

simply accumulated as a visual diary (later donated as part of the Warhol Photographic Legacy Program to educational institutions across the United States). Warhol's focus was on the performance of daily life—on glamour, spectacle, and transgressive practices as well as on the pedestrian and commonplace—all captured and exposed without hierarchy.

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NOTES

1. Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18.
2. Judith Butler, in an interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, "Gender as Performance," *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994).
3. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).
4. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), 191. Butler's book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) is widely recognized as a seminal contribution to the discourse on gender and performance.

CASE CHECKLIST

1. Bruce Nauman

(American, b. 1941)
Record, from the set *7 Objects / 69*, 1969
Screenprint on album cover
University purchase, 1969

2. La Monte Young

(American, b. 1935)
Drift Study 4:37:40–5:09:50 5 VIII 68, from *S. M. S. No. 4*, 1968
Cassette tape
University purchase, 1990

3. Joseph Beuys

(German, 1921–1986)
Noiseless Blackboard Eraser, 1974
Felt blackboard eraser, 102/550, with added carved display pedestal
Gift of Ronald and Frayda Feldman, 1990

4. Richard Serra

(American, b. 1939)
Rolled, Encased and Sawed, from the set *7 Objects / 69*, 1969
Lead pipe and lead
University purchase, 1969

5. Eva Hesse

(American, b. Germany, 1936–1970)
Enclosed, from the set *7 Objects / 69*, 1969
Tape, liquid rubber, powder, and balloon
University purchase, 1969

6. Unknown

(Japanese)
Pocket Shrine, 19th century
Carved and painted wood
Bequest of Charles Parsons, 1905

7. Unknown

(North American Indian, Umatilla, Plateau, United States)
Dance Rattle, n.d.
Gourd, pigment, and wood
University acquisition

8. John Cage

(American, 1912–1992)
Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1968, from *S. M. S. No. 4*, 1968
Artist's book
University purchase, 1990

9. Yoko Ono

(American, b. Japan, 1933)
Mend Piece for John, from *S. M. S. No. 5*, 1968
Plastic bag, satin ribbon, and cardboard box
University purchase, 1990

TEACHING GALLERY

Fall 2011

PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY ART

“Performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge.”

Jon McKenzie¹

“[It] is important to distinguish performance from performativity: the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject.”

Judith Butler²

This Teaching Gallery exhibition—on view September 9, 2011, through January 9, 2012—is curated by Robert Gero, lecturer in the College and Graduate School of Art, in conjunction with his graduate seminar “Contemporary Art Theory and Discourse” and undergraduate theory course “Critical Frameworks,” offered by Washington University’s Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts in fall 2011.

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

Performativity and its root, the performative, have become a topic or mode that one encounters almost daily in the world of contemporary art.

They are invoked regularly in multiple ways with seemingly multiple meanings. Clearly not reducible to a singular attribute or quality of performance, performativity has become, rather, a methodological approach to art practice and its discourses. One of the ambitions of this exhibition is to highlight the complexity of the concepts of performativity, the performative, and performance. Seen together, the works gathered here offer the opportunity to draw out distinctions between these concepts and to advance greater understanding, if not new definitions, of these terms. A second ambition is to explore how performance has come to pervade every aspect of our cultural fabric. Once considered only in relation to theatrical performances, performance art, rituals, and festivals, it is today applied to the sum total of human practices that are now both seen and judged as “performed.” As a social category, performance functions as a metaphor, an analytical tool, and an evaluative metrics for all cultural phenomena and human behavior.

Philosopher J. L. Austin, in his Harvard lectures of 1954, coined the term “performative” to refer to words that do rather than describe, the classic example being “I now pronounce you man and wife.”³ Here, the performative constitutes the very act that it performs; in other words, saying is doing, not only representing. Some years later, influenced by Austin and Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler developed the concept of performativity to address how subjectivity, identity, and gender are constructed. She argues that what is critical is iterability, the performing repetition of social conventions (norms, codes, or contracts). For Butler, performativity cannot be understood outside of this process of repetition, and, further, it is not performed by a subject, but is the means by which the subject, identity, and gender are constituted.

According to Butler, performativity also potentially “opens the signifier to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification.”⁴ In abbreviated form, this is the historical and theoretical foundation of an art practice whose stress is on process, participant, event, and execution, its emphasis being the investigation of cultural action and production.

