

The New York Times

Section 2

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JULY 2, 2000

A1 31

ART / ARCHITECTURE

Performance Hops Back Into the Scene



Customs Worker Marie Gallery, New York

By MICHAEL RUSH

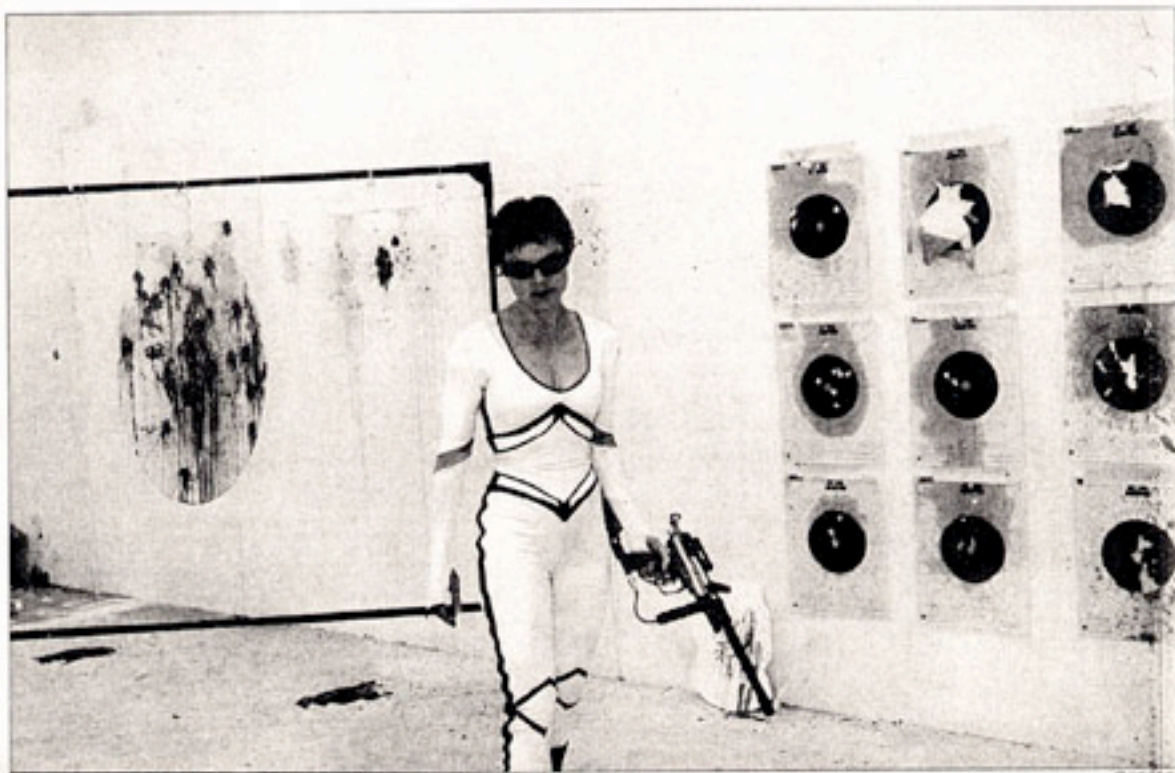
EVER wonder what happened to performance art?

After its heyday in the 1970's, when visual artists from Adrian Piper to Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman and Eleanor Antin were making sculptures of their bodies or trying on different identities in their gallery performances, performance art, many critics think, devolved into autobiographical rants that soon became indistinguishable from stand-up comedy or their any monologues. Well, it's back. In galleries, on the streets, in museums, on video, in cyberspace looking in some cases the way it did in the 70's, and in others very fresh and new.

