibition. A large number of artists were invited to exhibit, including Vito Acconci, Adrian Piper, William Wegman, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Gilbert and George, Chris Burden and Joseph Beuys. Quite interestingly, in the listing of all the artworks exhibited, no photo credit appears.

12 Stephen Prokopoff, *ibid*.

13 Amelia Jones, *Body art/performing the subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 32.

Unsurprisingly, this may be due to the confusion<sup>[14]</sup> and erroneous exchangeability of the performance art practice with its traces and/or modes of recording and transmission, of which photography seems the most valuable and easily tradeable commodity. I dare suggest that this confusion, in turn, may derive from our human inability to apprehend reality fully and, even more so, to share it with others. The only thing we are able to grasp, manipulate and communicate is an approximate representation of reality, through numbers, words, concepts, symbols, images, created and organised by our rational mind in a linear and sequential manner, which our brains can handle, but which is, for this very fact, inherently limited. I believe that performance art lives outside of this conventional and constructed realm. It is indisputable that in life we cannot rely purely on our rational mind and/or complex sensorial apparatus and only work at conscious level. Our subconscious is very powerful, as it operates from body memory and intuitive wisdom, and in many circumstances it appears more appropriate to access in order to apprehend reality or to furnish our own input or response to it. Intuition is an essential and even more potent way for us to face the world, one which cannot be described, explained or transmitted. Much of our most meaningful life experiences is ineffable and when we reduce it to mere words or images, we inevitably reduce its power, similarly to when one has to explain a joke.

Fritjof Capra, drawing thought-provoking parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism in his book *The Tao of Physics*, presents Eastern art disciplines as forms of meditation and “ways of self-realisation through the development of the intuitive mode of consciousness” rather than “means for expressing the artist’s ideas.”<sup>[15]</sup> I will discuss this connection between art and consciousness in the next chapter.

Photography is certainly much less problematic to manage and control, even for institutions, than a live performance, which instead - due to its often observed quality of authenticity and spontaneity, and even with a prior idea or image or sequence of actions in mind - has potentially a very high degree of unpredictability and nil opportunities to be *regulated* on the spot, without the risk of an obvious censoring external intervention.

This partly explains also why the organisation of performance art events and festivals – certainly in Southeast and East Asia, and from my direct experience - essentially rests with practising artists and many are today celebrating 10, 15, 20 and over years of dedicated, committed and relentless activity. If anything, artists have instead also ventured into fields pertaining to the performance art studies: such as the establishment of archives for the benefit of colleagues and researchers (for example: Boris Nieslony with ASA Art Service Association in Germany;<sup>[16]</sup> Lee Wen with Independent Archive in Singapore; a group of international artists with DARC<sup>[17]</sup> in the UK); the curation of exhibitions, where different aspects of performance art are researched, presented, contextualised and discussed;<sup>[18]</sup> or the organisation of hybrids between exhibitions and live art events.<sup>[19]</sup>

14 To disperse such confusion, I invite the reader to turn to Marilyn Arsem’s manifesto, *THIS is Performance Art*, in the Appendix of this catalogue, page 84.

15 Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (London: Flamingo, 1982), 46.

16 I refer the reader to *The Black Kit* guide found in [www.asa.de/asa\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.asa.de/asa_brochure.pdf) (14 June 2016).

17 Please see [www.darc.media](http://www.darc.media) (14 June 2016).

18 I have, for example, approached the subject of performance relics with the exhibition *Reliquarivm* in 2012, in Singapore. Catalogue in PDF, available upon request.

19 The first *Venice International Performance Art Week*, curated by VestAndPage in December 2012, is one

Performance art has, in recent years more consistently, caught the attention of some curators and institutions: in 2010, Klaus Biesenbach of the MoMA PS1 Contemporary Art Center, and RoseLee Goldberg of Performa, co-curated the ambitious *100 Years*, “an exhibition presenting influential moments in the past century of performance art history;”<sup>[20]</sup> in 2011 the MoMA curated *Staging Action: Performance in Photography since 1960*, to explore the different ways in which artists have used photography in performance;<sup>[21]</sup> earlier this year Tate Modern presented *Performing for the Camera*, an exhibition exploring, once again, the relationship between photography and performance art. Just to mention a few group exhibitions and without considering the solos of Marina Abramović at the MoMA, New York (2010) and at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart (2015); Tino Sehgal at the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); Amanda Heng (2011) and Lee Wen (2012) at the Singapore Art Museum; Ana Mendieta at Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2013); Marilyn Arsem at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2015-2016); and the list can go on.

Against the background of such an institutionalised interest, performance artists continue relentlessly to nurture the transcontinental network through dialogues which take place, virtually and/or live, in a disparaged variety of artist-led projects. *Two-Way Mirror* is one of them.

#### Experiencing the reality, capturing the present: the journey from performance to photography

A friend once recounted to me an incident, which had totally shocked him: in the middle of his performance, an artist, noticing the photographer taking snaps of him perhaps from an angle which he was deeming inadequate, addressed him and prompted him directly to move to an area he preferred. I joined my friend in the aghast reaction at the story. Why? To my friend and I, the artist had obviously left what it is often referred to as *the zone*,<sup>[22]</sup> and was back to his ordinary consciousness, to *real life*, devoid of that aesthetic quality necessary to the artistic experience, with such an ease and promptness that probably leads one to suspect he was never there in the first place. What is then, performance art? Historians and artists agree to disagree and. It is widely accepted that the concept of performance art<sup>[23]</sup> continues escaping a definition that could encompass the disparaged variety of practices that use this expression. This may be because its definition is attempted from a theoretical standpoint and/or with ambitious outreaching.

Reflecting on my own practice, I intend to share my experience, in the hope of contributing to the ongoing discourse from the opposing, yet complementing viewpoints of myself

---

such case, where the typical static quality of traditional exhibition is combined with the typical dynamic quality of live art events. I have considered this aspect in my essay for their catalogue, “Uncovering Poiesis in Performance Art,” in *Venice International Performance Art Week: Hybrid Body - Poetic Body*, Venice: VestAndPage Press, 2014, 71 to 79.

20 <http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/303/> (13 June 2016).

21 <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1087?locale=en> (13 June 2016).

22 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has written an enlightening book on this topic, *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience* (New York: Harper Perennial: 1991), from which I draw inspiring considerations applied to performance art and its relation to photography.

23 Some historians use different terminology. For example, Amelia Jones prefers the term *body art*, as she explains in the introduction to her book *Body Art/performing the subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998).

as artist and audience,<sup>[24]</sup> whilst framing it within the recent developments in a branch of psychology, known as positive psychology.<sup>[25]</sup> The study by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi into the experience known as *flow*, could help us understand what performance art can be and do, and thus attempt to offer a more solid base to the practice which this exhibition introduces and delves into.

Beginning with the most apprehensible method of *via negativa*, I can state that performance art never entails affectation; falsity; assumption of poses; full control; predetermination; rehearsal; safety; protection. Any of these qualities is unconceivable in my practice, because I consider my performances journeys I do together with my audience. I do not stage myself for the image, motivated by a predetermined concept of static beauty. I favour truthfulness and authenticity, and risk of failure is always possible, intrinsic and intimidating, but not petrifying: I am free to respond to it with spontaneity and sincerity. A new notion of beauty becomes thus discoverable, vague and open-ended, unfolding in the performance and strongly connected to the quality of authenticity in doing, as well as being and becoming, of the performer. Something which the camera is somehow able to capture, according to Susan Sontag, who writes that “notwithstanding the declared aims of indiscreet, unposed, often harsh photography to reveal truth, not beauty, photography still beautifies,” because at the very least, “the real has a pathos. And that pathos is-beauty.”<sup>[26]</sup>

And what the camera captures, by choice of and within the perspective of the artist who takes the photograph, tells us more about him/her rather than the one who is thus caught performing. Not of this opinion is RoseLee Goldberg, who, instead, considers the photograph like “a shard of pottery” from which she can discover “the story of an entire civilization.”<sup>[27]</sup> for Goldberg, then, it all becomes a matter of learning how to read its iconography and clues.

When discussing performance art, we are often faced with the obvious reference points of the artist’s body and action. In my opinion and experience, the body is most definitely not the only *locus* of the performance, but it is on par with the intangible aspects of a person: mind, self and consciousness. Similarly, action is most definitely not the only modality of the performance, but it is on par with being, disappearing and becoming. The full range of humanity’s modes of existence is at the service of the artist’s ultimate intention: nothing is excluded, not even vulnerability. Paraphrasing Lord Krishna’s words to Arjuna,<sup>[28]</sup> intention is what may guide the artist’s actions, but once these are carried out, the intention is then dropped and with it, any attachment to the results: the artist is open and exposed to unexplored territories which he/she can then walk into, together with his/her audience, in what Emily Durkheim calls “collective effervescence.” This is an intense and open participation to an impromptu “group with a concrete, real existence,”<sup>[29]</sup> which Durkheim believed was at the very essence

24 Ultimately, every performance artist who takes photographs of another performance artist, is first and foremost, audience.

25 I can recommend excellent books, besides Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s, such as *The Happiness Hypothesis* by Jonathan Haidt, *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl and *Authentic Happiness* by Martin E. P. Seligman.

26 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1990), 102.

27 “On Record, RoseLee Goldberg and Rozana Marcoci in Conversation,” in *Aperture* 221 (Winter 2015), 45.

28 Bhagavad Gita, 2.48.

29 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience* (New York: Harper Perennial: 1991), 110.



of religious experiences. An example of this in performance art could be what Paul Couillard refers to, when he writes about the audience's deep investment into Annie Sprinkle's performance *Post Post Porn Modernist*.<sup>[30]</sup>

In performance, there is no safety net, and vulnerability becomes the ultimate offering to the audience in exchange for the opportunity of a precious and authentic encounter, which could potentially leave us changed forever, with a shifted, richer consciousness. Even if the sequence of actions is identical, every performance is unrepeatable, just like Heraclitus's universe, where one cannot step twice into the same stream.<sup>[31]</sup> Essential components of a performance, in relation to my practice, include, in no particular order: body, self, consciousness, time, space, audience, intention/idea/image. Every performance is like a map in 1:1 scale to assist us in navigating human life, but in a distilled fashion, without the unnecessary and distracting elements of mundane life, so that we may uncover the essential, what it means to us and how it can guide us on our life journey. Every performance may be considered what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls, in his book *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*, an autotelic experience or *flow*: i.e. an experience that is an end to itself and self-contained, without expectations of any future benefits, "but simply because the doing itself is the reward."<sup>[32]</sup>

The body is the most obvious and visible component to who we are, but certainly not the only one. Whilst we share instincts with animals, it is consciousness<sup>[33]</sup> which sets us apart and allows us a whole set of faculties unique to human beings, such as making art, lying, daydreaming and so forth. In essence, consciousness is an open system of intentionally ordered information, in theory infinitely expandable. Thus, intentions keep the information in consciousness, ordered. But it is the process of attention, which selects the appropriate and relevant information from the endless multitude we encounter every day, guided by intention. And the self is none other than one of the contents of consciousness,<sup>[34]</sup> the most important, as it contains all that has passed through consciousness. Psychic *negentropy*, or optimal experience, can reinforce the self and make it more confident and strong, allowing more psychic energy to flow effortlessly. "In flow we are in control of our psychic energy, and everything we do adds order to consciousness,"<sup>[35]</sup> so that after such experience the self has grown, become more complex and more integrated, because "in deep concentration consciousness is unusually well ordered"<sup>[36]</sup> and it experiences harmony through focusing of thoughts, intentions and feelings towards the same goal. Control over our consciousness can, not only improve the quality of our experiences, but also determine the quality of our life. Therefore, knowing how to control the consciousness is primary and essential wisdom to our lives. It is a type of knowledge that comes from our direct individual experience,

30 Paul Couillard, *Performance Art Documents: An Apologia*, in this catalogue, 18 to 19.

31 δὴς ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης from Plato, *Cratylus*, 402a.

32 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Ibid.*, 67.

33 Already in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, one of the oldest Hindu texts in Sanskrit, Chandogya Upanishad (chapter 8.7 to 8.12), presents and discusses the four states of consciousness: awake (*jagrat*), dreaming (*swapna*), deep sleep (*sushupti*) and transcendent (*turiya*), declaring that only the last one is what the true Self corresponds to.

34 Well over 2,000 years ago, the science of *yoga* and the *Samkhya* school of *Hindu* philosophy already differentiated the ways in which the Self (atman) operates, through consciousness (*chitta*), ego (*ahamkara*), mind (*manas*) and intellect (*buddhi*). The *Taittiriya Upanishad* discusses the five *Koshas* or sheaths of being, of which *Annamaya*, the physical body, is only the first and the outer most.

35 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Ibid.*, 40.

36 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Ibid.*, 41.

as it requires the commitment of our emotions and will. Culture, religion, philosophy, etc... may provide some options and answers, but it is only up to the individual to decide for him/herself, whether those are, and in what measure, truly helpful.

And so, in light of the above, why choose to express oneself through performance art? Why choose to watch performance art? Or widening the range of the question: why do human beings make or need art at all? Because art is a way to control our consciousness. Happiness has a lot to do with the answer, but it is not money, success or fame that can offer a substantiating answer. We need to look deeper. In resorting to Csikszentmihalyi's study, I identify the ultimate point of encounter between artist and audience, which gives reason for the artist to make performance and for the audience to witness it: consciousness.

Csikszentmihalyi considers, *inter alia*, art and various artistic engagements, as opportunities to experience a sense of deep enjoyment, so rewarding that "people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it."<sup>[37]</sup> He then goes on to list the eight components to the phenomenology of enjoyment. Of these,<sup>[38]</sup> I isolate the one which entails merging of action and awareness and which takes place when the person stops being aware of him/herself as separate from the action he/she is performing. To those watching, the artist may appear as being in a sort of meditative state, completely immersed in the action he/she executes, as it may be the case in durational performances, where action tends to be minimal.

Logical and/or intellectual considerations cannot penetrate the synergy between action and awareness satisfactorily, because in flow there is no need to ask questions; to reflect; to think; to doubt; to interpret; to look for meanings. Our rational mind will only cause and perpetuate futile disagreements: like two monks debating on what they see moving, whether the flag or the wind; until the wise man interjects that the only thing moving is the mind.<sup>[39]</sup> Relinquishing any illusory supremacy in our logical faculties may allow us not only to connect with the performance at a deeper level, but also to stop attempting to explain what in essence may be comparable to *kōan*, paradoxical and nonsensical riddles of Zen Buddhism tradition. Inspired by that well-known Zen story, instead of looking at the finger pointing to the moon (representation of reality), we are invited to look at the moon (reality). And "reality is simply the present moment."<sup>[40]</sup>

And in that moment, much can be experienced. Being transported to a painful memory, which had been stored and temporarily forgotten. Feeling a sense of understanding filling the entire body. Or nothing. Because a performance may also be silent to me. What I take out of a performance on a personal level talks not so much about the performance or the performer, but about myself. Returning to Csikszentmihalyi, it is my attention at work which selects information meaningful<sup>[41]</sup> to me, from the plethora reality

37 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Ibid.*, 49.

38 For the full list and individual presentation, I refer the reader to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Ibid.*, 49 to 80.

39 I read the full story in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), 158.

40 Alan Watts, *Still the Mind* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2000), 115.

41 The underlying concept, which is too often ignored or forgotten, is that during the course of my entire life, I can only find transient answers, valid and pertinent to a specific time, place and state of consciousness, because my knowledge of reality is always limited, imperfect, fragmented and never final: it grows and develops with me. Outside of that specificity, I have to uncover fresher answers, in an endless flow that will last until I



offers, for the purpose of the ultimate human knowledge, that of myself, in accordance with the imperative γνώθι σεαυτόν.<sup>[42]</sup>

Therefore, it is reasonable to state that it is also my attention, within the context of the above concept of consciousness, that makes me depress the button on the camera to select the fleeting present<sup>[43]</sup> carrying the piece of information (an image, a feeling, an experience), which I feel compelled to attempt to retain, no matter how impossible I am perfectly aware it is.

I sense this precious and unique something animated by an almost hieratic aura, a tangible energy pulsating in the space and manifesting through presence. "What matters to me is not the photograph's "life" (a purely ideological notion) but the certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays and not with a superadded light."<sup>[44]</sup> And, cognisant of how fragile my memory and my life are, I entrust the image, a perfectly imperfect tool, to capture the intangible taking place in my presence: "The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed."<sup>[45]</sup>

Despite this, some seem to end up valuing images to the point that these become confused with the performance, end up representing it,<sup>[46]</sup> and even happen to be privileged<sup>[47]</sup> to it: the moon reflected in the water of the pail is mistaken for the actual thing.<sup>[48]</sup>

The seconds or fractions of a second which would take me to move from my sensorial experience, to my emotional response, to my rational decision to take a photo, and to my action of depressing the camera button, could be too precious to be wasted away to end up with nothing. Even when using a digital camera, which offers me the opportunity of a relatively immediate assessment, compared to the analogue camera, which prolongs the process.<sup>[49]</sup>

Therefore, early on, to preclude such an occurrence, I developed the habit of leave this body.

