

Andrea Fraser

Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk, 1989

Andrea Fraser began making what she now calls “institutional critiques” in 1986, when she was asked to contribute a work to *Damaged Goods: Desire and Economy of the Object*, an exhibition organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Instead of making an art object, she decided to conduct a tour, performing as a fictional lecturer named Jane Castleton. Since then, she has given similar talks at other venues. Based on a gallery talk performance conducted at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* takes viewers on a tour of one of America’s premier art museums. In the course of the tour, Fraser develops a social history of the art museum in the United States, focusing on the relationships among class, taste, private philanthropy and public policy. At the same time, Fraser enacts the effects of that history, developing an extreme identification with the museum in her attempts to become the institution’s representative and its ideal visitor.

Tehching Hsieh

One Year Performance (Time Clock Piece), 1980-1981

Tehching Hsieh’s work consists of five ‘*One Year Performances*’, mounted in the years 1978–1986. For the second *One Year Performance*, known informally as the *Time Clock Piece*, Hsieh punched a time clock every hour on the hour, twenty-four hours a day, for an entire year. To help illustrate the time process, Hsieh shaved his head before the piece began, and then let his hair grow freely for the duration. Every time he punched the clock, a movie camera shot a single frame. The resulting film compresses each day into a second, and the whole year into about six minutes.

Yvette Helin

The Pedestrian Project, 1990

Inspired by the figures on pedestrian crossing signs, Yvette Helin conceived the *Pedestrian Project*, creating black costumes with featureless, oversized spherical heads. In this generic guise she and her fellow Pedestrians took to the streets of New York enacting both choreographed and impromptu pieces in key city locations including Grand Central Terminal, the World Trade Centre and the New York Subway. Interacting in everyday activities such as shopping, walking the dog or joining a bus queue, these faceless figures allude to the anonymity we experience as individuals in a large systematic society. While many of the performances involve leisure activities, others offer somewhat grimmer reflections on issues such as crime, homelessness and environmental problems.

Nigel Rolfe
The Rope, 1987

The Rope is made up of three images and taps into self-identity and political power. In the first image the artist's head is being bound in creosote-covered sisal rope against a green background. The second sequence is the dancing feet of a traditional Irish dancer, legs moving below the knee, against a white background. The final image is of the artist continually drenched with large quantities of water, against an orange background. The three colours constitute the Irish flag.

This work has also been displayed as a three-screen installation with the three images side by side. In a sense the image is cruciform, with the dancing feet at the centre, the bound head on one side and the baptized head on the other. *The Rope* has partly been taken from the complete work *The Rope That Binds Us Makes Them Free*.

Patty Chang
Fountain, 1998

In *Fountain*, Patty Chang poured water on to the surface of a round mirror laid flat on the floor and, kneeling over it, strenuously slurped the water off. This action, which was repeated for thirty to forty-five minutes at a time, was captured by a stationary video camera, and the image was projected both on a monitor outside the gallery and on to a screen behind Chang's body. Chang's performances are examinations of the female experience. They are visceral and humiliatingly vulnerable and are characterized by physical challenges – often of endurance.

Julie Laffin
Various States of D(u)ress, 1995

Julie Laffin's practice involves the design, construction and wearing of large, elaborate gowns which can be understood as sculptures brought to life in her performances. In the footage of the 1995 performance, *Various States of D(u)ress*, which is a reflection on the previous history of her relationships, she dons a 60-foot black velvet mourning dress. Laffin intrudes into other people's space, inciting them to interact in the situations she has created, while her laborious manoeuvring in the long, cumbersome material inverts stereotypical female iconography.

Pat Oleszko
Kneel and Dimples, 1981

The small stars of the 1979 short film *Kneel and Dimples* enjoy a brief but romantic ‘hon-knee-moon’ in Knee York. Blissfully in love, the couple in the performance visit local hot spots, ride the ‘stubway,’ ingest Japan-knees food, and skin-knee-dip at Coney Island before meeting an unfortunate end. Utilizing elaborate costumes and props, Pat Oleszko has created performances, films, and installations on a wide array of subjects from trees, knees, and elephants to breasts and index fingers.

Jessie Jane Lewis
Stings, 1982

In *Stings* a jar of bees was brought out on stage and the artist invited audience members to help administer bee stings as a reference to the medically unsound practice of bee sting therapy. Lewis has had multiple sclerosis since 1979 and received bee stings as a treatment. The performance was a challenge to Lewis’ audience to witness the desperate extremes to which someone living with an incurable disease might go. Lewis’ work in video is equally uncompromising. There is little from her life that she has not filmed.

