

Public Programs These events are free, open to the public, and take place at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Seating is limited. Please check CAMH.ORG for the most current information.

Opening Reception | Stage Environment: You Didn't Have to Be There

Friday, September 7, 2018 | 6:30–8PM
Celebrate the exhibition opening that revisits CAMH's 70-year performative legacy of live arts by mining selected performance documentation and related ephemera from its rich archives.

Performance | Cell Lust | a body

Saturday, September 8, 2018 | 2–3PM
An ephemeral exploration of gender, sex, and relationships through word, light, and sound as told by the celestial bodies of the universe. Emily Æyer and Traci Lavois Thiebaud partner to present this performance within *Stage Environment* to continue CAMH's tradition of presenting new works in the gallery space.

Open Studio | Collaborative Scrapbook

Saturday, October 6, 2018 | 2–4PM
Archive your experience and add to a collaborative scrapbook celebrating CAMH's 70th birthday. Respond to the question: What art experiences would you document in 2018?

Art at Noon | Nancy Wozny

Friday, October 12, 2018 | 12–1PM
Join Nancy Wozny, current Editor-in-Chief at *Arts + Culture Texas*, as she lends her insight as a choreographer and dancer coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s to the exhibition *Stage Environment*. Light lunch provided.

Performance | Body Archives: Bone Deep Memories with Urban Souls Dance Company

Thursday, October 18, 2018 | 6:30–7:30PM
Join Urban Souls Dance Company in the exhibition *Stage Environment* as they explore the idea of archives and memory inside of the body. The brain remembers, the spirit recalls, and the body reacts. What do we do with the memories that we keep in our bones?

Drop-In Experience

Every Saturday | 1–4PM
CAMH's Drop-In Experiences feature guided in-gallery discussions and pop-up activities that provide creative opportunities to experience the exhibitions on view in a unique and meaningful way. All ages are welcome.

“It is not an acropolis we want there. It is not Culture on a corner. I think of the new museum building as a stage environment to house the multimedia in which artists of today are working.”

—Sebastian J. “Lefty” Adler
CAMH Director, 1966–72

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
@camhouston
CAMH.ORG
#atCAMH
#StageEnvironment

HOURS

Mon.	Closed
Tue.	10AM–7PM
Wed.	10AM–7PM
Thu.	10AM–9PM
Fri.	10AM–7PM
Sat.	10AM–6PM
Sun.	12PM–6PM

Cover: Joan Jonas, *Double Lunar Dogs*, 1980/1981. Performance documentation from *Other Realities—Installations for Performance* Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1981. Photo by David Crossley.

Inside (L to R): Maren Hassinger performing Senga Nengudi's *RSVP* (1975–77) at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston,

November 17, 2012, as a part of *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*. Photo by Max Fields.

Exterior view of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1972.

Michael Snow, *Night Light Color Flight* (installation view), 1972. Programmed colored light composition on Goodyear blimp, 10 minutes. Photo by Hickey & Robertson Photography, Houston, Texas.

Douglas Davis, *Seven Thoughts*, 1976. Copyright Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Courtesy Center for Advanced Visual Studies Special Collection, MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology. Used with permission.

Terry Adkins performing *The Last Trumpet* (1995) at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, November 16, 2012, as a part of *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*.

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Artists—Sissy and Denny Kempner, KPMG, LLP, The Sarofim Foundation, Louisa Stude Sarofim, Robin and Andrew Schirmeister, Wallace S. Wilson, Michael Zilkha