42 Gnōthi seautòn, is translated from ancient Greek, literally, as *know yourself*.

43 The relationship between reality and photography may be unambiguous for the artist who takes the image within a certain context, in time and place, but it is not necessarily so for the viewer. For some interesting considerations on this topic from the very onset of photography in the first half of 1800s, I refer the reader to Gilles Massot, "To cut or not to paste, that is the question ..." in *COS-MO The Constant Self-Recording Mode* (Singapore, 2013), 84.

44 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 81.

45 Roland Barthes, *Ibid*.

46 For a thought-provoking variety of considerations generated from the analysis of diverse performances in relation to photographs, I refer the reader to chapter 5 of Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), 211 to 259.

47 "I will argue here that this specificity should not be privileged over the specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces of such an event." Amelia Jones, "Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performances as Documentation," *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 1997), 12.

48 I read the full story in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), 55.

49 I thank Boris Nieslony for encouraging me to search through the documents in [www.asa.de](http://www.asa.de), where I came across an interesting interview of Ulay on performance and photography: Ulay shares about his experiments with Polaroid camera, which he preferred at one point because "its fastness and its rapidness and its instantness" allowed it to work "like a mirror" and because of its ability to superimpose - or at the very least to reduce the gap between - the initial moment of taking the image and the one when the image is eventually printed ([http://www.asa.de/magazine/iss6/21interview\\_ulyay.html](http://www.asa.de/magazine/iss6/21interview_ulyay.html)) (26 August 2015).

watching the performance through the lens, so that my focus would be unhindered by possible distracting elements surrounding the space and object of my attention. Consequently, witnessing a performance in this manner would mean to me to be in a state of full presence, and complete, utter alertness, open to receive the stimuli, and living each moment in expectation of something precious, or even nothing. My eye and the lens became one entity in response to my Self ready to capture *beautiful* - in the widest sense of the term - images unveiling in front of me. The beautiful that could be accidental, unexpected, spontaneous, candid, intense, vulnerable, exposed, ephemeral, indescribable, ... the real, the pathos, the beauty Susan Sontag wrote about.<sup>[50]</sup>

Over the years, my habit became an obsession in an attempt to capture the perfect picture, one which was able to precisely encapsulate or distil the experience I had just lived, so that I could

This way I became almost unable to watch a performance without the camera. I believe this obsession came to slowly manifest alongside increasingly recurrent considerations over my mortality and the desperate knowledge of the impossibility to leave any durable legacy upon my final departure, with disheartening consequences. And so, my life's journey and artistic research took a decisively spiritual turn with a surprising sense of calm, and subsequent loss of previous anxieties and fears. Perhaps discovering that 13 years of images with me in them had been maliciously destroyed, had something to do with it. But those who perpetrated such violence forgot that in keeping the images without me in them, they still kept my presence, not visible, behind the lens. In looking to uncover the wisdom and positive relevance in my life from this painful experience, I finally realised that I am not meant to keep and preserve everything that passes through my consciousness and the only thing I possess and have at my disposal is the eternal present.

It is mainly for this reason that I ceased to bring my camera to events. I stopped experiencing performance through the lens. These days I only take a handful of images, purely as a way to take note for reference or to assist my future, expectantly failing, memory, when faces, situations, dates and spaces start to blur. I began to accept that reality cannot be always distilled or wholly retained and preserved, no matter how noble the ultimate intention: a spontaneous gift, a friendly favour, an artistic ambition, an objective illusion. Being *there* can be more than enough. Being present to take the offering the performance artist - often also a friend - unveils, can be more meaningful. Letting silence engulf my response so that my Self has the time and space to process it, distil it, or do nothing with it, in freedom. Being there, when we have the opportunity to be, will never be replaced by seeing a two-dimensional image. And when we cannot be there, we simply have to accept that an image may tell us a story, offer us a perspective, be useful to the artist and posterity as proof that something happened, even be an artwork in its own right, but it will never be the performance.

50 I refer the reader to note 26 of this text.

## Conclusion

It has been an enriching journey to prepare for this exhibition, to encourage all the artists and myself in self-reflection and to engage ourselves in dialogues. On a personal level it has allowed me to confront my Self, to become aware of what I have learnt so far in this journey, to acknowledge similarities and differences in our practices, to discover the diverse approaches in our art-making and in our considerations of how photography impacts our ephemeral artworks.

From the various submissions, I noticed similar attitudes. For example, Kelvin, Marita and I have recently experienced a decreased interest in taking photographs, whilst conversely we prefer to dedicate ourselves to be more fully present in the moment, to enjoy the performance and to relish the encounter with the artist. This preference is also apparent in the words of Farah, Manuel, RED BIND and Varsha. Sometimes taking the image for another artist is a type of gift (AñA, Razieh); or a sign of friendship (Tara); or a favour (Urich); or a form of note-making (Sharon). The image can become a bottled memory for our limited recording capacity (Sharon) or a visual memory (Sophia Natasha); or a souvenir (Ezzam); or an educating tool (Ezzam); or an artwork in itself (Kelvin, Lisa), or a reference point (Nguang How).

Words recurrent in the various submissions and that caught my eye, are memory, audience, record, perspectives, situations, beautiful, live, documentation, capture, feelings, being, there, authentic, visual aesthetic, fragmented, distorted, trust, exchange, collaboration, ... And the reader might be able to uncover more.

AñA, Qing, Ezzam, Farah, Gabriela, Jürgen, Kelvin, Nguang How, Lisa, Manuel, Marita, Nisa, Paul, Razieh, Barbara and Gilivanka of RED BIND, Sharon, Sophia Natasha, Tara, Urich, Varsha, Watan and I have distilled and shared our reflections so far. I hope that this project has reached out to other performance artists and inspired them to question themselves in relation to this practice and to performance art in general. I sure would like to hear from them and continue this conversation, because as much we can be aware of ourselves, our practice can never exist in isolation. We need the other to see us too: two-way mirror.

## ESSAYS

### **Performance Art Documents: An Apologia**

by Paul Couillard

Using a camera is like playing an instrument or wielding a tennis racket: a novice user may sometimes benefit from a happy accident or beginner's luck, but to produce consistently admirable results requires hours of practice as well as a natural affinity.

Me, I am no photographer. I am distinctly uncomfortable behind a viewfinder, painfully aware of the shortcomings of my eyesight, coordination and response time. There are few things that make me feel more inadequate than being asked by other artists to document their performances for them. I'm always concerned that I will make some terrible mistake, resulting in a chaotic jumble of blurry, unusable images—or no images at all. Even worse, being behind a recording device makes me feel distant from the work I am charged with documenting, as if I had been placed behind a thick door, with only the tiniest fragment of the action visible through a narrow keyhole. When the performance finishes, I often find that my memory of it is overshadowed by my tactile and visceral struggles with the unforgiving lump of plastic, metal and glass in my hands. It is a wonder I have ever produced any documentary images of performances at all.

And yet, over the years I have taken hundreds of photos and videos of performances, many of them published in books and catalogues or circulating via artists' web pages and DVDs. The bulk of these images stem from my early years as the artistic director of Fado Performance Inc. (now known as FADO Performance Art Centre), when the imperative of producing recordings of performances was slightly less ingrained than it has now become, and the recording process was more cumbersome and expensive. Then, it seemed more important to me to maximise artist fees than to use precious organisational dollars hiring photographers and videographers. As a consequence, I was not only the curator and organiser of Fado's events, but also their main documenter.

It may be difficult to fathom now, but I remember a time when many performance artists were proud of the fact that so much of our work was undocumented on film or video, existing only "in the moment." Ephemerality was our badge of authenticity. Our most prized record of a performance—and to be honest, still my favourite form of archival reproduction—was the way an event was (or wasn't) preserved and transmitted strictly through the high-wire-without-a-net act of human memory. Not how the performance was scripted as a text of words and images, or saved on film for posterity, but how it became a story as it evolved through recountings that made up in meaningfulness for what they lacked in accuracy. When all that remains is an impression, what remains matters.

Then, documentation was seen as getting in the way of performances. The distraction of clicking shutters or chirping camera prompts (let alone blinding flashes) equated to a scandalous and generally intolerable disregard for a performance's most important audience: the live witnesses. And since there were few places for documents of performances to circulate, their most important, practical function was how they might assist in future grant applications. At a time when expectations of live performance

were changing, shifting away from the privileging of the assembled audience in favour of the frame of the camera, I remember regular discussions about how to deal with this burdensome problem of having a visual record of the work. A dear colleague (now dead) had a simple schedule: every three years, he would do a work designed just for the camera, for the sake of documentation. This would free up the rest of his work to focus on the sacrosanct principle of maintaining a direct relationship between performer and audience, while ensuring an ongoing and reasonably recent supply of images to satisfy the business requirements of getting the rest of his work funded and curated.

This was a largely pre-digital era, when photo documentation usually meant capturing images on print and slide film (slides were the medium of choice for presenting work to selection committees and grant juries) following the arcane exigencies of film stocks and F-stops. Lighting (impossibly dim or glaringly overlit for the demanding photographic process) was almost always an issue, and photo retouching was an expensive and highly specialised skill.

Now, of course, we live in a different world. In selfie culture, pictures are ubiquitous— instantaneous, cheap to produce, easy to take and just as easy to manipulate. Everyone is a photographer, and turning what one sees and does into pictures is as much a birth right as speaking a language or knowing how to read. Today, we have come to see the world through a “Facebook eye.”<sup>[1]</sup> We advocate what Jacob Silverman has referred to as “the populist mantra of the social networking age”—*pics or it didn't happen*—where the value of experience rests on its ability to enter the sharing economy and feed the insatiable hunger of social media.<sup>[2]</sup> This suggests that we have begun to seek out and negotiate experiences not for their own sake, but for their value as representable (and therefore circulable) tokens of experience.

*Two-Way Mirror* is not precisely about that, of course. If anything, this exhibition takes a strategic, institutional approach to counter the always-already-losing-its-currency image overload of social media. I use the terms “strategic” and “institutional” as they are laid out in Michel de Certeau’s well-known analysis from *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau offers a distinction between *strategies*, which are territorial—“A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it”—and *tactics*, which are temporal:

a ‘tactic’ [...] is] a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. [...] The “proper” is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Performance art tends to be temporal and tactical, designed to take advantage of the

1 “Today, we are in danger of developing a ‘Facebook Eye’: our brains always looking for moments where the ephemeral blurof lived experience might best be translated into a Facebook post; one that will draw the most comments and ‘likes.’” Jurgenson, Nathan. (Jan 2012). Facebook, therefore I am. *Corriere della Sera*. <http://lettura.corriere.it/facebook-therfore-i-am/>

2 Silverman, Jacob. (26 February, 2016). “Pics or it didn’t happen”—The mantra of the Instagram era. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/feb/26/pics-or-it-didnt-happen-mantra-instagram-era-facebook-twitter>

3 de Certeau, Michel. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. xix.

makeshift resources available to it in the moment. Selfies, too, are tactical, though the social media platforms that distribute and encourage them are strategic interventions by corporate and media interests into our daily lives and routines. An exhibition of photographs is also strategic, relying on the institutional weight and real estate of the gallery setting. Framed by a carefully curated context, the photos included in *Two-Way Mirror* are meant to have or accrue a certain gravitas. They are marked as standing out from the endless stream of images that wash over us on a daily basis. By drawing on the resources and conventions of the art world, this exhibition assures us that these images are worthy of a closer, longer, more thoughtful look. They merit the privilege of occupying a physical space.

This collection also draws our attention to a specific and expert type of gaze. Technical prowess with recording devices aside, these images have been assembled to test the assertion that performance artists are important documenters of performance art because artists witness their colleagues’ works in particular, specialised ways. In her initial contact with me about this exhibition, the artist curator, Daniela Beltrani, wrote that her own experience documenting other artists’ work has led her to believe that “performance artists taking photos of other artists can offer an additional layer of performance photography.”<sup>[4]</sup> Indeed, it is this argument that persuaded me to be a part of the exhibition. Even if my relationship to cameras is awkward, I nevertheless find myself uniquely attuned to appreciate specific details and moments of at least some performance art works. Like many of my colleagues included in this exhibition, I have seen, made and organised many performance art events in a range of styles and a variety of locations over several decades. As a result, I have a developed set of aesthetic (if this word can capture the nexus of physical, emotional, psychological, social, political, ethical, epistemological and spiritual concerns that shape my outlook) sensibilities. If I am a singular, “personal” body in my reactions to the time, space and circumstances of the performances I witness, it is also true that I embody a “professional” perspective that understands and reacts to performance art in particular, invested ways. Watching what happens during a performance, I have the sense of also having been there, in the thick of what is happening. I straddle both sides of the metaphorical mirror that names this show.

But how does this particular “being there” matter? Writing as an art historian, Amelia Jones has argued forcefully that being a live witness of a performance offers no special privilege in terms of understanding a performance’s importance—or more specifically, its “historical truth.”<sup>[5]</sup> Jones asserts that the problems she faces in writing about performances that she has not seen live are “largely logistical rather than ethical or hermeneutic.”<sup>[6]</sup> All experience is mediated, and the way one experiences a document is both intersubjective and eventful, just as a live performance is. Therefore, she argues, the experience of being there offers no guarantee of improving one’s appreciation for the context and value of a work over discovering it through its documentation. I have much to say about the different understandings that a performance might afford

4 Email correspondence with the curator, August 2015.

5 “[W]hile the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical ‘truth’ of the performance.” Jones, Amelia. (Winter, 1997). “Presence” in absentia: Experiencing performance as documentation. *Art Journal* 56.4: 11-18, p. 11.

6 *Ibid*.

its audiences based on how it is accessed—whether through live experience or photographic record—but also, following the curatorial premise of *Two-Way Mirror*, it is important to consider how the question of who has taken the photographs might matter.

If we understand the recording process as mediating or filtering a performance, then we might want to consider how and what this process mediates or filters. To believe that a photograph offers a useful record of a performance first assumes that the performance is, crucially, a visual experience. Undoubtedly, this is true of many performances, but I have created and produced dozens of performances that were not primarily visual, and for which very little of value could be conveyed by a visual record. Furthermore, even performances with very strong and striking visual components generally address a combination of senses. A camera captures far less of what is happening in a performance than what would be experienced by a human body, and what it does capture, it captures very differently than the human sensorium. In this sense, we can consider the recording device as having a mediating effect, but the operator of the device is equally a mediating influence. What she chooses to shoot or not to shoot, how she composes and frames each shot, which shots she allows into public circulation: all of these “choices,” conscious or not, are inflected by subjective influences. We register and record what our point of view—both physical and psychic—allows us to. It seems reasonable to me, then, that the photographs a performance artist takes of a performance might reveal (and presumably preserve for posterity) something entirely different than photos taken by someone with a different set of allegiances and identity references; say, a journalist, or an art historian. Extending this argument, what is recorded and who records it surely influences what of a performance becomes or is available to become “history.”

The question of what becomes history is clearly important to Jones, although the closest she comes to defining what she might have in mind in her quest for historical truth is a “sense of clarity about [...] what the work] may have come to mean in its original and subsequent contexts.”<sup>[7]</sup> She indicates some of the things she thinks are not key to clarifying the “meaning” of a work—in particular, she is insistent that the artist’s intentions for or understanding of the work may not be of particular relevance<sup>[8]</sup>—but she is less clear about what does fit the criterion of historical pertinence. I understand her desire to look beyond the traditional privileging of “authorship”; in the end, it is the audiences who determine what a work means. But I would hardly be the first to note that the “death of the author” in favour of the notion of the (disembodied, displaced and depoliticised) text occurred at precisely the moment when traditionally unheard voices were finally achieving the agency of a recognised subjectivity, with the added effect of privileging the very same texts that had previously been canonised as works of authorial genius.<sup>[9]</sup> Too often, what is privileged through this reworking of significance is simply the voice of the critic. Having discovered performance art and developed my own practice primarily through Canada’s vibrant artist-run culture and an artist-driven international performance art network, I could cite any number of artists and art

7 *Ibid.*

8 One of the “logistical difficulties” to approaching the work that she cites is “writing about the work without becoming entrapped in the artists’ usually fascinating but sometimes intellectually and emotionally diversionary ideas about what the work is (or was) about.” *Ibid.*, p. 12.