In 1952 **John Cage** performed *Theater Piece No. 1* at Black Mountain College, as part of an experiment that was, along with his influential classes at the New School for Social Research in New York, the genesis of both Fluxus and Happenings, the precursors to performance art. Cage developed a compositional method that privileged process over structure, one based on duration that is arrived at by chance or the throw of the I-ching coins. This strategy created for Cage an opening to extend the boundaries of music, art, and theater, making the border between art and everyday life not only porous but “magical.”

Jiro Yoshihara founded the Japanese avant-garde group Gutai in 1954, “gutai” meaning concreteness or embodiment. With action painting and the work of Jackson Pollock as a starting point, Yoshihara and the Gutai artists created action-performances in the 1950s, anticipating the advent of Happenings and Fluxus. Aimed at reinvesting matter with spirit, their emphasis was on process over product; materially, the body was primary, used in association with other natural materials and ordinary objects. Yoshihara applied the principles of Zen Buddhism to painting to create a calligraphic expression in reverse, such as in his white circle paintings as well as in *White Line on Black* (1968).

The heart of **Joseph Beuys’s** work lies in the intricately formulated construction and performance of identity, and, by regular repetition, its enactment and acceptance. Beuys conjures his own origin myth—of being saved by Tartars after his plane crashed on the

plains of Crimea, resulting in his mystical rebirth and transformation. Beuys’s persona echoes the mythic Norse hero in Richard Wagner’s epic *Ring Cycle* operas (c. 1848–74), but in Beuys’s case he not only performs the myth, he also propounds and reifies it. In the elaboration and perpetuation of his identity myth, Beuys produced a complex symbolic cosmology following the writings and symbolism of Rudolf Steiner and his philosophy of “spiritual science.” *We Are the Revolution* (1972) is one of hundreds of Beuys’s iconic, serial self-images, extending his performance of persona.

In **Glenn Ligon’s** participatory linguistic performance, both ethnography and autobiography are utilized to create self-narratives that critique race. For *Runaways* (1993), Ligon appropriated the language and form of American runaway slave posters from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He invited friends to describe him physically, as if he himself were missing, and then created posters, each based on a different person’s report: “Ran away, Glenn, a black male, 5'8".... Wearing faded blue jeans, short sleeve button-down 50’s style shirt, nice glasses (small, oval shaped), no socks.” These works underline the ways in which identity is performative, that is, socially and linguistically constructed.

John Bock has described his art as a “Gesamtkunstwerk,” or total artwork. His performances are a mash-up recalling Antonin Artaud’s theater of cruelty, German Expressionism, the work of contemporary artist Paul McCarthy, and the intimate, dark, psychological spaces of Harold Pinter’s plays. Bock’s performances often take the form of a mad theoretical or mathematical lecture using word collages and imagined references, with the artist-as-performer wearing ambitious costumes and strange object-props he creates, which are artworks themselves. In the performance *No Time No Screws* (2010), Bock performs on a city bus, wittingly or unwittingly

forcing those who happen to be on the bus into the belly of the work.

Andrea Fraser’s work has been called “interventionist performance.” In her video performance *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001), Frank Gehry’s design of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao becomes the subject of an eroticized parody in which she uses slapstick as institutional critique, with the museum itself as her primary source material. In this performance, she listens to the museum’s public audio tour and responds literally to its invitation to visitors to experience the sensuousness of the building, calling attention to how museums package art and the experience of viewing it. Her “counter-practice” discloses and subverts the normative coded museum culture as, among other things, a capitalized retail exchange.

In **Vik Muniz’s** portfolio *White Noise* (1991), the artist simultaneously shows and says. The series of nine photographs presents nine different nurses, each with their index finger placed vertically over their mouths in the universal gesture of silence. Printed toward the bottom of each photograph is the phrase “silence please,” each in a different language. The nurse functions as an authority figure in the institution of the hospital; the photograph, displayed within an institution where viewing and contemplating art is often silent, calls attention to the normative behavior specific to both sites as well as to those authorized to enforce it. As such, they do something rather than show something, demanding silence through both language and gesture, thereby performing the performative.

For **Andy Warhol**, art, work, and life were inseparable, and it was the camera that was the primary point of convergence. Taking a camera everywhere he went, he obsessively recorded his life and the world around him. Some of these images became paintings and screenprints, but most of the photographs were