In the last few months alone, some young artists staged a guerrilla performance to get their artworks "hung" in the Museum of Modern Art by hiding them in their coats, which they checked at the entrance; the artist Nayland Blake, 41, performed on video in an over-stuffed ratna outfit in his show at Matthew Marks Gallery; and, as part of the Whitney Biennial, the online collector Fakebook (www.fakebook.com) staged an elaborate interactive performance event with surveillance cameras at a makeshift room in Chelsea. Currently both the Sculpture Center in New York and the Alrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Edgely, Conn., are presenting a performance series featuring three generations of artists.

Why this sudden renewal of interest in an art form that seemed relegated to the history books like Neo Geo or Aikido? "It's a new spirit of openness in the galleries," said Mr. Blake, who has been performing since the mid-80's, first in San Francisco and then in New York.

The critic and performance-art historian RoseLee Goldberg agrees. "The galleries are realizing that their spaces are ideal for performances, and there's a whole new generation of artists eager to work in them," she said. Of course, performance never actually disappeared from art, but in the fading frenzy of the 80's for



Christina Read

Mr. Blake filled a honey costume with 146 pounds of heavy beads equal to the weight of his lover), which added to his own 210 pounds, made movement, especially dance, almost impossible. But more he did, rendering a hilarious and complicated meditation on relationships, the body and doomed attempts to please another person.

Extreme performance art is also in evidence in the three artists who are occupying (two of them literally) the Sculpture Center on East 69th Street through July 15. William Pope.L, 45, a performer and the curator of the series, is doing what his title says, "Eating the Wall Street Journal." Seated on a toilet atop a 10-foot tower, Mr. Pope.L, naked except for a thick dusting of flour over his black skin, a jockstrap, a silk tie and a gold watch, munches on a stack of Wall Street Journals, aided by milk and ketchup. He then regurgitates the contents to dispel the heavy metals and bleaches in the paper.

"Our consumer society promotes power and wealth simply by owning certain objects," Mr. Pope.L said, "which harks back to primitive magic and voodoo. I figured if I ate it, just imagine how much power I can draw from this fettered object!" He is not the first to create unusual meals as a performance. The Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy, who will have a mid-career retrospective in this city in the fall, gained notoriety in the 70's by ingesting large amounts of hot dogs and other edibles and nonedibles, which he, too, regurgitated.

Mr. Pope.L, who studied with the Fluxus performance artist Geoffrey Hendricks at Rutgers in the late 70's, invited his teacher to participate at the Sculpture Center. Mr. Hendricks, 65, is re-enacting a piece from 1971, "Dream Event," during which he will sleep in the space, record his dreams and perform a new work, "Eating and Breathing," with the dancer and yoga instructor Christina Read. Mr. Hendricks, who participated in performances with George Maciunas, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono and John Lennon, Alison Knowles, Dick Higgins and others, became known for his 1971



William Pope.L at the New York Times

CUDDLY AND NOT SO CUDDLY Nayland Blake, top left, in a honey suit for the video performance piece "Starling Over"; Michelle Handelman, above, dressed for action in her "pivotal performance" last month at the Alrich Museum, in which she and others shot paint guns at canvases; William Pope.L, left, performing "Eating the Wall Street Journal" at the Sculpture Center on June 20.

performance "Body/Hair," during which he shaved his entire body in an act of Buddhist inspired self-abnegation. A video of this performance will be shown at the Sculpture Center.

While Mr. Hendricks's work may be spiritual in its intention, Patty Chang's is anything but, though one of her first performances, "Shaving," did suggest some smirking connection between the two artists. In this piece from 1988, Ms. Chang, 27, swathed into the jaw-breaking area wearing a red crinoline dress and carrying a bowl of soapy water. She sat on a stool, lifted her belly skirt and proceeded to shave her groin vigorously as well as defiantly, suggesting a subterfuge hidden under that proper dress.