9 See for example, Christian, Barbara. (Spring, 1987). The race for theory. *Cultural Critique* 6: 51-63.

initiatives that have come to be seen as “historically” significant only because artists took it upon themselves to control and safeguard not only their means of production and distribution, but also the contextualising and archiving of their work. Indeed, *Two-Way Mirror* is an excellent example of this.

Of course, photographs are not the only possible documentary record of a performance, and presumably they are not the only type of record Ms Jones might use to gain access to a performance. But photographs are particularly useful to her argument about what performance art reveals or conveys in art historical terms. Jones admits to being less interested in “performance art” than in an idea of “body art” that may include live performances but also extends to works made exclusively for the camera, with no live audience. She argues, quite brilliantly, that the real “message” delivered by body art is a destabilisation of any unified sense of wholeness through embodiment. According to Jones,

[b]ody art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body-as-subject and its inability to deliver itself fully (whether to the subject-in-performance her/himself or to the one who engages with this body).<sup>[10]</sup>

Not surprisingly, for Jones, it is the photo document that most potently delivers on the promise of her thesis, for

it is precisely the relationship of these bodies/subjects to documentation (or, more specifically, to re-presentation) that most profoundly points to the dislocation of the fantasy of the fixed, normative, centered modernist subject and thus most dramatically provides a radical challenge to the masculinism, racism, colonialism, classism, and heterosexism built into this fantasy.<sup>[11]</sup>

Jones is incisive and insightful in her analysis. Her arguments confidently problematize the traditional and common sense notion of performance as offering a direct, unmediated relationship between performer and witness. At the same time, she is an art historian, with a particular view of what constitutes the “historical ‘truth’ of the performance.” From her perspective, it would appear that the outcome of an artwork, whether it is delivered as a photograph or as a performance, is always a representation, and representations follow the logic of the sign. They communicate symbolically, acting as signifiers, always already contaminated by an open-endedness of potential, “supplementary” meanings. They circulate as part of an endless chain of signifiers, unable to guarantee any pure signified that could tether and unify meaning. Signifieds, it turns out, are themselves always, only and already (known as) signifiers. With representation, there can be no direct experience, no unmediated knowing, no pure certainty. This is the conundrum posed by the logic of the sign, which is interpenetrated with the logic of a transmission theory of communication, in which communication is also understood to be representational in nature. Such a viewpoint treats communication as a process whereby messages/meaning/signifiers are conveyed across some distance from a

10 *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 12.



transmitting body to a receiving body.

Elsewhere, I have argued for a “ritual” rather than “transmission” understanding of communication, following James Carey and John Dewey.<sup>[12]</sup> This alternate interpretation of the communicative process is not grounded in theorisations of representation. Instead, it considers the shared space and time of the performance as an event that enacts a temporary, contingent social whole. The understanding and meaning that is manifested by the social whole does not belong to any one of its individuated bodily subjectivities, but is better described as a collective subjectivity that contains all of the potentials and contradictions generated through and as its various parts. Message and meaning are not hived off from the material conditions of their instantiation, as if they are somehow distinct entities. In a ritual model of communication, the boundaries separating what constitutes a thing and its meaning cannot be preceded by their becoming; rather, it is the encounter that reveals what manifests as both thing and meaning. We come together in order to become what we are and in order to know what we know.

Laying out the idea of ritual communication in all of its richness is beyond the scope of this essay, but I can offer an example that might point toward how an art historian’s account of (what she saw at) an event, understood through the lens of a transmission approach to communication, might differ from a performance artist’s account of (what he discovered through) an event, corresponding to a ritual understanding of communication.

In one of the “case studies” presented in her article on presence, Jones describes her reactions upon attending U. S. performance artist and porn star Annie Sprinkle’s *Post Post Porn Modernist*. Jones provides a description of the closing section of Sprinkle’s performance to explain how “being there” does not guarantee greater understanding of the event. She writes:

In the final segment of *Post Post Porn Modernist*, Sprinkle takes on the archaic-goddess persona of “Anya” to bring herself to a twenty-minute long spiritual/sexual orgasm on stage. My first reaction on seeing this elaborately orchestrated performance of *jouissance* was to assert to my partner that she was faking it. My secondary response was to wonder why I needed to think that she was faking it. As Chris Straayer puts it, “Whether Annie Sprinkle is acting (and/or) experiencing orgasms in her performances cannot be determined by us”—and, I would add, *this is the case whether we view the performance live or not*.<sup>[13]</sup>

While I did not attend the particular performance where Jones was present,<sup>[14]</sup> I am certainly familiar with the work she describes, having produced a five-performance run of *Post Post Porn Modernist*.<sup>[15]</sup> Jones (and Straayer) assert that the audience cannot

12 See Couillard, Paul. (2010). Ritual communication and body doubles: Attending (to) the work of Monika Günther and Ruedi Schill. *FADO Performance Art Centre*. <http://www.performanceart.ca/index.php?m=pub-article&id=22>

13 *Op. cit.*, p. 17, emphasis in the original.

14 She does not identify when or where it took place.

15 Organised through A Space Gallery and presented at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto, Canada,

know for certain whether Annie Sprinkle experiences or simulates the experience of an “orgasm” during her performance. This question is obviously one that captured their attention as audience members, perhaps in part because of the rhetoric that seeks to categorise performance art as authentic and unique experience, while theatre strives to produce a repeatable representation. Are we seeing something “real,” or are we seeing a representation, an illusion?

Whatever label one chooses to give the work, it is clear that *Post Post Porn Modernist* follows many of the conventions of theatre. Certainly the theatre technicians had no problems recognising the work as constituting a script with specific sound and lighting cues. The performance is structured to exploit the technical infrastructure and audience expectations associated with theatre, and as I discovered, presenting back-to-back shows was no problem for Sprinkle. I cannot dispute that the work and her performance of it invite analysis on the basis of their representational elements.

What stays with me from the work, however, are experiential aspects that cannot be gleaned from the photo documentation of the performance, in part because such photos tend to focus on the performer. For me, what happened in the theatre during the Anya sequence is hardly captured by describing the event as a representation of an orgasm. I suspect a first-person narrative might better convey this event and its significance.

As we were setting up for the first performance in Toronto, I was sceptical about how engaging *Post Post Porn Modernist* would be. I remember, in particular, that one of the preparations involved making a supply of “rattles” for audience members to shake during the Anya sequence. Taping together plastic cups filled with dried beans, I had a sinking feeling. Toronto audiences, I thought, would simply shake their heads at these unsophisticated, makeshift props, and be embarrassed or discomfited by the spectacle of the “goddess” Anya bringing herself to orgasm. I feared the event would fall flat.

I was wrong.

Show after show produced audiences of men and women deeply invested in the work, many of them transported into an ecstatic state more typically associated with religious experiences than performance art events. Although some sequences of the performance were stronger than others, there was a cumulative effect to the whole that definitely exceeded its atomised parts. Each sequence built toward a common consensus in the crowd, leading us toward a sense of communality through shared experience. By the time Anya took the stage, after an intermission where anyone uncomfortable with what they were experiencing had presumably left, those that remained constituted a kind of coalition of perhaps not “the converted,” but certainly “the willing.” These audiences were eager to shake their humble rattles as they watched Anya in the subdued light. The rattles, it turned out, were essential, because they allowed the audience members to be more than just observers. The shaking of the rattle was an entry point into the *doing* of what was being done, a way for the audience to feel and feed the energy they were contributing to the event. In this context, the question of whether we were “seeing” a genuine genital climax take place in the performer was of little consequence; what was being generated was a visceral, tactile, auditory, pheromonal experience both felt

21-23 February 1992.

and generated by the audience as a whole. The important climax was not localised to either the genitals or the body of the performer. It was an affect that enveloped the theatre and all of the bodies in it, and when the house lights came up, I saw looks of friendly solidarity—albeit temporary—passing among members of the audience, many of whom clearly felt a kinship in what they had shared together.

Clearly my experience of *Post Post Porn Modernist* was different than the one described by Jones. Neither, obviously, is a complete picture. But I can say with some certainty that if I had not been at those performances, I would not have understood them as I do. For me, these performances did not affirm an inability to know; rather, they disclosed meaning, generated understanding and manifested a sense of community, at least within the temporary boundaries of the performance. Let my record of the event attest that it has, at least in some small way, transformed me; I am attuned to the world differently because of it.

These, I suppose, might be viewed as “personal” rather than “historical” truths. When speaking about individual reactions, it is impossible to report what superficial or profound effects a work may have had on other audience members, or what choices they may have taken or actions undertaken as a result of their experience. So what constitutes historical truth? A historian might be able to consider and comment on how common or uncommon such an event was in the era it took place, how much media attention it received, and what kinds of official, institutional reactions greeted it. A historian can also make note of what public figures or social groups claim to have been affected and how by the event. A historian can compare what is known of the event to current practices, or determine what documents of the original have survived and how widely they circulate. A historian can also assert, as Philip Auslander does, that it is the performativity of the documentation that constitutes the performance, thereby erasing any necessity of a live, witnessed event at all.

Whereas I, as a particular kind of performance artist, privilege what happens in the live moment among those present as the central concern of my work,<sup>[16]</sup> Auslander offers a diametrically opposed view. It is worth including an extended quote here:

I submit that the presence of that initial audience has no real importance to the performance as an entity whose continued life is through its documentation because our usual concern as consumers of such documentation is with recreating the artist's work, not the total interaction. As a thought experiment, consider what would happen were we to learn that there actually was no audience for Chris Burden's *Shoot*, that he simply performed the piece in an empty gallery and documented it. I suggest that such a revelation would make no difference at all to our perception of the performance, our understanding of it as an object of interpretation and evaluation, and our assessment of its historical significance. In other words, while the presence of an initial audience may be important to performers, it is merely incidental to the performance as documented. [...] When artists decide to document their performances, they assume responsibility to

16 For a more extensive exploration of these concerns, see Couillard, Paul. (Summer, 2011). Why performance? *Total Art Journal* 1.1. <http://totalartjournal.com/archives/1572/why-performance/>

an audience other than the initial one, a gesture that ultimately obviates the need for an initial audience [...] In the long run, it makes no more difference whether there actually was a physically present audience for *Shoot* or any number of other classic works of performance art than it does whether someone happened to see Acconci on Greenwich Street or wandered into the studio while Cindy Sherman was shooting one of her disguised self-portraits. In that sense, it is not the initial presence of an audience that makes an event a work of performance art: it is its framing as performance through the performative act of documenting it as such.<sup>[17]</sup>

For Auslander, “the total interaction” of a performance clearly does not contribute to its “historical significance.” Indeed, he is convinced that the audience of the documentary record “obviates the need for an initial audience.” This suggests that the only performativity he is interested in, the only communicative relationship that he acknowledges as mattering to art history, is the one that involves audiences of the representational products that result from an artist's actions. This denial of the agency of presence in terms of the liveness of the performance comes with a curious flipside: what is instead vaunted is the absolute value of the presence of the representational record, which has the same valence whether it is a reliable documentary index pointing back to an actual event, or a complete fabrication. As Auslander concludes,

It may well be that our sense of the presence, power, and authenticity of these pieces derives not from treating the document as an indexical access point to a past event but from perceiving the document itself as a *performance* that directly reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience.<sup>[18]</sup>

Auslander acknowledges that there are two audiences for live works that are documented: the audience of the live performance, and the audience of the documentation. For him, however, only the latter is of historical consequence, because only the documentary representation of the artist and her actions constitutes the “*artist's work*.”<sup>[19]</sup> This perspective is challenged by a number of contemporary art practices, such as relational practices, infiltrating practices and manoeuvres,<sup>[20]</sup> where the participation and engagement of a live audience in a work is an essential part of its status as a work. In these practices, without live participation, there would be no work. My position, which privileges the event as the work, and Auslander's, which privileges the representational product as the work, appear to be irreconcilable. Where, then, does this leave our by now thoroughly troubled performance art photographs taken

17 Auslander, Philip. (September, 2006). The performativity of performance documentation. *PAJ: A Journal of performance and art* 28.3: 1-10, pp. 6-7.

18 *Ibid.* p. 10

19 The purpose of most performance art documentation is to make the *artist's work* available to a larger audience, not to capture the performance as an “interactional accomplishment” to which a specific audience and a specific set of performers coming together in specific circumstances make equally significant contributions. *Ibid.*, p. 6

20 For a discussion of these various practices and their relation to the history of performance art, see Couillard, Paul. (2014). From strangers to Rosa: Manoeuvring in the *Vita Activa*” in *Alain-Martin Richard: Performances, manoeuvres et autres hypothèses de disparition / Performances, Manoeuvres and Other Hypotheses for Disappearing*, ed. Paul Couillard & Alexandra Liva. Toronto/Québec: Fado Performance Inc., Les Causes Perdues Inc. & SAGAMIE édition d'art. 210-241.



by performance artists? Why should I care about the quality of the images I take of a performance art work, or indeed bother with them at all, if I do not perceive them to be of any consequence to what the work is?

One honest answer is that the photographic record does not have the same value *for me* that it admittedly does have for most contemporary artists. As information technologies continue to proliferate, I find myself more and more an outlier in this position. This does not mean, however, that other artists have abandoned any recognition that a performance may impart something different to a live audience inhabiting the same space and breathing the same air as the performer than it will to those who encounter the work through its more enduring visual documents. Contemporary artists tend to work across various media, interested in the distinct expressive qualities and challenges of different materials, including time and space, and equally, in the particular generative potentials of varying media in terms of the way audiences respond to them and what meanings can be disclosed in relation to them. A live performance may be valuable and interesting for different reasons than a recorded performance. This need not raise any concerns about the authenticity or importance of the work based on how it accessed, nor need it result in the privileging of any one mode of access for works that migrate across media or platforms. In other words, *both* of the audiences Auslander recognises might be of historical significance, albeit for different reasons that may not be equally measurable. Furthermore, there may be cases where the affect of the visual record may rely in part on the viewer's awareness that a work actually happened, or was actually presented in front a live audience. Sometimes, indexical authenticity or vulnerability do matter; at the very least, the perception of these qualities often have an affective charge, and discovering that a depiction never happened in real life can change the performative agency or audience reception of an image. I would contend that the photographic document's ability to enact the agency of performativity rests on more than the sheer representational force of imagery. It is also often tied to the way the image extends the time, space and *action* of the performance itself.

If the role of documenting makes me nervous, it is perhaps not only because of my fears of technical inadequacy. I also recognise the documenting role as an important participatory moment that contributes to the "doing" that is the performance. When I stand behind the camera, I take on the role of a very specialised audience, whose interpretive frame may be less visible than that of a raconteur in the way it contributes to the continued liveliness of the performance—but it is no less subjective. Peering through the camera lens, I am concerned with more than just what I am "seeing" before me, or with what will make an arresting image. I am on the lookout for something that might somehow—and it is this somehow that remains inarticulable—disclose how what is happening makes me feel. How might the resulting photographic image contribute to a ritual rather than a transmissive communication with some unknown future audience? What—of the time, space, bodies, actions and interrelationships that constitute performance—might be enfolded into the act of documenting and into the resulting documentary image, in a way that can, in turn, enfold those future audiences into a *shared* production of meaning through our mutual becoming? Responding to this convoluted, unanswerable question is what defines my role as a performance artist documenting the work of other performance artists. It is the task of my "professional" eye at work.

## The Photographer's Eye

by Nisa Ojalvo

It was a freezing night in upstate Buffalo, New York. I stood in a large crowd on the grand marble staircase leading up to the entrance of the Albright-Knox Museum. We collectively waited for cement to solidify around the naked greased body of a Chinese performance artist, who was partially embedded within a plexi-glass encasement, waist high in the thick grey substance. A few artists, all from Mainland China, bobbed in front of the lone performer snapping pictures. I was cold in my ski jacket and, despite the thrill of the artist's powerful gesture, was growing restless. The curators looked on worriedly, discussing under their frosty breath whether to put a stop to the spectacle. The fifteen-minute performance had extended well over an hour. The extreme low temperatures were preventing the cement from drying, and there was concern the artist would suffer hypothermia.

On impulse I pulled out my camera and in the dark night sky began to shoot – performer, machinery, audience, curators. I lost myself completely. I could barely manoeuvre the camera in the cold, my gloved fingers numb. Watching the now grimacing performance artist I felt guiltily complicit in the brutal action unfolding before me. It was scary and exciting. How long could the artist last? How long would the museum permit the action to continue? I had been photographing my travels across Asia for nearly two decades by this point, but this was a new feeling of exhilaration. By the time the curatorial assistants moved in with hammers to break up the now-hardened cement and forcibly eject the artist from its suffocating grip, I was hooked.