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Stage Environment

You Didn't Have to Be There

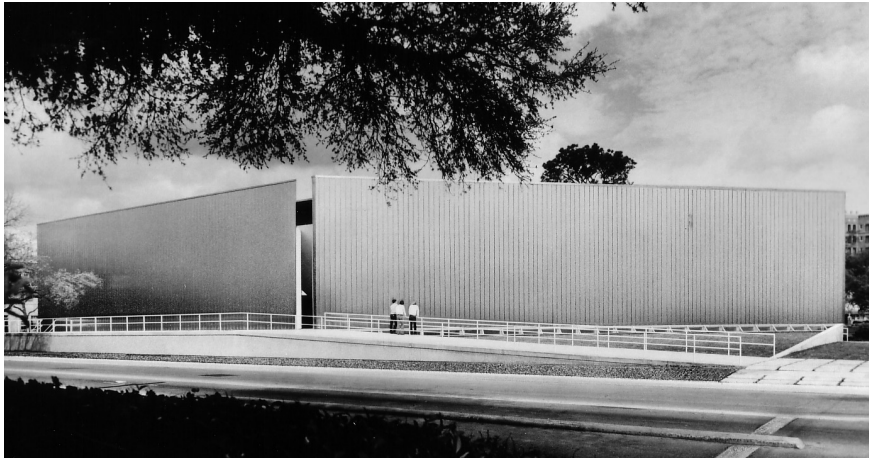
September 8–October 21, 2018



Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), the third-oldest contemporary arts institution in the United States. Although the museum's name and physical address have shifted since its 1948 founding, CAMH's commitment to presenting cutting edge art of its time has remained steadfast. The institution continuously has celebrated works beyond the traditional scope of visual arts—showcasing design, theater, music, dance, and literary traditions alongside the plastic arts. Notably, a demonstrable focus on live arts, performance art, and artwork with performative elements is embedded in CAMH's institutional DNA. Perhaps above all, CAMH should be celebrated for its expansion efforts—broadening what constitutes art, questioning what a museum should offer to the public, reconsidering the physical boundaries of a museum, and supporting a changing definition of arts. *Stage Environment: You Didn't Have to Be There* revisits and reinvigorates CAMH's longstanding performance focus by showcasing documentation and related ephemera from some of the museum's most poignant and palpable performative pieces.





Latvian architect Gunnar Birkerts explored the small yet prominent site for CAMH's current location at the intersection of Montrose Boulevard and Bissonnet Street in 1969. He was equipped with a modest budget and an unconventional directive for an arts museum. Unlike other museums that often wanted to resemble sophisticated department stores filled with permanent collections of riches, CAMH considered itself a place of energetic experimentation and desired a structure that could be flexible and amenable to expansive exploration. Sebastian J. "Lefty" Adler, the museum's Director at the time and the key consultant for the new structure, positioned CAMH as a brave type of cultural institution: "It is not an acropolis we want there. It is not Culture on a corner. I think of the new museum building as a stage environment to house the multimedia in which artists of today are working."¹ Devoid of permanent interior walls, the resulting 1972 structure was one of the most technologically advanced and malleable arts museums in the country.

As soon as the Contemporary Arts Association (CAA, CAMH's founding name) was formed in 1948, it was determined to display a broad and generous definition of the arts, *plural*. The first exhibition CAA mounted was *This is Contemporary Art*, which presented nearly 175 objects as "contemporary art," including Russell Wright china and a Waring blender, in addition to furniture, advertising, graphic arts, fabric, silver, jewelry, a model of Frank Lloyd Wright's house, and more. Less than one year later, the institution laid the groundwork for seven decades of robust performance support with the exhibition, *Theatre and Ballet Art: Elements of Stage Design*, which was accompanied by an evening of dramatic performances by four local theater companies.

In December 1954, following the sale of CAMH's original property on which an A-frame building was first sited, the museum staged an early "happening" by inviting the public to participate in the physical move of its structure. The

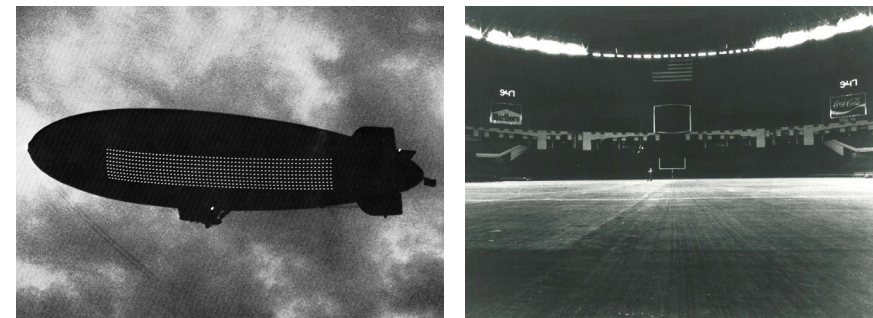
¹Sebastian J. Adler as quoted in "Birkerts May Set Precedent in Museum Construction," *Houston Chronicle*, July 9, 1969.

museum was divided into two parts, loaded onto two flatbed trucks, and moved to the southwest corner of the Prudential lot at what is now known as Fannin Street. Nearly 200 supporters came out to witness the move, which began at 10PM and was completed at 2:30AM.

In 1960, CAMH began an ongoing series of radical television programming on Channel 8 in order to reach audiences in their own homes. Much of the series was dedicated to live performance for the television, including poetry readings, theater stagings, and improvised music performances. CAMH had the innovative foresight to try and utilize television as a medium itself, documenting some of the first happenings on television. CAMH continues these traditions by documenting all of our public programs to stream on our YouTube channel.

CAMH sponsored a significant evening of performance by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Houston's Music Hall on April 14, 1965. The dance company performed five works, and John Cage also came to Houston under CAA's sponsorship to lecture on his music the night before. Although the *Houston Post* called the evening "a three stage escalator to hell," this performance was the first time Houston audiences were introduced to the Company.