MS. CHANG is not one for subtlety. Her other performances to date have included cutting open her breast (actually a cantaloupe concealed in her bra), and standing still in a gray suit with the sleeves sewn into the jacket, feebly dog arm movement, as her mouth was held open by a dental clamp attached to a wall by string. "I think of them as sculptures," she said, "not necessarily as political acts." She is essentially living in the Sculpture

Continued on Page 37

The market has cooled, galleries are showing a new freedom and artists are once again putting themselves center stage.

high-priced "objects" like paintings and sculpture, the new-based art of performance as well as video were less in favor because of their lack of marketability.

Fans of what changed is that some visual artists have come to see performance as a natural extension of their overall artistic practice, which may also embrace painting, video and installation. Mr. Blake is a good example. In his recent show he exhibited large charcoal drawings, multimedia sculptures and a full-wall video projection of a performance. Echoing the endurance performances of Chris Burden and others in the 70's,

Michael Rush is the author of "New Media in Late 20th-Century Art," published by Thames and Hudson.

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JULY 2, 2000



Thomas Daniel for The New York Times

The performance artist Patty Chang on a water bed at the Sculpture Center.

Performance Hops Back

Continued From Page 31

Center and using a water bed and live-feed video to create an as-yet-unnamed performance.

For their "Acts of Art" series, the Aldrich Museum curators Jessica Hough and Aran Winterbottom have assembled a mix of artists — from the well-known dance duo Eiko and Koma, who on Friday will be performing one of their minimalist dances inside a custom-designed trailer they travel in for these occasions, to the musician and sound artist Stephen Vitiello, 36, whose installations were seen and heard this year at P. S. 1 and Postmasters Gallery. On July 14 Mr. Vitiello will project on a wall a three-minute scene from the movie "Twister" slowed to 45 minutes while he performs live with a sampler and electric guitar.

Last month at the Aldrich, the filmmaker and visual artist Michelle Handelman, 35, who has a background in martial arts and dance and likes to "activate people," organized a "picnic performance" during which visitors shot paint guns at canvases (reminiscent of the Japanese Gutai performance artists of the 1950's). And Ianier Reynolds, 41, transformed himself from a mummy-wrapped figure lying on the floor to a whirling dervish in a full-length gown spinning for up to two hours.

From time-based to timeless, performance art can also be found in cyberspace. Martha Wilson, the doyenne of downtown performance and the founder of Franklin Furnace, moved in 1997 from a basement stage in TriBeCa to the Web (www.franklinfurnace.org), where she has presented dozens of new and archived performances. The current rage for viewer-involved activity is available in the performances at www.movingimagegallery.com.

The Plaintext Players are a collective of

artists and writers from around the world, including the James Joyce scholar Marlena Corcoran, who log on from their real locations (Nashik, Los Angeles, New York) to a communal text space known as a MOO (Multiuser Object-Oriented Space) and proceed to type in dialogue, action and scenery in a steady flow of improvised theatrics. Their work, which was included in the 1997 Venice Biennale and Documenta X, can be found at <http://yin.arts.ucr.edu/~players>.

KRISTIN LUCAS, 32, a 1994 graduate of Cooper Union, started out as a V.J. (video jockey) mixing video material culled from friends or found in the garbage into visual collages at parties much the way D.J.'s mix music. She soon found herself in the 1997 Whitney Biennial with a "performative video," as she calls it, "Cable Xcess," in which a fragmented image of her face stares at viewers through a blue haze as a voice-over provides social commentary on television shows. A video document of Ms. Lucas's recent performance "Drag and Drop" can be seen through July 28 at the Sara Meltzer Gallery in Chelsea. In this performance, filmed on a tennis court, the artist faces an opponent who is a video projection that moves according to electric signals from sensors placed under the court.

Performance art, which some critics trace to the virulent gestures used by Jackson Pollock in making his paintings, has radically influenced all forms of contemporary art from video art to conceptual art to multimedia installations. It has placed the person and the body of the artist center stage and allowed for a sense of self-mockery and playfulness to infiltrate a field often bent on the rigors of form and function.

If all the world's a stage, performance artists occupy a special and quirky corner of it.