That was 2005, and thus began a decade of traipsing around the world to performance festivals with my camera, meeting artists and photographing their work. I travelled from festival to festival, trying my best to maximise my three-week annual leave from my day job as a corporate lawyer. Each performance shoot led to another opportunity, and in each instance I made contacts and new friends. Over the next decade, the fantastic world of performance art opened its doors to me.

I would meet artists at one festival and might not encounter them again for years. German Black Market co-founder Boris Nieslony was one such artist whom I met briefly in India in 2007, and whom I would not see again until seven years later, at a festival in Venice. South African artist Steven Cohen was another festival participant in Delhi, whom I met up with next in New York, when he came to present a video of *Chandelier*, his haunting performance in a Johannesburg squatter camp, for the *Crossing the Line Festival*. Steven allowed me to photograph him just before his presentation, and I was so pleased that he wore his signature 5-inch heels, his face adorned with delicate fluorescent butterfly wings and a Jewish star.

Before travelling for a shoot, I would ring the host institution, museum or curator and ask permission to photograph. In each instance I was warmly welcomed and often invited to join the festival group for meals with the artists. It was during these informal gatherings, in cities as diverse as Liverpool, Copenhagen and Chengdu, where I learned about the artists' work and lives. As my photographic practice grew, I was sometimes recognised at festivals and asked by artists to capture their performances.

Photography gave me an entrée into a new world, an inner circle of creators.

One seemingly random encounter proved pivotal in my development as a performance photographer. While attending a festival in the Mediterranean fishing village of Sète in Southern France, I met Norwegian artist Rita Marhaug and we went for coffee. I had just arrived, jetlagged after a redeye flight from New York and a five-hour train ride from Paris. I knew of Rita's provocative work, and was intrigued by her exploration of femininity and motherhood, as well as issues surrounding the exploitation of natural resources by corporations. I was thrilled when Rita mentioned she would perform one of her signature oil pieces, and I offered to help.

We met the next morning and I helped her carry a rather unwieldy stack of hospital IV bags filled with black ink, which she had diluted with cooking oil to just the right viscosity for her performance. Rita had scouted the perfect site the day prior, midway up the local opera house steps, which bordered the Saturday market. Smirking harlequins adorned the opera house doors, advertising the current season. Rita, dressed in a pristine white suit, laid face down on the marble staircase, her head several steps below her feet. The IV bags were enough to hold the amount of blood in the human body, and were rigged to slowly leak black oil ("Norwegian gold" as she called it) in a thin jagged-edged trickle over the course of the day, her commentary on oil production and natural resource exploitation in her native Norway. I was amazed at the intensity of gesture and the effort it must have taken to remain utterly still for hours in that uncomfortable position. Having just met Rita the day before, I was surprised at how concerned I was for her wellbeing. I returned repeatedly throughout the day to check and to see that she was okay and had not passed out. Only later I learned, as I helped Rita return to her hotel, drenched and trying not to dirty the hotel lobby floor with oily black footprints, that some boys had pelted her with fruit. I was struck by the vulnerability of performing in public, and remembered the complicity I had felt in Buffalo as audience member on that chilly night.

Sète marked the start of an invaluable friendship with Rita, who invited me to return to Europe to photograph her performance triennial. A year later I was on the little island of Herdla, Norway, a former World War II military airbase. We were housed in the officers' barracks. Traci Kelly and Richard Hancock, whose collaborative work I recognised from Manuel Vason's stunning performance art book, *Encounters*, were the first artists I met. We decided to explore the island together and photograph some improvisations.

The next day we wound our way across a defunct World War II airstrip, overgrown with grass, and past a rather aggressive herd of grazing cows, where we found an outcropping of boulders and crumbled cement along the water's edge. Against this backdrop we set up our experimental shoot. It was exhilarating to test ideas, play with the fierce wind and participate as the duo hancock & kelly reinvented themselves and we created work for the camera. There was a wordless understanding the two artists shared after years of collaboration. I was particularly taken with their warmth and generosity, towards me and towards one another. We kept at it the better part of the afternoon until we lost the sun. This experience also marked the start of a wonderful friendship and paved the way for several new projects. I had been invited into this realm to create, collectively, in what was to become one of my first collaborative endeavours. If I had not been hooked before on performance, and the prospect of co-creation, then

I certainly was.

A few days later, the Herdla triennial festival took place in a torrential rainstorm. The audience turnout was surprisingly high. Norwegian families, undeterred by the inclement weather, simply showed up dressed head-to-toe in practical yellow and black raingear, many in fisherman hats and high galoshes. Durational performances were dramatically set amongst the walled bunker ruins, craggy waterfront and of course, the cows. Despite best efforts to stay dry, I nearly ruined my equipment that day. Part of my shoot yielded a series of enigmatically frosty photographs, lending an ethereal quality to the performances I captured that day.

In contrast to the windy wet Norwegian coast, I photographed a weeklong festival in India at the beginning of the hot season. The performance venues were spread across the city, ranging from posh galleries to outskirts of slums. One balmy March evening I found myself in a dense crowd watching a film projection on a crumbling wall in a dusty alley. I leaned up against the ledge of a cigarette vendor's booth, its swinging metal doors lined with small colourful boxes of smokes. Without realising it, I had sidled up to the vendor's home where he was reclining on a narrow makeshift bed, his feet touching the far end of the cluttered encasement. In my eagerness to watch the film, I had plunked myself at his doorstep. With a nod he welcomed me to sit and we watched together from our front-row seat. In this moment I recognised the great levelling power of performance art, where far from the sterile, rarefied world of the white cube gallery, the two of us from such different backgrounds could share this viewing experience.

Sitting together in a Delhi alley recalls for me the overlapping roles of photographer as documenter, observer and audience member, which has long intrigued me and which holds inherent contradictions. I am constantly investigating my ability to give voice to an alternate perspective of a performance. As external party, I have the unique ability to help shape the memory of a piece, which is otherwise ephemeral, and may likely not have been experienced by those who view my resulting image. I recognise that the very act of photographing is fraught with complexity. Time-based live performances and durational works are not necessarily meant to be captured. In other cases, photo documentation is prohibited. I acknowledge and embrace that oftentimes I am virtually providing my personal perception of another's artistic work, and that may in fact result in a very different sensibility from that originally intended by the performer.

It can be magical when the act of taking pictures allows me to experience a piece as part of the audience. I remember photographing the *Isles Arts Initiative* opening in Boston, for example. I followed Chicago artist Pate Conaway from our arrival by ferry, off the gangplank and onto shore, recognising the importance of not losing him, as the island where he would perform throughout the day was sprawling. I turned away for an instant to capture others disembarking our boat, and in that moment he had disappeared into the vast ruins of the island fortress. For the next hour I walked in the heat, hoping to catch a glimpse of Pate, whom I had travelled hours by train to photograph. After a good hour of searching, I wound my way through a dark tunnel and exited into stark daylight to find my subject slowly and meditatively weaving a long rope into a delicate conical sculpture. As he neatly fit the material into a crevice in the rampart wall, I realised that in my hour of wandering, I had morphed from photographer

to audience. I felt the thrill of discovery in the moment I stumbled upon the artist, and revelled in the strangeness of encountering the performance. It was quite magical and made me appreciate the performance even more.

Perhaps for that reason my favourite works are experiential, inviting the viewer to be complicit in the act of creation. Those performances tend to create an environment and a world unto themselves. They are often site-specific, created in part out of the space in which they are housed and infused with the spirit of location. I am less interested in elaborate props, or complicated storytelling. The pieces I am drawn to tend to be simple and quiet, contemplative, often using the body as metaphor.

Shooting performance art for me is also a form of meditation. I sit in silence, waiting for a moment of transition – a gesture, a shift, a glance. I want to experience the pieces I photograph and not simply document. I want to feel wonder, and allow myself to be surprised. I prefer not to know what to expect in too much detail, so I can be moved to capture the elements that I see as fundamental to each performance. The elements of a piece that I try to express in images can be as much psychological and driven by the passage of time, as they may be physical or explicit to the viewer. A festival that was housed in a crumbling disused Bergen prison that I photographed in 2015 comes to mind. Artists were assigned individual cells and asked to perform inside throughout the course of the day. Each cell was different - one had tarred black walls, another was bright and intricately stencilled. All had a single barred window and thick metal door with a dungeon-like peephole just large enough to pass food through. I found myself voyeuristically setting my camera lens on the peephole and capturing, as if through a fisheye, the performance unfolding within.

These dimly lit pieces appeal to me, although they present a challenge to photograph, as I prefer not to use flash. This allows me to better blend in with the audience. As a performance photographer I straddle the fine line of wanting to capture a specific gesture or movement, while trying not to interfere with the audience experience. I avoid sharp movements and calling attention to myself with loud colours or stiff clothing that might rustle when I move. I am especially careful not to alter the course of a performance. On occasion I have sensed that an action was repeated or slowed for my benefit, to be captured by the camera's eye. In these instances, I may put down my camera and spend time experiencing the piece. These periods of contemplation allow me to better understand the audience experience, which I try to capture in my images as well.

My photographic practice has been moving from pure documentation to more collaborative picture making and co-creation. The process began almost imperceptibly, at first at festivals when I would infuse my own vision into a piece. I sought to capture not only an action, but the feeling and emotion of the viewing experience, for both audience and myself. I have moved in this direction with performances for camera, and this shift has continued steadily.



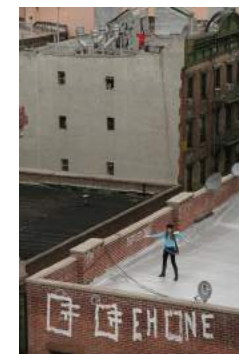
Steven Cohen  
*Knock 'Em Dead*  
2010  
Crossing The Line Festival  
New York, USA  
Photo credit: © Nisa Ojalvo 2016



Eleanor Lawler  
*Dirty Laundry*  
2015  
PAB Open 2015  
Bergen, Norway  
Photo credit: © Nisa Ojalvo 2016



Aldo Tambellini  
*The Tanks: Art in Action, Retracing Black*  
2012  
Tate Modern, London, UK  
Photo credit: © Nisa Ojalvo 2016



Christian Jankowski  
*Rooftop Routine*  
2007  
Performa '07  
New York, USA  
Photo credit: © Nisa Ojalvo 2016



hancock & kelly  
*Medusae*  
2010  
Herdla, Norway  
Photo credit: © Nisa Ojalvo 2016



## PHOTOGRAPHS AND REFLECTIONS



Julie Vulcan  
*Redress #6*  
2013  
Exist~ence5 International Festival and Symposia 2013  
Brisbane, Australia  
**Photo credit: AñA Wojak**

For over 40 years I have been an exhibiting visual artist and for 20 years I have been a performance artist. How I see things, as observer or presenter of work, is evident in this evolution of my practice. Thus, my photography is a reflection of how I view the world; the roving eye focusing on minutiae and these myriads of details coming together in a composite.

I find myself drawn to the intimacy of detail and this is also what most engages me in performance art. An emotive glance... a subtle gesture... a flicker of focus... the grains of salt still clinging to a face, as it leaves an imprint and moves on.

The timelessness of live durational performance is often best captured in those frozen moments, just as the mind did at the time. And as an observer I value the capture of that emotive impression, returning to being truly present as participant/audience without losing the continuity of bearing witness. (Unless a work is actually staged for film, video documentation of a live performance can often be too literal and time based, more a record than an interpretation).

Performance art is so ephemeral and often passes without a trace beyond the memories of the participants, both artists and audience, both a virtue and a loss. In the case of Julie Vulcan's work, I was drawn into a complex story that unfolded over two days, starting with an intimate gesture of audience participation that made us complicit in the ritualised repetition and layering of the work... its construction/reconstruction/deconstruction. It moved me on many levels, so I stayed to record/witness, both for myself and as a gift back to the artist.

redress

it started  
with  
red  
lipstick  
dress  
the isolation  
the intimacy  
of a veiled kiss  
on white

one woman  
two days  
the solitude  
timelessness  
of durational performance

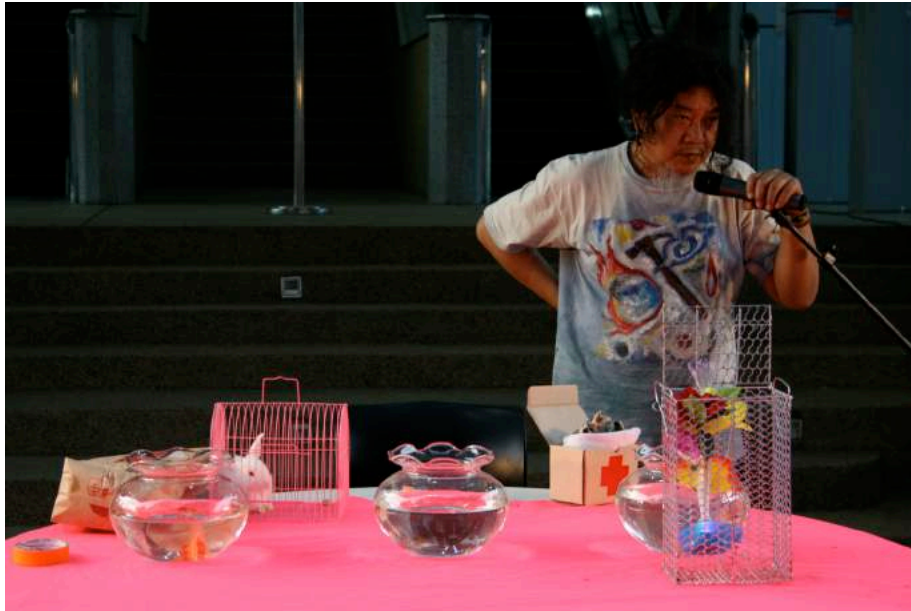
*hinc illae lacrimae*

this self containment  
of repetitive gesture  
ended in tears  
swept away

*ad nauseum*

I was compelled  
to bear witness

AñA Wojak



Paisan Plienbangchang  
*On War*  
 2011  
 BUKA JALAN, International Performance Art Festival  
 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
**Photo credit: Cai Qing**

我拍摄的行为艺术作品是生动和值得怀念得。对我来说, 这些照片是做作为一种记录 (便于研究或之后记起)。

I enjoy taking photographs of performance art works which are either very vivid or memorable; it is also a way of recording to facilitate research or visual memory.

Cai Qing



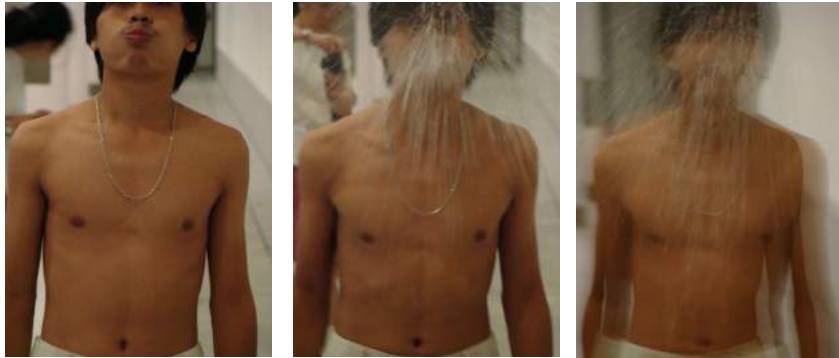
Sophia Natasha Wei  
*Qin Mi*  
 2014  
 Art Now Live Tour  
 Grand Taihang Canyon, Linzhou, Henan Province, China  
**Photo credit: Daniela Beltrani**

For one interminable second the in-breath is held, the offering is complete and there she stands motionless, her beautiful face covered in black sesame seeds and golden glitter. This is the climax of an idea: imagined in the mind, created in real life, captured on camera. A journey. Control and lack of. Potentiality actualised. It is so: she was there and she still is, now. I was in front of her in her space and I still am, together with the viewer, now.

Daniela Beltrani



Photo credit: Ezzam Rahman



Nguyen Hong Hai  
*Renewal*  
 2008

Kết Nối Vietnam - Singapore Performance Art Event  
 Singapore Management University, Singapore

**Photo credit: Ezzam Rahman**

There he was, topless, revealing his petite bronze body in white trousers. Hong Hai uncapped one of the two bottles of water, took a mouthful, breathed through his nostrils and an explosion of water and saliva spewed out of his mouth. Like an accurate mathematician, he measured his footsteps, paused and repeated the same action. As I followed him, I found a subtle masculine beauty in this presentation. The mixture of water and saliva trickled down his chin, then to his chest, stomach and slowly slipped through his translucent white trousers, revealing the colour of his briefs. Armed with my camera from a safe distance, so as not to be doused by the artist, I managed to capture these images of Hong Hai bursting like a human fountain. There was something special about his presentation: monotonous, slow-paced, repetitive, yet captivating and seductive. Although he was physically smaller than the average man, he commanded attention from the audience with his strong magnetic presence.