CAMH continued to push boundaries and explore new ideas in the 1972 *Exhibition 10* with the performative artwork by Michael Snow. Snow created a score for a light performance composed of 8,000 colored lights on a Goodyear blimp, which was flown over the museum. When CAMH first flooded, only four years after the new building opened on Montrose, then CAMH Director Jim Harithas decided to use the city as his extended museum while renovations were underway. One notable performance took place on December 20, 1976 in the Astrodome. The art and interactive technology pioneer Douglas Davis, broadcast the first live global satellite performance in Houston. This was one of the first uses of satellite technology for artistic purposes. During the performance Davis read seven thoughts to a live international satellite audience and an empty Astrodome; he then put the seven sheets of paper that contained the seven thoughts in a sealed box that was never to be opened.



Although *Stage Environment* focuses on more historic performance work organized by the museum, one recent exhibition of note is *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (2012). This exhibition was the first comprehensive survey of performance art by black visual artists. It provided a critical framework to discuss the history of black performance traditions within the visual arts beginning with the "happenings" of the early 1960s, throughout the 1980s, and into the present practices of contemporary artists.



Stage Environment explores the dialectical relationships between these performances and their documentation. Why are some ephemera labeled artwork, such as Michael Tracy's altered documentation of photographs of his 1974 *Sugar Sacrifice*, while most performance documents are relegated to archival objects? Entering a decades-long academic debate about these relationships, this exhibition posits that performance documentation and ephemera can have generative and productive functions, not merely serving as consolation prizes for not having been there. While honoring the power of liveness, this exhibition seeks to demonstrate the often unsolidified and contradictory connections between performance, works of art, and documentation. By rethinking these relationships, documentation can be freed from simply serving as a historical archival index. It has been noted that there is little difference between a photograph of a dance or performance and a Jackson Pollock painting in the ways both trace and record movement.

Stage Environment also aims to correct some erroneous historical records while reviving numerous performance histories from potential erasure entirely. It is stimulating to revisit and reevaluate these historical documents in our contemporary context to see what new relevance and meanings they can offer. Ultimately, the exhibition seeks to complicate the division between archive and collection, documentation and performance, performing arts and performance art—blurring that strives to disable conventional hierarchies between concepts often placed at odds with each other. By dissolving staunch boundaries between performance and its archival documentation, new potential spaces for engagement can emerge.

—Patricia Restrepo
Exhibitions Manager and Assistant Curator
Curator of *Stage Environment: You Didn't Have to Be There*

Suggested Resources

These resources are recommended for further inquiry into the artwork and themes explored in the exhibition *Stage Environment: You Didn't Have to Be There*.

CAMH Archives

Woodson Research Center
Special Collections &
Archives, Fondren Library at
Rice University
6100 Main, Houston, Texas
77005

Reading

Clarke, Paul, Simon Jones,
Nick Kaye, and Johanna
Linsley (editors)

– *Artists in the Archive:
Creative and Curatorial
Engagements with
Documents of Art and
Performance*, 2018

Enwezor, Okwui (editor)
– *Archive Fever: Uses
of the Document in
Contemporary Art*, 2008

Foster, Susan Leigh
– *Reading Dancing:
Bodies and Subjects in
Contemporary American
Dance*, 1986

Gassner, Hubertus (editor)
– *Deep Storage: Collecting,
Storing and Archiving in
Art*, 1998

Giannachi, Gabriella and
Jonah Westerman (editors)
– *Histories of Performance
Documentation: Museum,
Artistic, and Scholarly
Practices*, 2017

Goldberg, RoseLee
– *Performance Art: From
Futurism to the Present*,
1988

Goulish, Matthew
– *39 Microlectures:
In Proximity of
Performance*, 2000

Hodgdon, Barbara
– *Shakespeare,
Performance and the
Archive*, 2015

Lambert-Beatty, Carrie
– *Being Watched: Yvonne
Rainer and the 1960s*,
2008

O'Dell, Kathy
– *Contract with the Skin:
Maochism, Performance
Art, and the 1970s*, 1998

Phelan, Peggy
– *Unmarked: The Politics
of Performance*, 1993

Schneider, Rebecca
– *The Explicit Body in
Performance*, 1997

Taylor, Diana
– *The Archive and the
Repertoire: Performing
Cultural Memory in the
Americas*, 2003

Viewing

Cage/Cunningham
– Elliot Caplan, 1991

In the Steps of Trisha Brown
– Marie-Helene Rebois,
2017

*Merce Cunningham: A
Lifetime of Dance*
– American Masters, 2001

*Robert Rauschenberg:
Inventive Genius*
– American Masters, 2006

*Robert Rauschenberg: Man
at Work*
– Chris Granlund, 1997