Coco Fusco & Guillermo Gómez-Peña
The Couple in the Cage, 1993

The Couple in the Cage documents the travelling performance of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, in which they exhibited themselves as caged Amerindians from an imaginary island. While the artists’ intent was to create a satirical commentary on the notion of discovery, they soon realized that many of their viewers believed the fiction, and thought the artists were real ‘savages’. The record of their interactions with audiences in four countries dramatizes the dilemma of the cross-cultural misunderstanding we continue to live with today. Their experiences are interwoven with archival footage of ethnographic displays from the past, giving a historical dimension to the artists’ social experiment. *The Couple in the Cage* is a powerful blend of comic fiction and poignant reflection on the morality of treating human beings as exotic curiosities.

Billy X. Curmano
Swimming the Mississippi, 1987

Billy X. Curmano is an artist known for eccentric performances. In the performance *Swimming the Mississippi* he became the first person to swim the Mississippi River all 2,367 miles from its source to the Gulf of Mexico. Curmano saw his swim as an

environmental statement and encountered everything from sewage barges to alligators during the swim. In other performances Curmano has been buried alive for three days to celebrate the dead and fasted for forty days in Death Valley to greet the Millennium.

Reverend Billy
Political Actions, 1990-2001

Bill Talen is an artist and activist who, as Reverend Billy, has adopted the tone and mannerisms of a Baptist preacher from the Deep South. However he preaches something no other fundamentalist would. As the head of the Church of Stop Shopping, Reverend Billy (accompanied by his Stop Shopping Gospel Choir) preaches in places like Starbucks and the Disney Store, urging customers to “Save your soul my child. Back away from that silly little product on the shelf.”

Donna Henes
Eggs on End, 1984

In the work of Donna Henes community involvement is emphasized. Henes considers herself an urban shaman and ‘Unofficial Commissioner of Public Spirit of New York City’. For over thirty years she has produced hundreds of community events in public locations like parks, plazas, museums, schools and streets throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Her aim is to create an invigorating, non-elitist, participatory atmosphere in events and rituals. *Eggs on End* involves a celebration of the coming of spring derived from pre-revolutionary China where peasants believed that by standing eggs on their ends at the Vernal Equinox, one would have good luck throughout the following year. The first egg-standing ritual took place in New York in 1976 and since then thousands have participated in the yearly event.

Doug Skinner
Prelude, 1986

As well as a visual artist, Doug Skinner is a musician, actor, ventriloquist, lecturer and translator. He has composed for theatre and dance as well as playing piano, cello and ukulele with his band White Knuckle Sandwich. In *Prelude* the artist plays a variety of small instruments like a toy orchestra in the style of vaudeville scores as well as animating a doll in a ventriloquism part of the show.

Suzanne Lacy
The Crystal Quilt, 1987

In *The Crystal Quilt* 430 older women seated at tables placed on a vast square rug formed a quilt. When signalled, they simultaneously altered the position of their hands on the table, to change the design of the quilt. An accompanying soundtrack of women's voices combined personal reminiscences and observations about aging and social analysis of the marginalization of the elderly. As the soundtrack played, real-time conversations among the women echoed the same themes. The whole thing was performed and broadcast live by public television on Mother's Day 1987 in Minneapolis. In her work Suzanne Lacy often includes social themes and urban issues. Since the 1970s her practice has been based on collaborations with other artists and people in a wide variety of communities, and she was one of the first artists to use performance specifically to address the question of violence against women.

X-Cheerleaders
Boobs, Belly, Butt/Fuck Off/Birth, 1994

In 1994 conceptual and performance artist Kim Irwin and choreographer Jody Oberfelder brought together a team of ex-cheerleaders ranging in age from 20 to 50 to explore this gender-based ritual in terms of the construction of identity, power relations and sex roles in US society. The performance was preceded by a 10-minute video documentary of former cheerleaders in conversation. *X-Cheerleaders* examines the contradictions of the cheerleading role, redefining the ritual with humorous new chants, cheers and movements, exploring its complicity with the existing power structures.

Kriota Willberg
Doggie Style, 1999

Doggie Style presents an unexpected striptease in which cabaret-style dancing merges with dog-like movements. The humorous dog-lady provocateur, Willberg, wears a costume with multiple breasts to create a burlesque character. Kriota Willberg studied dance and performed with companies in the mid-west and New York before founding her own company Dura Mater in 1993. Her choreographed works have been performed at a variety of venues throughout the USA. In addition to working with her company, Willberg has collaborated with rock bands, graphic artists and theatres.