I began performing in 2000. In the early years, I had experienced and watched performance art at various events, including those organised by The Artists Village and Future of Imagination. Back then, I did not own a digital camera and developing films can be quite expensive for a young artist. Therefore, all my experiences were mostly captured by memory and shared orally amongst my peers at gatherings or interviews and described in writings.

With the advancing of technology, we are lucky to have easily accessible mobile devices that have different functions to capture moments, through photography or film. I have always enjoyed taking photographs of performance artists in action. These photos are kept as personal souvenirs, since performance art is created in real time and real space. Additionally, as an art educator, I share this personal collection of performance photographs with my students in class.

I take photographs with no intentions of proper compositions or for aesthetics documentation. I simply want to capture moments that I have experienced and to share these photographs with the artists who performed and created the works. Most of the times, I will upload them to my personal Instagram account, where I can always retrieve them quickly when I need them. Having the habit of taking photographs of performance art in action allows me to train my observational skills to focus on the little details of the work that I would have missed through the lens of a camera.

Ezzam Rahman





Ezzam Rahman  
*Kak Gaia dah marah!*  
 2012  
 SPAM (Self Performance Art Meetings)  
 Sembawang Park, Singapore  
**Photo credit: Farah Ong**

*Kak Gaia dah marah!* at Sembawang Park was not so much a performative piece per se: but the image showed the audience and viewers actively participating in the nature or intention of the work, which was to clean up the beach. What I wanted to show was the experiential and interactive nature of the performance, against the background of people on the jetty, who were oblivious to our activity on the beach. I am always captivated by site-specific performances, and I do admit I have a penchant for outdoor and site-adaptive works. The passers-by always become part of the background, or get directly involved in the performance in one way or another. And this adds another layer to a performance, whether in terms of aesthetics or involvement. It breaks down the fourth wall, present when performing in a theatre venue.

Performances are delicate, and they involve so many different levels of process to actually materialise our ideas and concepts into a three-dimensional and visceral piece. What we conceptualise may turn out to be something completely different when actualising it.

The documentation of a work brings on a different effect to how we want our works to be remembered. We are what we see. And that is especially poignant in the context of performance documentation. The person behind the lens will shoot his/her perspective of the piece. And it may not be what the artist initially intended. We can also say that the performance documentation can display an artistic quality on its own. I always try to look at documentation of a performance piece, and understand the various perspectives the audience sees, in a very rough sense. We are not only looking at the performance shots, but at the performance through different eyes. I take pictures of performances to save the mental snapshots of the experience I went through. But we must always be careful in this, and listen to the intuitive call of the performance. Some performances are so sensitive and quiet, that it feels as if documenting them will not bring the justice they deserve. And as the performer in me would say: it is always about the performance first, and then its pictures.

Farah Ong



Karine Turcot  
*Untitled*  
 2012  
 IV Bienal DEFORMES  
 Valdivia, Chile  
**Photo credit: Gabriela Alonso**

I think that Karine has been trying to present in her actions themes related to beauty, love and loneliness. It is likely that this action sought to provoke those watching. It was particularly beautiful from an aesthetic point of view, but the material appeared too thick and heavy to tell the truth, in temporal terms, and it generated discomfort from this viewpoint. Following this image, over the course of an hour or more, Karine slowly broke all the eggs one by one, which she had for some time before held obsessively against her body. This image shows the beauty and sorrow anchored to a beautiful body, in infinite time, and dispossession through a succession of ordered actions.

I took this photo because I sought to explore the action before me and, later, to evoke the memory of the event, trying to capture the impossible, the ephemeral. I think a photograph is not only an aesthetic document. The photographic image corresponds to a small fragment of life itself, both for those within the photographic frame as for those outside it.

Therefore, photography not only captures what is visible to the eye. There is also something related to the order of the intangible that remains stored in that document, unconditionally exposed and ready to be discovered. To take a picture is an action, subject to the environment, and to the other. The performance is ultimately a sequence of actions, poetic, political, conceptual, experimental, conducted over a period of time and in space by one or more bodies. From my point of view to take photographs of a sequence of performative actions probably is a performance in itself, perhaps another, perhaps the same.

Gabriela Alonso



Emma Dixon  
*Untitled*  
 2012  
 IPA Summer  
 Istanbul, Turkey  
**Photo credit: Jürgen Fritz**

The Symposium at the IPA Autumn 2015 in Bristol, organised by Fay Stevens, put forward the question “Where does performance happen?”. This is an interesting starting point to consider my approach to photography. For me, performance happens in the “in between:” between performer and material, between performer and audience, between performer and viewer, etc...

The interesting point, if one approaches performance art in this way, is that one cannot create the “performative” image directly. One can only create or work within a situation, where the “performative image” may appear as a result of the action or awareness.

In this way, as a performer one always shifts between the two poles: to move and to be moved. The photo of Emma Dixon’s performance at the harbour in Istanbul represents this approach very well. She moves in with an idea, she creates this situation, but as action. She gives herself over to the situation and is moved by the waves.

Jürgen Fritz



Galuh Tulus Utama  
*Bermain di Air (Playful in Water)*  
 2014  
 PADJAK#3: Urban  
 Manggarai Watergate, Jakarta, Indonesia  
**Photo credit: Kelvin Atmadibrata**

A poet and theatre practitioner from Surabaya, Galuh Tulus Utama caught the most attention when he stripped to his striking white underwear and jumped into the pool of rubbish. What might have been considered as playful, Galuh created a serious projection of social concern as he remained in the dirt for almost an hour. Despite curious noises from the audiences, Galuh’s presence silenced the atmosphere as it smelled of death and desperation.

PADJAK (Performance Art Di Jakarta, [www.padjak.yolasite.com](http://www.padjak.yolasite.com)) initiates performances as a form of contemporary art in public spaces. Its sessions pay attention to site-specific presentations with the aim to introduce and develop live art in Jakarta. PADJAK also organises discussions, exhibitions and publishes writings specifically centred on historical and contemporary approach to performance.

For me the basic intention was simply to document the performance as an image, that is visually composed in relation to the site (background), the performer (subject) as well as the intended social message. The lack of facial recognition of the performer was both intentional and situational, as I felt Galuh’s face was not important in this piece (although I did take pictures with his facial expression in other images). Situational in as far as I can remember, the spot where the image was taken was among the few



available spots for the audience to watch the piece. The site was relatively filthy, hence spectators were limited in their views as they were not able to move 360°. So the image can be perceived as both planned and constructed (visually), yet also accidental due to the viewing limitation.

At the same time, I felt obligated to capture the image (as well as others for the whole event) as I was the organiser. Hence, this leads to the non-aesthetic reason behind the photograph.

Having said that, I think Galuh's piece was visually stunning. The contrast between his almost nude body and the pond of trash, to put it simply, created a beautiful image. Or maybe not *beautiful* per se, but shocking, interesting. I have to admit that it was not my favourite piece of the festival, but image-wise, one of the few that I am fond of the most.

Coming back to your question of what I was trying to achieve, I think it was primarily for documentation purpose. And to be honest, my interest in taking performance photographs has decreased, when I am stripped off my role as organiser. I think eventually, performance should be enjoyed and presented live, hence the photo documentation, just like Galuh's image, served only as a fragmented memory. Additionally, I am unsure of how sufficient that image was in relation to Galuh's context and intention of his action, so despite the shocking nature of the image, it might not be as useful as a representation of the actual performance.

Having said that, I enjoy taking photographs of performances. I think it allows me to view the performance differently (not necessarily worse or better experience), but simply an alternative way of enjoying the piece. The process of clicking the camera shutter allows me to choose which are the focal points of the performance, what I want to see, what I do not want to see, what I am more comfortable in seeing and what I prefer to ignore. For example, with the DSLR camera, I can easily zoom into the details of the performer (body), action and material, which I feel might have been the most important or interesting aspect in that specific moment of the presentation. Hence, I often take images that are zoomed in, more focused. But of course, this means that by stripping away the other elements, the performance becomes one dimensional, almost like a biased way of perceiving the piece.

I always keep in mind the visual aesthetic (which is according to how I perceive it) when I take photos. For example, I rarely compose the performer to be in the middle of the frame, almost always they are somewhere other than the centre. Maybe this is because I pay attention to the site, surroundings and physical background of the piece, but honestly I myself am unsure of the exact reason of this choice. I always attempt to exclude the audience, as personally I am more inclined to documentations that are focused purely on the artist's body and his/her interaction with the material (with the exception of those cases which include audience participation).

Maybe, I have the impression that these images can eventually be transformed into photographic artworks in themselves, almost like performance-for-camera pieces hence the exclusion of the audience. My statement seems to give the impression that having audiences as part of the image is a bad thing, and now that I am thinking about it, I disagree. But somehow I still could not bring myself to include the audience in

the images, whenever it is possible. I am contradicting myself here, so I think it is a decision which I myself am unaware of, or have yet to understand.

Lastly, coming back to my decreasing interest in carrying a camera while watching a performance. Not only I am starting to enjoy watching live actions with my own naked eyes other than through the camera, but also I feel there is a need to pamper myself as an audience. Being a photographer sometimes strips away our attention and experience from the performance itself and I feel that in performance art, experience is one of the most vital elements. It takes effort and focus in composing the moment into two-dimensional flat images, that sometimes we lose control of the experience initially prepared for us by the performer. Just like watching a live musical concert, I prefer now to have *documentations* as memories than physical images.

Regardless, I still take images occasionally, although not as frequently as in the past. Personally, I feel my appreciation towards performance art does not change, as experiencing the works through a camera lens and without, does not create a better or worse way of watching performance art. They are just different. Maybe the current mood affects the decision, maybe my role (as audience, organiser, or a person responsible of documentation) affects it as well. I have never thought so much about this prior to being in this show, so I thank you for reminding me about this. I hope my answers are taken without judgment, as they really are. These thoughts have made me evaluate my approach to being an audience of performance works.

I hope to have a more elaborate conversation with you regarding this, so let me know what you think.

Kelvin Atmadibrata



Juliana Yasin  
*Untitled*  
 1992  
 Performance Week  
 Gallery 21, Singapore  
**Photo credit: Koh Nguang How**

I have been taking pictures of performance art in Singapore since 1987. *Performance Week* came from artists mostly from the art group The Artists Village (TAV), who took part in the event *The Space* during the Singapore Festival of Arts Fringe 1992. Juliana Yasin was one of the active members of TAV and part of *Performance Week*. The untitled work in Performance Week could be her first solo performance I had seen and photographed. I was going to document the whole event, as my usual approach to documentation. The selected picture of Juliana during the beginning stage of her performance made connection with the picture of me responding to her broken relics, and both are suitable in this project.

My overall approach to photographing performance art is to present as much as possible views experienced by me as a photographer and then present them as best references to people who did not see the performances. I hardly take the pictures accordingly to the artists' assignments or instructions. I would instead try to understand the meanings of the works from written texts, if any, such as flyers, posters, statements and conversations with the artist. These would allow me to predict the following movement/action, as at the time I was using film, and not digital camera.

Koh Nguang How



Ly Hoang Ly  
 Title unknown  
 2009  
 10<sup>th</sup> International Open Performance Festival  
 Beijing, China  
**Photo credit: Lisa Bauer-Zhao**

Movement dominates this photograph: lines/threads that create uncertain and unuttered relations between (human) bodies, between places that remain unseen in the image. How can the feeling that a performance in the moment it is happening be transferred to and fixed on a photograph? And can such a photograph at the same time still be a documentation of the event, a document that tells those who were not eye-witnesses, what happened? Does the photographer have to choose in between creating a recognisable document or a hint of a feeling that is necessarily subjective?

I took this picture a few years ago – I think it was because I liked the performance, or rather, the feeling the performance offered to me. So I tried to catch this feeling by taking this photograph. There was hardly any light in the space the performance was taking place – a rather unfavourable situation for taking photos. But in the end, maybe that is what made the movement that dominated the performance visible and tangible.

I occasionally take photos of other artists' performances. Sometimes just to remember them. But it is only if I really like the performance that I can take a photo that is more than a mere documentation of an event. So I do not try to take pictures that are recognisable as a certain artist's performance, but as a (small) artwork in itself.

Lisa Bauer-Zhao



Ron Athey  
*Incorruptible Flesh, Messianic Remains*  
 2014  
 Performance Space  
 London, UK  
**Photo credit: Manuel Vason**

I have documented a large number of performances of Ron Athey and with time our relationship transformed into a fruitful friendship. I will never stop celebrating his work and the importance of his practice. It is thanks to Ron that I have experienced sublime ecstasy and a sense of catharsis. His work is just beyond description and my photograph can only introduce a possible physical experience.

The focus of my art practice is the problematic relationship between looking at a live performance and looking at fragments of that performance in a photograph.

My photographs are not objects of loss but objects of recovery; they are created with the intention of connecting with the live action.

I do not believe in the modern concept of photography as the perfect science to trace evidence; my photographs are repository of my experience and they reflect not only my photographic skill, but also my emotional response and participation to the live event. In fact, I would state further that the more I am emotionally charged by the live performance the more the resultant images are loaded with communicative power. Each photograph is the result of a series of decisions. Metaphorically, I see those decisions as the chiselling of a sculptor giving shape to an image.

Generally, I prefer to discuss the performance with the artists prior to the event, so as to be able to engage with the action not only by responding through my aesthetic sensibility, but by interpreting the action through their messages. In fact, during the dialogue with the artists I am not interested in the description of the action, but I question the reasons behind the action and the messages that they would like to deliver. Of course, I keep this information to myself and I try to embed it on the resultant photo traces.

This is the reason why I have insisted for years to call this process of image making *collaborative*. There is more than a simple skilful input: during the performance I feel the responsibility of speaking for the others and building an authoritative trace of the work of somebody else. Through dialogue I receive intimate information that I exchange with responsibility and loyalty. The sense of trust and the exchange are the foundation of any collaboration.

I am also aware of the limit of my position and the medium I am operating with. Even if I am fully committed and engaged, my photographic documentation will be partial and fragmented. Even if I have anticipated my decision with an intimate and trustful dialogue with the performance artist, my interpretation will be distorted and particular.

So, instead of fighting the deficiency of my role, I focus on the outcome of what I define the bones of the performance. My photographic documentation will serve the viewer to re-collect or encounter the live action and add the narrative (the flesh) to the fragments.

I will never propose my images as a replacement to the live performance. My images are an encouragement to witness the action LIVE. They exist as a support to the live action and I would like to suggest my images as an extension of the live action.

Even though photography wants to represent movement, it is its stillness that most animates me. In fact, I consider my photographs as containers of different temporalities: the time of the performance, the time of my execution, the time of my selection, the time of the presentation, the time of the encounter with the viewer and so on...

Finally, I see my images changing with the time and, of course, through the context in which they are presented.

Manuel Vason



Boris Nieslony  
*Naturstudie (Nature study)*  
 2014  
 Contexts 2014, The 4<sup>th</sup> International Sokolovsko  
 Festival of Ephemeral Art  
 Sokolovsko, Poland  
**Photo credit: Marita Bullmann**

I keep the photographer and the performer strictly separate. I see the artwork more in the performance than in its documentation. Some photographers take documentation of the performance, and view it as an artwork in itself, but for myself I keep the two aspects separate.

I think it is really relevant to have a documentation, but we can also start the discourse of “trusting an image or not trusting it.” There are bad images of beautiful performances and great images of bad performances. So now: what is more relevant? The image or the performance? It is really difficult to say and it may cause a big discussion.

I am always curious about the documentation and for myself I use it more as a proof of my ideas and images, to get to the core or to check whether, for example, it was a big mess.

Also recently I stopped taking documentation with my camera. I take some images with my phone for my memory, but only for me. I really started to enjoy the live moment again and the performances happening just in front of me. It is such a difference to witness performance art through a camera or directly with my eyes.

I think it would make more sense to make performances especially for camera. So both can decide on the aesthetics and the direction. Generally, I think it is always an issue of trust and good will. The performer tries her best and the photographer tries her best and both are kind of dependent on one another, but also can really benefit from one another.

Marita Bullmann



Sandra Johnston and Alastair MacLennan  
*Let Liminal Loose*  
 2014  
 Venice International Performance Art Week  
 Venice, Italy  
**Photo credit: Nisa Ojalvo**

I met Sandra Johnston in the summer of 2014 at a Norwegian triennial that I was photographing. We spent a week together with a small group of performance artists from around the world, housed in officer's barracks on an island that had served as a WWII German air base. During that time we engaged in conversation about our respective work and artistic interests. Sandra took it upon herself to guide me around the island, as she was privy to the space each artist would occupy for their performances. We spent a while at the crumbling concrete bunker that would house her meditative piece the following weekend. The following winter, I was photographing the Venice International Performance Art Week where Sandra was to perform a multi-day durational piece with Alastair MacLennan, a Scottish artist based in Northern Ireland. I was familiar with Alastair's beautiful and austere work, as it was featured on the cover of Manuel Vason's performance book, *Encounters*. I was both excited and intimidated to meet Alastair. On the Venice opening day, Sandra and Alastair approached me and Alastair asked if I would photograph their collaboration. I was surprised by his soft voice and gentle disposition. I spent the next five days thinking, shooting and wandering through their performance space, observing their movements through a keyhole in the hulking wooden palazzo door. It was exhilarating to photograph their durational piece, and the rhythm and intimacy of their *impromptu* movements, supported only by simple props gathered in the Venetian shops nearby.

Nisa Ojalvo





Jenny Strauss  
*Intake*  
 1999  
 TIME TIME TIME series, Fado Performance Inc.  
 37 Hanna Ave, Toronto, Canada  
**Photo credit: Paul Couillard**

In Jenny Strauss's *Intake*, a 24-hour performance timed to coincide with the USA Thanksgiving holiday, the self-proclaimed "fat femme dyke" inhabited the imagined characteristics of a pig, in a room equipped with an easy chair, bales of hay, a mud pool, junk food and garbage. Having often been compared to a pig, the performer sought to enact, in her words, a "spiritual transformation, using [...] the primary element—my fat body—to meld the mind/body fracture trained into me by society."<sup>[1]</sup>

This image was taken late in the evening, when no one else was around. Jenny had been arranging an assortment of junk food (Twinkies, Cheetos, M&Ms) into a kind of mandala on the floor, but at a certain point, she stood up, took a potato chip and put it partway into her mouth. Then she began to slowly stack more chips onto the first, creating a mask that echoed the image of a pig snout. She, of course, could not see the effects of this spontaneous gesture. As she engaged in this careful action, the room became charged with a different energy, and through the mask of the potato chips, a previously undetected vulnerability and preternatural power shone forth. For me, this was the transformational moment of the performance, in which something new was discovered or revealed.

<sup>1</sup> From the artist statement for the performance. <http://www.performanceart.ca/index.php?m=program&id=104>

This particular photograph of the performance is significant to me in part because there were no other live witnesses to this moment. In the durational and site specific performances that I was curating at the time, there were many such moments: at 4:00am, when only the artist and the curator were present, or traveling along some secluded side street where there were no passers-by. Still, the artist would maintain her/his commitment to action, because every moment was felt as contributing to the overall charge of the work; still, I as the curator would maintain my commitment to witnessing, because any moment might be the precise instant where form would coalesce into meaningfulness.

Although I was not always recording, these were the moments that were easiest to document, because there was less concern of disturbing other viewers, of miscalculating the rhythm of the work, or of getting in the way of the performance. Often in such moments, the artist's guard in relation to the camera and to me as a witness seemed to have been let down or abandoned—or, at least, as much as they could/would be.

Paul Couillard



Tara Goudarzi  
*Playing with light*  
 2015  
 Light Art Performance – 2<sup>nd</sup> edition  
 Ghamary Cave, Khoramabad, Iran  
**Photo credit: Razieh Goudarzi**

In this work Tara and I were in the cave. At the time of the performance we did not know what would happen. I had a say in where she should stand in the cave, so that the image could transfer the greatest impact I could experience directly. After a performance, a good picture or video tries to show the performance conditions, what the performer wanted to demonstrate and what happened during the performance.

I take photographs of performance artists, because I think I can transfer the feeling of the performer, as I get it. I believe I can transfer it on the image. And I love to record moments. When I see anything that I enjoy I feel compelled to click and then share it with others. And I think some performance artists like to have pictures from their performances, so I enjoy helping them and give them as a gift.

Razieh Goudarzi



Nenad Bogdanović  
*Unknown Heart*  
 2013  
 Traverse Video Festival  
 Toulouse, France  
**Photo credit: RED BIND**

Nenad Bogdanović is an artist and a curator. He is the founder and director of International Multimedia Art Festival (IMAF). He has been a friend of mine since we met in 2013, a few days before I took this picture. So I know him enough by now, to tell how hard he works for performance art.

This performance was really strong. Just before it started, I did not know anything, I was still on the public side. The light was like a shower on his head and some piano music was keeping the audience quiet, like a kind of holy breath. At this point, everyone could see him holding a piece of soap and some red paint above a big basin full of water. It was the very first time I was attending one of his performances.

He looked so strong and focused that he could have hypnotised people with only a soap and some red paint.

As a performance artist myself, I feel I have to take pictures of these very special moments, where the artist performing shows a true bare face, not only to the audience, but to himself as well. This is not only about memory, but also about existing as a performer in the very present. Performance art is an intense practice: you have to be here and now, you have to be. Today, I see performance art as a huge intercontinental

space to think, talk, learn, meet, search and act, again and again, like an endlessly expanding magma. To take pictures of other performers is nourishing the magma. It is like screaming to the rest of the world: "Something is happening!"

Few years ago I decided to make videos too. It depends on the performance. These last years I had the chance to experience a lot of performances as spectator, not as a performer, and now I can say that most performances are deeply linked to their context, where something invisible can happen. You can catch most part of this with a picture, but for some other ones I decided to make video. Video can catch sounds, body moves, breaths or tremors, hesitation, voices or whispers of the public. Obviously, there is no media able to transcribe a performance in its entirety, you have to be there with your body. It is true for the performer, but also for the audience. Video is a way to collect more information about what you cannot see on a picture.

As a performer, it is also really interesting to have the chance to watch our own performances, it is nourishing our own researches. We did performances in which we were momentarily blind, and when we can watch videos from those performances it is a great help. It also allows to understand the difference between doing and watching. Whether photography or video, documenting performance art is an integral part of our research and our concerns as performance artists.

RED BIND



Varsha Nair  
*Undercurrent in Yangon*  
2014  
Beyond Pressure  
People's Park, Yangon, Myanmar  
**Photo credit: Sharon Chin**

Varsha had asked me to take photos of her performance with her iPhone. In that case I was aware that I was trying to document the performance for a colleague, so I tried to get shots that could present the work in good way. It was dusk on the second day of the festival, and Varsha was the first to perform. Evening falls slowly in Yangon, lilac sky slipping into supple night.

A couple of days earlier, at the hotel, she showed me the giant paper boat she had made and brought over from Bangkok, where she lives. I knew that the past year or so had been hard on Varsha – there had been personal loss and poor health, and she had witnessed violent chaos unfolding in Bangkok. The paper boat seemed symbolic of a transitioning state, of hope made manifest, however fragile.

This was a reunion for us, and mirrored our first meeting in Yangon five years earlier. We were both artists in the performance art festival Beyond Pressure. Back then Beyond Pressure was only two years old, and was entirely centred on performance art.

We took photos of each other's performances then too. I remember being struck by how Varsha created a specific mood in her piece *How to grow a perfect Bonsai* that was mysterious, poetic and sharply comical. I was new to performance art then, and admired artists who seemed to take their time, who could gather a presence and spin it out, like thread – fast or slow, intensely or leisurely, as they wished. I have never been able to do that. I am nervous and shaking and rushed and goofy, never really in my own body during a performance. Even today, I feel a bit of an imposter, with my props and concepts and mental script of how things should happen.

So, back to the more recent past, and Varsha's paper boat. Things were going well. We had a few days before the festival officially started, and hung out a lot. I could tell she was improvising, slowly putting together the piece in her mind. The day before both Varsha and I were due to perform, Moe Satt, Beyond Pressure's founder and organiser, came over to where we were chatting together and gave me my agreed artists fees in crisp US dollars. I saw Varsha's face change. "I didn't know we were getting fees", she said. Moe Satt was sheepish, but to his credit, looked her in the eye and said that some artists were getting fees and some weren't.

From that moment onwards, I think the festival was ruined for Varsha. She was angry and upset. I didn't know how angry, until the next day, when she told me she did not feel like presenting her performance anymore.

It took me a while to truly understand the implication of unfair wages in this context. Festival organisers have always managed their budgets at their own discretion, and in my experience, seldom been transparent about how fees are apportioned. Artists also tend not to ask, to our detriment. This kind of opacity is widespread in the art world, and is tied to the failure to see the work of artists as real labour. Artists internalise this attitude all too easily, and replicate it when we find ourselves in the position of organiser: in other words, a commissioner of artists' labour. But it goes further, because artists identify so deeply with their labour. Varsha told me she was not sure why she was there at all. She began to doubt the real reason she had been invited, and to suspect that the organisers did not in fact care for her art. Failure to acknowledge its labour value reflected absolutely the same consideration towards its artistic value. I myself speculate on whether the fact that she is an older, female artist had any bearing on what happened.

In the end, Varsha did carry out her performance. She changed it at the last minute, and charged it with her anger and disappointment. I will always remember how she took the paper boat off her head and dashed it to the ground. That is why Varsha is a total pro, an artist I have looked up to since the day we met. She took the pain of the moment, and in a lovely pivot, transmuted it into beauty crackling with poise and fury.

Words spoken by Varsha and translated into Burmese by Maung Day during her performance:

*I thought to tell you my story But details of last few days came in the way  
I thought I have a speck of land Until our difference took it away  
I thought I had reached a shore But felt the undercurrent too late  
I thought things were fair – at least up to a point they were But the equation had changed  
I thought ok, I have this boat But a wave unravelled its seams  
I search the stars to find a way But the moon tonight is blinding bright  
The sun just went down Tomorrow I will find it in another place*

When I look at exhibitions or performances, I do take photos. It is a form of note-making. I use the camera as a brain extension to help me remember visual details. I'm not trying to take a beautiful picture; my photography skills are pedestrian anyway. Time of day, where the audience was standing: these can bring back strong emotional impressions that a piece of work left on me. The photo is like a bottled memory, or extra RAM for the limited hard drive of my brain.

Sharon Chin



Daniela Beltrani  
*Shi Jian*  
2014  
Art Now Live Tour  
Linzhou Cultural Centre, Anyang, Henan Province, China  
**Photo credit: Sophia Natasha Wei**

Whenever I recall Daniela's performance in Anyang, China, the image of the Chinese characters '时间' (*Shi Jian* meaning Time) flowing and dissolving into the water lapses me into melancholy on the coming and going of time. Her struggle to hold on to the characters as they disappear into nothingness makes me more determined to capture on photography that moment I would not want to lose.

Documenting others' performances adds to my growth as an artist, because they are rich learning content and meaningful evidence of myself being part of this community. The camera is the artistic eye diligently searching for visual outcomes in the performance and tracing its process. The photographs of a performance are not just visual memories, but deeply felt reflections of how I have encountered and experienced the performance. It is also a window to which we see ourselves and a mirror telling us what performance art is.

Sophia Natasha Wei





Marzieh Etefaghi Darian  
*The mirror sees, I would love you, get wiped*  
 2014  
 The second Festival of Humar  
 Hormuz Island, Iran  
**Photo credit: Tara Goudarzi**

In this performance, in Hormuz Island, Marzieh sat where the waves of the sea could reach her. At first, she weaved her hair in two braids, then she cut them and placed them by the sides of the head of an image of a little girl she had made in the sand. She lied down next to the image in a gentle hug. Marzieh and I waited for the sea to produce a stronger wave that could wash away the image on the sand. Waiting was an activity we shared: I as photographer and Marzieh as performer. In the end I felt that one photo was not enough to show what the artist had done during her performance. So I put together a selection of meaningful images in a succession with the final one just before the wave washes the drawing in the sand, as the main one.

I take photos of other performance artists because I want to help them record their art works in the best possible way. I know my artist friends and I know what they are looking for. I am a performance artist myself and so I know what a performance artist wants from a photographer.

In Iran, most artists who are working in nature are trying to help one another. To hire a photographer or cameraman is difficult, because it is expensive. So we document our performances and this, in turn, develops or strengthens the friendship.

Tara Goudarzi



Gwendolyn Robin  
*Where is the future?*  
 2008  
 Future of Imagination 5  
 Sculpture Square, Singapore  
**Photo credit: Ulrich Lau**

The explosion on the head was the final act of what the artist was doing with a few other explosions and rudimentary pyrotechnics. Destruction was more profound when the human body became the fuse. The explosion set off the fire alarm in the gallery and that was the most interesting ending of any performance at the event.

In the beginning I used to take photographs, because other performance artists had asked me to do it for them during their presentation, and eventually it became an interest for me. Photographing for performance art is like street photography. I should be connected with the scene and my subject, yet invisible and unobtrusive to the performer and other people around me.

Also, photographing performance art is like hunting, follow the pace of the performer and watch out for the movement in the gestures, the eyes, and even in the breathing. Having a keen observation of the performance is mostly about anticipation for the perfect shot.

Ulrich Lau



Sharon Chin  
*Scream, Honey*  
 2014  
 Beyond Pressure  
 People's Park, Yangon, Myanmar  
**Photo credit: Varsha Nair**

Sharon and I agreed to photograph one another that evening. As her performance for which she interacted with the public was later, my concern was to tackle the strong spotlights and capture some good shots, and how to go about this without crossing and disturbing the audience's line of vision.

It all looked idyllic. Two seats facing each other under the branch of a tree, two soft pillows resting on the seats, a bottle of honey rigged up and dangling from the branch, and Sharon dressed in a crisp cotton yellow dress that she had made.

As I soon found out I was to be the first person she gently invited to sit opposite her and asked if I would like to scream. I said – yes. Uncertain about how to begin - how does one let rip in the midst of a lot of people encircling and watching you - I followed her and buried my head in the pillow and let out a mighty scream, then another, and then a few more. After, she asked whether I felt better. I responded saying - yes, I certainly did.

I had not screamed in a long while.

She handed me a spoon and led me to the honey bottle dangling from the tree, squeezed some out and in unison we licked the sweet liquid off of our spoons to soothe our throats.

As she looked to see if anyone else would like to join her in sharing their screams and licking honey after I wondered whether from amongst the mostly shy audience anyone would step forward. And they did, quite a few of them. We all have our dumbbed-down screams and not much opportunity to let them out, let alone in public.

Sharon Chin's performance *Scream, honey* haunts me. It grabs me unexpectedly - whilst reading a book, watching the news, answering a phone call, travelling to another place, or stepping onto a dog turd on my way to somewhere. And I often find myself thinking – if only Sharon could set up her two seats, cushions and bottle of honey, be it in a shopping mall, on a street corner, anywhere really, and in many places around the world..... if only...

Unless I am asked specifically to do so, I almost never take photos during a performance. I prefer to immerse myself in that which unfolds in real time - the lived moment is one thing and the photo is quite another. It is a document, and regarding it as such when I look at photos of my own or others' performances, more than anything else I tend to focus on the audience and what they are doing, how they are reacting. When you see such an image, which also captures the audience's actions, the document retrospectively becomes part of the performance as it records people's presence at a particular moment and in a particular place.

If I do ask an artist colleague to take photos off/for me, it is to have a few images for documentation. But each time I look at these images what is foremost in my mind is the people who took them and so the images become more of personal documents. The photographers are behind the lens capturing moments according to how they see things and it is this, their point of view, that also starts to reveal different aspects or outlook of my work. In these images the photographer marks his/her presence in a particular way and in doing so I feel they become a part of my performance.

Varsha Nair





Monika Günther / Ruedi Schill  
 Title not known  
 2014  
 Japan International Performance Art Festival (NIPAF)  
 Tokyo, Japan  
**Photo credit: Watan Wuma**

在自己還沒有做行為藝術之前（約15年前），我就經常透過鏡頭在看行為藝術，我喜歡行為藝術家們自由自在的在任何空間裡創作，儘管我的角度不是很好或者光線也不佳！但是當我快門按下的那一刻，卻是最真實的紀錄了藝術家的作品。

I began practising performance art about 15 years ago. I often look at performance art through the lens of my camera. Even when my camera angle or source of light may not be very ideal, I still relish in the freedom and creativity of the performance artist in that particular space and time. To me, the moment I press the shutter is my most authentic record of the artist's work.

Watan Wuma

## BIOGRAPHIES

### AñA WOJAK (Australia)

AñA Wojak is an award winning inter-disciplinary artist working in performance, assemblage, installation, painting and theatre design. Australian born, she studied in Gdańsk, Poland amid the turmoil of Solidarność and martial law. She has been an exhibiting visual artist for nearly 40 years and a performance artist for 20. She has shown in numerous award exhibitions, winning the prestigious Blake Prize in 2004. Her work is featured in private and public collections including Artbank and National Portrait Gallery of Australia.