Susan Mogul
Take Off, 1974

Susan Mogul regularly crosses and erases the boundaries between a mixture of artistic genres. The intention of her video works is to create dramatic, poetic narratives with their point of departure in the activities of everyday life. As a feminist film-maker she often reflects in her works on the role of women in society, and has done so since she started working as a video artist in the early 1970s. In *Take Off* Mogul talks about her vibrator, how she uses it and about its advantages. She sits at a table so you can only see the top part of her body. She alternately pulls the vibrator out on to the table and talks about it, then switches it on and puts it in under the table while chanting the words “There isn’t a man under the table, there isn’t a woman under the table, it’s only my vibrator.”

Annie Sprinkle
Post-Porn Modernist, 1998

Annie Sprinkle is a former prostitute, stripper and porno actress. She is the first porno star to be awarded a PhD, which she earned at the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco. Today she works both as a performance artist and as a sex instructor, and for many years she has toured internationally with various shows on the themes of sex, porno and sexuality. *Post-Porn Modernist* is one of these shows and features various extracts from some of her best known performances. In a clip Sprinkle invites the audience to celebrate the female body by letting them look into her cervix with a speculum and a flashlight. In another clip she engages in a ‘sex magic’ masturbation ritual, while in third clip she performs a humorous burlesque dance.

Deborah Edmeades
The Fancy Ladies, 1999

In *The Fancy Ladies* Deborah Edmeades appears as a rich, smart woman who uses banknotes to wash herself, clean up or blow her nose. The performance is divided up into small descriptive chapters, and in the last part Edmeades goes to a fictive dance for smart people wearing a little wet cloth as a dress. During the dance she loses the dress without discovering it. When she finds out she gets dreadfully embarrassed and rushes away from the dance. Edmeades works with performance, video and installation and in *The Fancy Ladies* thematizes capitalism, consumerism and social status.

Linda Montano
Mitchell’s Death, 1977

In *Mitchell's Death* Linda Montano mourns the death of her ex-husband. Montano recounts every detail of the story of the ex-husband in a monotone, chanting voice, from the point when she was told of the tragic death to her experience of seeing the husband's lifeless body. In the video we see only Montano's face, which is pierced by acupuncture needles. As Montano tells the story the focus on her face changes slowly from blurred to distinct and back to blurred again. Montano uses the performance as an instrument of personal transformation and catharsis.

William Wegman

Reading with Man Ray, 1977

At the end of the 1960s William Wegman acquired the dog Man Ray. Together they began a long and fruitful collaboration. Wegman appeared in his performances with Man Ray, known for his dry, 'deadpan humour' participation. *Reading with Man Ray* is an early performance at Franklin Furnace, where William Wegman reads aloud from a text with a confused and uninterested Man Ray at his side. Throughout his career Wegman has had made use of several dogs in his artworks. In addition he has among other things made video works for the satirical show *Saturday Night Live* and the children's programme *Sesame Street*.

William Pope.L

The Crawl Project, 1991-1995

In his conceptual works William Pope.L investigates American culture, race and consumer culture. Pope.L is best known for his *Crawl Project*, which is part of his *eRacism project*. In each 'crawl' performance he crawls along pavements dressed in a variety of costumes: Superman, a business suit, etc. There have been more than 40 'crawls' since 1978. Some arise spontaneously with no preparation, others demand great physical endurance from Pope.L. In 2002 he began one of his most ambitious 'crawls', *The Great White Way*, where he crawled close to 40 km all the way up through Manhattan. The performance took place in several parts over a five-year period as he moved from the Statue of Liberty past Broadway and on to the Bronx, where his mother lives.

Matt Mullican

Hypnosis Performance (Utrecht), 1981

As a rule Matt Mullican's works consist of large industrially made banners and architectural diagrams. On these are drawn symbols that show his own overwhelmingly

complex personal philosophy of psychology and aesthetics. In his *Hypnosis Performance* he allows himself to be hypnotized in order to explore subjective constructs. A hypnotist puts Mullican in a trance, then in several sessions Mullican is asked about various things. For example, can the hypnotist decide that Mullican should feel very thirsty or assume someone else's identity? During these performances Mullican succeeds in drawing a number of words and symbols on large pieces of paper. When he comes out of the trance, he sometimes feels fresh and relaxed, while at other times he has a kind of hypnosis hangover and feels exhausted for several days afterwards.