Based in Northern Rivers NSW, her performance and video have been shown throughout Australia and internationally. She has collaborated with the likes of Tony Yap (Australia), Pacitti (London), senVoodoo (co-founder), La Pocha Nostra (US), Felix Ruckert (Germany) and Textile Audio (Australia) amongst others. AñA Wojak has performed at festivals in Australia, Europe and Asia, such as: *Interakcje 14* Poland 2006, *DIAF China* 2006, *Alice Desert Festival* 2007, *Brisbane Festival* 2011, *undisclosed territories* Java 2007, 2013 and *MAP Festival*, Malaysia 2013, 2014, 2015. In 2016 she will be attending *Arts Island Festival* in Java as well as returning to *Melaka Art & Performance Festival (MAP)* in Malaysia. As an Australian artist she finds relevance in being part of to the Asia Pacific region.

With a particular interest in site-specificity, durational performance, ritual and altered states, AñA creates visually poetic works that resonate with a visceral depth.



AñA Wojak  
*Lamentation II*  
 2015  
 MAPFest 7 Melaka Art & Performance Festival  
 Malaysia  
 Photo credit: Steve Chong

### CAI Qing (China/Germany/Singapore)

Cai Qing Sonnenberg (b. 1961, Hulin, China) is a contemporary performance artist and art critic from China. He has lived and worked as an independent artist in Europe and New York since 1989. In September 2007, he accepted a professor position at the School of Art, Design and Media at the Nanyang Technological University and relocated to Singapore, whilst he was also guest professor at various art academies in China. In September 2015, he began a full-time academic position at the Fine Art Academy of Tianjin, China.

Qing has published countless essays in various art journals and magazines and two books about performance art, *Performance Art and Spiritual Therapy* in 2012 and *Live Art 2006-2013* in 2013. He is currently curating a one-year long series of contemporary art exhibitions, *Parabiosis*, at Chongqing Changjiang Museum of Contemporary Art (CCMCA) in China.

Qing has also curated several important art shows. In 1998, he co-curated China's first contemporary art exhibition in a private space, *Trace of Existence* in Beijing. In 2014, he curated the international performance event *Art Now Live Tour* from Beijing to Anyang.

As a contemporary artist, he uses performance, installation, video and photography to express his ideas. The concept in most of his art is the interplay between the observer and the observed, focusing on people from various backgrounds in different societies. He enjoys interaction with people and finds inspiration for his works in many of their life stories.



Cai Qing  
*Rice a half yellow sun flag up in Venice*  
2015  
Venice, Italy  
Photo credit: Xu Lei

### Daniela BELTRANI (Italy/Singapore)

Daniela (b. 1968, Rome, Italy) is a performance artist based in Singapore. Classically educated in Italy, Daniela attained her Master of Arts in Contemporary Asian Art Histories in 2011 from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. Since 2010 Daniela has curated many solo and group exhibitions. She has contributed articles for art publications and catalogues with a focus on contemporary art in Southeast Asia and performance art. Early in 2011, sensing an all-too-often misleading gap between art theory and art practice, she embarked on an experiential journey in performance art to supplement her concurrent research, and she has not stopped since. Since 2011 she has also organised performance art events, in Singapore and abroad, for local and international artists. In June 2011, she set up S.P.A.M., a performance art platform. She has presented over 60 performances, solo and in collaboration, in the Philippines, Singapore, Italy, Cambodia, Myanmar, Turkey, Indonesia, Finland, China, Malaysia and India.

Daniela is not only a practising performance artist and organiser of performance art events, but she has also contributed essays and articles. She tries to stay focused on her intent to promote an experience of art that on one side is non-elitist and yet probing and on the other can offer opportunities for alternative and more visceral readings and reflections. Benefitting from a strong humanistic background, ultimately her efforts tend to encourage the audience of her performances into a more holistic experience of art as a means to cultivate their own individual aesthetic sense and to recover their humanity beyond the flimsy parameters of a decadent and commodity-driven society. Her holistic approach to performance art - as performer, spectator, amateur photographer and academician - allows her to fully explore the practice and its different aspects. Her current research into Patañjali's *Ashtanga yoga* enriches her performance art repertoire with works inspired by, created and performed with the application of selected yogic practices.

<http://danielabeltrani.weebly.com>



Daniela Beltrani  
*Prana*  
2016  
Morni Hills Performance Art Biennale  
The Government Museum and Art Gallery,  
Chandigarh, Punjab  
Photo credit: Lakshmi Maurya

## Ezzam RAHMAN (Singapore)

Ezzam Rahman (b. 1981, Singapore) is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Singapore. He graduated with a BA (Hons) in Fine Arts from University of Huddersfield, UK in 2010. He is currently pursuing his MA in Fine Arts from Goldsmiths, University of London, UK, at LASALLE, College of the Arts.

Ezzam works with a variety of mediums, employing sculpture, installation and performance art to construct glimpses into basic human emotions and question our own making of the world. He considers his works as improvisational objects, time-based ephemera, that invite the viewers to question the value and worth of impermanence. Relying on instinctual desires for beauty, abject poetics and seduction, Ezzam constructs unconventional visual experiences from singular materials and the presence of his breathing body.

Ezzam's works have been showcased in numerous group exhibitions, events and festivals, in Australia, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand and UK.

In 2014 Singapore Art Museum commissioned a set of miniature sculptures in the artist's own skin for the exhibition *Unearthed*. In 2015 Ezzam presented an installation-cum-performance at *SingaPlural*, an anchor event for the Singapore Design Week 2015. In the same year, he was awarded the Joint Grand Prize for the President's Young Talents 2015 and the People's Choice Award by the Singapore Art Museum.



Ezzam Rahman  
*You Are What I Don't Want To Be*  
2015  
Singapour Mon Amour: Inter | Actions  
Église Saint Merry, Paris, France  
Photo credit: Georgies Srour / Lowave

## Farah ONG (Singapore)

Farah Ong is a multidisciplinary actress/performance artist/occasional art maker, who is exploring the cross-disciplinary practice of photography and performance. Rooted strongly in her background in theatre, she is constantly working towards organic diversification of her artistic vocabulary.

Having graduated from LASALLE College of the Arts and majored in Fine Art Photography, Farah has performed across Asia and the Middle East. In 2012 her photography works were exhibited at the Stockholm Pride.

She feels that sometimes love makes us numb, culture turns us characterless and religion leaves us faithless. And her personal practice navigates the inter-relatedness and contradictions inherent therein.

When not working, Farah enjoys her solitude and indulges in aimless joyrides on her Vespa. She likes chancing upon quiet spots on this not so quiet island.



Farah Ong  
*Eulogy*  
2012  
Fetterfield  
Cemetery, Jalan Kubor, Singapore  
Photo credit: Kelvin Atmadibrata



## Gabriela ALONSO (Argentina)

Gabriela Alonso is a multidisciplinary artist. For Gabi art has no limits, no gaps between its possible applications, nor is it separate from life. It is not extraordinary or ordinary, it is how we live and move. So one can dance if one can hear music in the colours of a painting.

Educated as a teacher in visual arts, Gabi has been devoting her time to painting, dance and theatre from a very young age. These have been the triggers for what today she calls *events*, which she plans and executes. She watches and coexists with the environment in which she lives, but these acts are not always the same. She performs actions together with various communities, in which she works to address and solve the various problems that cross these groups, rescuing memory, human and urban knowledge and poetry.

She is a cultural manager and coordinator of various events and experiences in performance art. She is an activist, feminist, cook, mother. The house where she lives in the city of Quilmes, south of greater Buenos Aires, is a laboratory of human links that operates under an economic collective scheme.



Gabriela Alonso  
*Huella y memoria*

2011

EPI Encuentro Independiente de Performance Internacional

Lota, Chile

Photo credit: Nelda Ramos

I discovered Lota, mining town 60 km from Concepcion and 600 km from Santiago de Chile. Upon my arrival I researched the place through various documents. I had knowledge about the geographical, historical aspects; I went through many files and photos the organiser of EPI, Alperoa, had sent me. To tell the truth, I had enough information about the place. And so I arrived with a vague idea about a possible action to propose there.

Much I had imagined, I even imagined the colour, the dress, the departure and the arrival.

What I had not imagined was the meeting with the caretaker. Arriving at the ruins of Enancar in Lota Alto, there greeted us Guillermo, the caretaker. We told him the reason for our arrival on site. Guillermo readily empathised, we introduced ourselves and talked. While unpacking my objects, I got a ladder, discovered the blackened sand diluted in the hands of the caretaker and our conversation took an intimate turn, when I do not know why, but he shared his personal story and I shared mine.

I had no doubts with "The Guardian" by my side ... the action had begun before the guests arrived at the site ...



## Jürgen FRITZ (Germany)

Jürgen Fritz was born in 1958 in the Black Forest, Germany. He studied theatre and music.

From 1982 to 1990 he worked as a theatre director, curator and actor, and, since 1984, as a performance artist. He is co-founder of Black Market International, an international collective of performance artists who have worked together since 1985. He is also co-founder of the International Performance Association (IPA). Since 2005 he has been a freelance artist in Hildesheim, Germany. Jürgen has shown his performances in many countries worldwide. He is the artistic director of the annual festival of performance art ZOOM!, co-founder and co-organiser of the Platform for Young Performance Artists and the IPA Summer.

Since 1995 he has held the post of lecturer in performance art at different universities in Germany.

He develops his works mostly as site specific. His conceptual approach is characterised by an impressive concentration and precision. For that he uses simple materials, such as bamboo sticks, a bell or marbles, with which he creates inspiring imagery.

Performances with simple musical instruments have become an essential component of his work in recent years. He has been performing his piece *Ringling a bell in dialogue with...* since 2008 with traditional musicians from Europe and Asia.

[www.fritz-performance.de](http://www.fritz-performance.de)



Jürgen Fritz  
*Untitled*  
2007  
Stockmann  
Kunstverein Kassel, Germany  
Photo credit: Stefan Daub

## Kelvin ATMADIBRATA (Indonesia)

Kelvin Atmadibrata (b.1988, Jakarta, Indonesia) employs superpowers awakened by puberty and adolescent fantasy to assemble a formidable army of outlaws. Equipped by *shōnen* characters and macho *ero-kawaii*, his antiheroes contest the masculine and erotica in Southeast Asia.

He works primarily with performance, often accompanied by and translated into drawings, mixed media and objects compiled as installations. Approached as multi-disciplinary projects, Kelvin recreates narratives and characters based on RPGs (Role-Playing video Games) theories.

Kelvin graduated with Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) majoring in Interactive Media from School of Art, Design and Media in Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. Previously living in Singapore for a decade, he is now based in Jakarta, Indonesia running PADJAK (Performance Art di Jakarta), a bi-monthly performance art gathering in the city.



Kelvin Atmadibrata  
*Mabigat (Heavy)*  
2015  
Usbong Festival  
University of Philippines, Los Banos, Philippines  
Photo credit: Joseph Gabriel

## KOH Nguang How (Singapore)

Born in Singapore, 1963, Koh Nguang How is an artist associated with the Singapore art collective The Artists Village, and independent researcher/archivist on Singapore art. He worked in the National Museum Art Gallery as a Museum Assistant between 1985 and 1991 and later briefly as Assistant Curator in early 1992. He was a researcher in the pilot Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Researcher/Curator in Residence Program, in 1999. He was artist in residence at the inaugural Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) Artist in Residence Programme in 2014.

His artistic practice began in 1988 and encompasses photography, collage, assemblage, installation, performance art, documentation, archiving, curating and research. Due to much time spent on archiving work, he decided the best way to satisfy his artist role is to combine the archives in his installation works and projects. He initiated his archive project in 1999, but only naming it *Singapore Art Archive Project* (SAAP) in 2005, when working with a new curatorial team called p-10, on his collection of primary and secondary source materials about art in Singapore.

His archival materials supported several works and exhibitions, including: *The Documentation of Tang Da Wu and His Works: 1970-1999*, *The Commemorative Exhibition for the 10th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes*; *Situation: Collaborations, Collectives and Artist Network from Sydney, Singapore and Berlin*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia; *Errata: Page 71, Plate 47. Image caption. Change Year: 1950 to Year: 1959. Reported September 2004 by Koh Nguang How*, p-10, Singapore; *Picturing Singapore 1955-2005: An Archival Perspective*, a parallel event to the exhibition *Archive in Motion: 50 Jahre/Years documenta, 1955 – 2005*, at the National Museum of Singapore; *When Photographs Become Drawings, Drawing as Form*, The Artists Village Show 2009 and *Artists in the News*, Singapore Biennale 2011.



Koh Nguang How  
*Four Days in August*  
1992  
Performance Week  
Gallery 21, Singapore  
Photo credit: Thein Naing

## Lisa BAUER-ZHAO (Germany)

Lisa Bauer-Zhao is a PhD candidate at Hildesheim University, Germany and a performance artist. Her research's main focus is the situation of Taiwan's modern and contemporary art against the background of the globalisation of art discourse.

She has been performing at many performance art festivals worldwide, including Beijing and Singapore. She took part in the *M.E.L.Ting Project – One Year Conversation: Thread, Ghost Story, Escape* by curator Yves Chiu at the Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei.

The main focus of her performances is to look at everyday actions, expressions and materials in a reduced manner, place them in a different environment and in this way empty their previously defined meaning and open new spaces of thoughts. The plainness of the movement and the repetition create a floating image in between concrete everydayness and conscious absurdity.

She is also engaged in curatorial practice. In 2009 she established *Kulturflur*, an alternative art space (2009-2011).



Lisa Bauer-Zhao  
*The Ocean is too far away*  
2012  
13<sup>th</sup> International Open Performance Festival  
Beijing, China  
Photo credit: Zhao Lidong

## Manuel VASON (Italy/UK)

Manuel was born in Padua, Italy in 1974. He discovered his interest in photography while working in a black and white professional darkroom. After having assisted some of the most celebrated fashion photographers of his generation in Milan, New York, Paris, London and Los Angeles, he decided to pursue a Masters degree in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins at University of the Arts in London. In 2002 he completed and presented two books: *Exposures*, a publication on the body in live art (Black Dog Publishing, 2002) and *Oh Lover Boy*, a two-year collaboration with artist Franko B (Black Dog Publishing, 2002). In 2007 Manuel's first solo exhibition *Encounters* was presented and accompanied by a 230-page catalogue (Arnolfini/Cornerhouse). In 2012 he presented *Still\_Movil*, an itinerant exhibition of co-creations with 45 choreographers in South America. In October 2014 he launched his latest book project titled *Double Exposures*. Manuel is continuously developing a practice integrating different mediums and collaborative methods.

Manuel's artistic practice explores the relationship between photography and performance, presence and representation. He considers the capturing of a moment as an act of creation, as a ritual towards the illusion of immortality and as an exchange between who is in front and who is behind the camera. The collaborative nature of his practice shapes a unique hybrid art form and generates new vocabularies. His collaborations to date have become some of the most iconic images of performance and his work has been published and presented internationally.



Manuel Vason  
*Metafora*  
2014  
Galeria Vermelho  
São Paulo, Brazil  
Photo credit: Rafael Canas

This was the first time I was presenting the *PhotoPerformer* through a live action. The *PhotoPerformer* is my alter ego, a photographer documenting his own action, a performer expressing through the camera. With a camera wrapped on my face I was performing a breathing exercise that was making my body sweating heavily. Underneath my feet I had an image printed on soluble material that was dissolving drop-by-drop causing the photograph to disappear. The audience was participating in the ritual by shooting my activity through a remote control. Each resultant image was simultaneously projected on my back so as to create a virtual mirror of the space.

## Marita BULLMANN (Germany)

Marita Bullman is a performance, installation and photography artist based in Essen, Germany. Marita studied photography and, in 2011, graduated with distinction at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen. In the same period she went to Israel to study at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, where she followed classes in performance art with Adina Bar-On.

In 2011, together with Boris Nieslony from Black Market International and others, she set up *PAErsche*, an action-laboratory, which focuses on encounters and networking as a gift and cooperation ([www.paersche.org](http://www.paersche.org)). Since 2013 she has been the organiser and art director of the performance art platform INTERVAL ([www.maritabullmann.de/interval/](http://www.maritabullmann.de/interval/)).

Since 2006 Marita has been presenting her work across Europe, Israel, Russia and China.

Marita uses everyday materials in her performances. She tries to keep the number of materials for each performance to a bare minimum, which is helpful to keep the action focused and clear. What happens between Marita and the material is that it becomes a comparison between shapes, structures and movements of what the material is capable of. It's an exploration of how the material reacts on the body's movements and vice versa. She is looking for images and actions, which manifest the beauty of the now and its simplicity.



Marita Bullmann  
*Foam from a thousand beers IV*  
2014  
Bel-Esse Exchange  
Lisburn, Northern Ireland  
Photo credit: Jordan Hutchings



## Nisa OJALVO (USA)

Nisa Ojalvo is a published performance art photographer and lawyer who resides in New York City. Nisa has been documenting live art for over 14 years, and has photographed festivals in Italy, India, Norway, Denmark, France, China and the UK. Through her photography she seeks to explore the meeting point of artist, audience and location.

Nisa has been published in *Art Asia Pacific*, *The Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, *KunstForum*, *ExBerliner* and RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. Her images have been exhibited at Kunsthalle Osnabrück and Künstlerforum Bonn in Germany, Gallery 53 Guangzhou, Chelsea Art Museum, NOoSphere Arts and Dumbo Arts Center in New York. Nisa collaborates with artists Rita Marhaug (Norway) and Traci Kelly (UK/Germany) as part of kelly/marhaug/ojalvo.

Nisa is a native English speaker, fluent in Japanese, Chinese and French, and she studies Hindi, Kannada and Norwegian. She holds a B.A. in East Asian Literature & Arts from Dartmouth College and a J.D. from GW National Law Center.

[www.nisaojalvo.com](http://www.nisaojalvo.com)



Nisa Ojalvo (kelly/marhaug/ojalvo)

*Untitled*

2015

Lofoten, Norway

Photo credit: Nisa Ojalvo, © kelly/marhaug/ojalvo 2016

kelly/marhaug/ojalvo is a collaboration among Traci Kelly (UK/Germany), Rita Marhaug (Norway) and myself, Nisa Ojalvo (USA). We engage in site-specific and site-responsive live art and performance. We work with the natural landscape, placing the body in dialogue with specific local histories, cultural practices and geographic locations. Our work incorporates photography, video, installation, sculpture and text.

We started collaborating in 2013 on a series entitled *Lånt Landskap/Borrowed Landscape*, which began with a road trip up the Western coast of Norway and ended in the Lofoten Archipelago above the Arctic Circle at 68N°. We were awarded a joint residency in Wales in 2016 to continue working on this series. Rita and I met in Southern France in 2010, and had a show together at NOoSphere Arts in New York in 2014. Traci and Rita met in 2009 and have been collaborating since 2013.

This image was created at the end of our second collaborative journey to Lofoten in 2015. While we had played previously with “threes” to represent our joint project and to serve as stand-ins for ourselves during our 2013 road trip – three scallion tops while picnicking on a ferry trip from Bodø to Å; three cows in a pasture on the remote island of Leka; three open car doors during one of our many pit stops - we had not yet all three of us appeared in any collaborative photograph. The property we were staying at had these amazing wheelbarrows, and Rita had three colourful sheepskins from a 1970s Norwegian thrift store. So we set our scene against this Lofoten mountain backdrop, climbed into our respective wheelbarrows and I captured all three of us for the first time.



### Paul COUILLARD (Canada)

Paul Couillard has been working as an artist, curator, and cultural theorist since 1985, focusing on performance art with forays into installation and various new media. He has created more than 200 solo and collaborative performance works in 24 countries, often working with his partner Ed Johnson. His work seeks to build community and address trauma through responsive explorations of our bodies as shared vessels of sensation, experience, knowledge and spirit. He has a particular interest in considering the situated borders of our separate existences, searching for a language that can convey complex layers of personal history and cultural specificity while questioning the notion of universal experience. His solo practice is often focused on duration and the effects of time.

Paul was the Performance Art Curator for Fado from its inception in 1993 until 2007, and is also a founding co-curator of Toronto's 7a\*11d International Festival of Performance Art. He is the editor of Fado's *Canadian Performance Art Legends*, a series of books on senior Canadian performance artists. Paul has been a lecturer at McMaster University and the University of Toronto Scarborough, and is currently a doctoral candidate in the York/Ryerson Joint Graduate Program in Communication and Culture. His research is focused on a theoretical recuperation of the notion of presence as an ongoing and entangled process of becoming.



Paul Couillard

*Activations (White Canadian Gay Male)*, detail from "White"  
2007

Participatory Dissent: Debates in Performance, part of the LIVE! Performance Art Biennale  
Western Front, Vancouver, Canada

Photo credit: Artur Tajber

*Activations (White Canadian Gay Male)* was an 8-hour performance that took place throughout the passageways of the Western Front in 2007, two hours in each location ("White" on the overhanging wall of the front entrance, "Canadian" in the stairwell, "Gay" at the upper window at the top of the stairs, and "Male" in the toilet next to the upper landing). The image I have selected shows a video tape of me performing the "white" section, in which I was painting in white paint onto the white wall a phrase that talks about whiteness as "a way of seeing that is not-seeing".

When this shot was taken, the live performance was continuing in another part of the building, but the presence of the materials on site - the video camera is set up on a tripod underneath the ladder I had been standing on - could potentially draw the viewer's attention to this furtive intervention, even as they might be more interested to move on to the "live" activity that could be heard going on above them. Yet to me this earlier activated space remained "live" as long as the performance continued, and was a vital marker to tie what had happened to what was happening and would happen. I love that Artur had the awareness to capture this detail of the performance with the mediated "me". In the context of an exhibition about artists documenting the live work of other artists, for me this image speaks to both the potential vitality of the document, but also its inevitable incompleteness and its inability to tell anything other than its own story, removed in a sense from either the intentions of the artist or the experiences of its human witnesses...

## Razieh GOUDARZI (Iran)

Razieh Goudarzi was born in 1987 in Khoramabad, capital city of Lorestan Province, in Iran. She holds a Bachelor degree in Industrial Economics and Master degree in Executive Management. She began her journey in art in her late teens. Since 2008 she has been taking part in art festivals and exhibitions. She is one of the co-founders and director of the contemporary art institute ARTA. Razieh manages environmental festivals and training courses at the institute, whilst developing her keen interest in photography. Since 2009 Razieh and her sister Tara have often been performing together and have also been managing recycle art projects with junior high school students. Her works have been exhibited locally and internationally, including India, USA and Romania.



Razieh Goudarzi  
*Interaction*  
2016  
Morni Hills Performance Art Biennale  
Morni Hills, Haryana, India  
Photo credit: Prabhesh Kumar Sharma

## RED BIND (France)

Gilivanka Kedzior and Barbara Friedman have been working together since 2010 as RED BIND. They currently live and work in Toulouse, France.

Through performance, video, sound and photography, they analyse the confrontation to otherness and its inter-thematic with subjects, such as social yokes, dominant/ dominated relationships, codes and what happens to them out of their context, gender and its limits and ambiguities, issues of the double and of the multiple characters under a single skin, the identity, status and image of woman.

Recent performances, exhibitions and screenings include the *Nuit Blanche 2013*; *5<sup>th</sup> Edition of Frasq, Résurgences #5* and *Vision'R VJ Festival* in Paris (France); the *15<sup>th</sup> OPEN International Performance Art Festival* and *Art Now Live Tour* International Performance Art Tour from Beijing to Anyang (China); *MPA-B 2012 & 2015 Month of Performance Art-Berlin* and the *23<sup>rd</sup> International Week of young Theatre*; *ARENA... of the young Arts*, Erlangen (Germany); *IMAF 2013 & 2015*; *15<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> International Multimedial Art Festival*, Novi Sad (Serbia); *AVAF 2013*; *Athens Video Art Festival*, Athens (Greece); the *Lower Polk Art Walk*, San Francisco (USA); as well as the *Sazmanab Platform for Contemporary Arts*, Teheran (Iran); the *MACA Junin Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Argentino*, Buenos Aires (Argentina); and the *CAM Casoria Contemporary Art Museum*, Naples (Italy).

Their performance *ACANTHETHESIA* has been rewarded with the *23<sup>rd</sup> ARENA... of the young Arts Co-Production Prize* (July 2012, Erlangen, Germany).



RED BIND  
*Red Pole Dance*  
2014  
*Between Wheat & Pine* Nomadic Arts Festival  
Charcibalda, Poland  
Photo credit: Arek Diczek



### Sharon CHIN (Malaysia)

Sharon Chin (b. 1980) is an artist and writer living in Port Dickson, Malaysia. She led a mass public bath/performance in the Singapore Biennale 2013, and painted weeds on political party flags for the 8<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) in Brisbane, Australia. She is currently working on *In The Land That Never Was Dry*, a series of illustrated journalism pieces about water issues in Malaysia.

[www.sharonchin.com](http://www.sharonchin.com)



Sharon Chin  
*Scream, Honey*  
2014  
Beyond Pressure  
People's Park, Yangon, Myanmar  
Photo credit: Varsha Nair

### Sophia Natasha WEI (Singapore)

Sophia Natasha Wei (b. 1982, Singapore) is a contemporary artist based in Singapore, who pursues performance art as her main artistic expression. Her performances address the human condition, which she hopes her audience could re-create personal meanings and discover new experiences from. The corporeal endurance of the female body to achieve empathy is expressed through her visual language, where she works regularly with confines of space, distorted beauty and vignettes of dreamlike fantasy. In recent years, Natasha's works have evolved to present the liminal zone between painterly images and live action. She is also an active contributor to the Singapore arts landscape with her artistic practice and work in education.



Sophia Natasha Wei  
*Revival*  
2015  
/\*semble\*/  
Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, Singapore  
Photo credit: Nel Lim

## Tara GOUDARZI (Iran)

Tara Goudarzi is a visual art educator and environmental artist based in Khoramabad, Iran. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Painting in 2009. She works with performance, video and installation. Since 2006 she has been participating and collaborating with many artists in more than 24 Environmental Art Festivals. Since 2009 Tara and her sister Razieh have often been performing together and have also been managing recycle art projects with junior high school students. In 2010, she was the Director of the 30<sup>th</sup> Environmental Art Festival in Shoushtar, Iran. Since 2014 Tara has worked as an art curator in contemporary art institute ARTA in Khoramabad. She is a member of art collectives Open 5 and Low art. Her works were featured in YATOOi calendar and catalogue and have been exhibited locally and internationally, including India, Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Bulgaria, France, Korea, UK, Canada, USA, Romania, Mexico and Finland.

[www.arttara.com](http://www.arttara.com)



Tara Goudarzi  
*Offering*  
2009  
30<sup>th</sup> Environmental Art Festival  
Hormuz Island, Iran  
Photo credit: Raheleh Zomorodinia

## Urich LAU (Singapore)

Urich Lau Wai-Yuen (b. 1975, Singapore) is a visual artist, independent curator and art educator based in Singapore. Working in video art, photography and printmaking, he has presented works extensively in Singapore and various countries including Australia, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Serbia, Taiwan, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan.

Recent exhibitions include *Singapore Biennale 2013*, *VII Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art* in Uzbekistan; *Project Glocal: Cityzening* at Jorge B. Vargas Museum in Manila. He was one of the finalists in the Sovereign Asian Art Prize 2013-14 in Hong Kong. In 2013 he held his solo exhibition *Persistence of Vision* at Space Cottonseed in Gillman Barracks, Singapore.

He has curated and organised projects focusing on video art in Singapore, Indonesia, China and Germany. He holds a Master of Fine Art degree from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He is a lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts. He is a member of The Artists Village and served as its president from 2012 to 2014. Urich is resident-artist at the Goodman Arts Centre in Singapore.



Urich Lau  
*Life Circuit*  
2014  
行為藝術實驗室計劃 Performance Art Laboratory Project 2014  
Centre For Community Cultural Development, Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre  
Hong Kong, China  
Photo credit: Nancy Liu (Liu Nanxi)

*Life Circuit* is conceived by Urich Lau as a series of video performances with wearable gadgets reconstructed from industrial safety equipment: welding goggles, gas mask and earmuffs, which the artist named as the *Video Goggles*, *Sound Mask* and *Amp Muffs*. The gadgets become the extensions of the artist who is unable to see, speak or hear, but is able to stream video and audio via live-feed back to the audience. Altering human functionality and interactivity, the artist forms a circuit between the audience, medium, moving images, sounds, and spaces, replacing human senses in perception and expressions.



## Varsha NAIR (India/UK/Thailand)

Varsha Nair was born in Kampala, Uganda, and has been living in Bangkok since 1995.

Inviting multidisciplinary collaborations, her work encompasses various approaches and genres including making, writing, and organising projects.

Her performances have been presented at Art-Plus Performance, Matsumoto, Japan (2015); Beyond Pressure, Yangon (2014 and 2009); An Elixir Realigning for Meridian I Urban, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2011); Buka Jalan, Kuala Lumpur (2011); National Review of Live Art, Glasgow (2010, 2006 and 2004); Asiatopia, Bangkok (2009); Performance Saga, Basel (2009); Tate Modern, London (2006).

Varsha is co-organiser of Womanifesto Thailand, and Editorial board member of the web art journal Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art.

[www.varshashavar.com](http://www.varshashavar.com)



Varsha Nair  
*Undercurrent in Yangon*  
2014  
Beyond Pressure  
People's Park, Yangon, Myanmar  
Photo credit: Sharon Chin

## Watan WUMA 瓦旦·塢瑪 (Taiwan)

Born in 1958, Wuma is a member of the Atayal tribe from Jianshih Township, Hsinchu County. He is the artistic director of Waterfield Studio. Since presenting the performance art piece *No Photography* in 2004, he has also been participating in festivals and events around the world, including NIPAF (2004 and 2006); Taiwan International Live Performance Art Festival (Macau, 2005); Making Relationship (2005); Performance Asia: Program for Chile, Argentina and Uruguay (San Diego, Valparaíso, Buenos Aires and Montevideo, 2005); Ireland and Northern Ireland International Performance Art Festival (Cork, Dublin and Belfast, 2005); The 4th DaDao Live Art Festival in Beijing (2006); Conceptual Art Solo (Shanghai, 2006); Asian New Humanities Net Third Annual Meeting-Swimming in Memories Exhibition (2006); Japan Taiwan Performance Art International Exchange (Taipei and Kaohsiung, 2006); Asian Workers' Works (2006); The 8th and 10th OPEN International Performance Art Festival (Beijing, 2007 and 2009); Asian Body Art Festival (Shanghai, 2008); TIPAF-Theater Piece I, II and III (Taipei and Kaohsiung, 2009-2011); Songzhuang Performance Art Exchange Workshop (Songzhuang, Beijing, 2009); 3rd Macau International Performance Art Festival - Taiwan Performance Art Feature (OXwarehouse, Macau, 2009); 2nd ArTrend International Performance Art Festival (Taipei, Taitung and Kaohsiung, 2009); Cultural Events Celebrating the 39th Anniversary of Chun Tae-Il's Death (Seoul, 2009); TOTATOGA Art Festival (Busan, 2010); New Taipei City Art Festival - Environmental Theater Series: "Shenkeng Performance Art Marathon" (Shenkeng District, New Taipei City, 2010); 6th Philippines International Performance Art Festival (City of Santiago, 2011); 318 Art and Cultural Communities and Labor Movement Communities 'Forbidding Dispatched Employment' Joint Press Conference (Taipei, 2011); VIA Yilan (Lotung, Yilan, 2011); 5th Guyu Action - Performance Art Festival (Xian, 2011); Dawang Culture Highland Arts Festival (Shenzhen, 2011); and Breath of Sand (Tainan, 2011).



Watan Wuma  
*Wind-driven grass*  
2011  
Performance on the sandbar  
Chiku, Tainan, Taiwan  
Photo credit: Hsu Ping

## APPENDIX

## NOTES

### **THIS is Performance Art** **a manifesto written by Marilyn Arsem in January 2011**

originally posted on the *Infr'action Venice* website, and now online at Total Art Journal (<http://totalartjournal.com/archives/4298/this-is-performance-art/>).

### **THIS is Performance Art**

#### **Performance art is now.**

Performance art is live.

Performance art reveals itself in the present.

The artist engages in the act of creation as s/he performs.

Performance art's manifestation and outcome cannot be known in advance.

Re-enactment of historical work is theater, not performance art.

#### **Performance art is real.**

Performance art operates on a human scale.

It exists on the same plane as those who witness it.

The artist uses real materials and real actions.

The artist is no one other than her/himself.

There are no boundaries between art and life.

The time is only now.

The place is only here.

#### **Performance art requires risk.**

The artists take physical risks using their bodies.

The artists take psychic risks as they confront their limits.

Witnessing a performance challenges an audience's own sense of self.

Sponsoring performance art, with its unpredictability, requires taking risks.

Failure is always possible.

#### **Performance art is not an investment object.**

The work cannot be separated from the maker.

It cannot be held.

It cannot be saved.

It cannot be reproduced.

Performance art is experience - shared time and space and actions between people.

The record of performance art resides in the bodies of the artist and the witnesses.

#### **Performance art is ephemeral.**

It is an action created by an artist for a specific time and place.

Witnesses are privy to a unique experience that will never happen again.

Performance art reveals the vulnerability of living.

Performance art reminds us that life is fleeting.

We are only here now.



# TWO-WAY MIRROR

## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE