

Julia Heyward — „Miracles in Reverse“
Kunstverein Nürnberg — Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft
Opening and Live-Performance: 30.01.2026, 19:00



Julia Heyward
„No Local
Stops“, 1984

With “Miracles in Reverse,” the Kunstverein Nürnberg – Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft presents Julia Heyward’s (*1949, USA) first institutional solo exhibition in Europe. A central figure from New York’s 1970s and 1980s downtown art scene, Heyward’s work anticipated major developments in art history. Over the last five decades, Heyward has developed a distinctive practice as a musician and performer, combining throat singing, ventriloquism, spoken-word poetry, and sound effects. Her performances, video works, and music engage contemporary questions of faith, class, and gender, addressing topics such as the Cold War, the conservative backlash of the Reagan era, feminism, and environmentalism.

As early as 1971, Heyward began deconstructing role stereotypes in photographic self-portraits, experimenting with fluid constructions of identity and strategies of self-representation. After being accepted into the Whitney Independent Study Program in 1973, Heyward moved from St. Louis to New York. There, she became part of an artists’ scene concentrated in former manufacturing and

warehouse spaces in Lower Manhattan, where artists, poets, and musicians tested collective, experimental modes of production. Artist-initiated, non-commercial institutions such as The Kitchen (founded in 1971) and Artists Space (founded in 1972) became important points of convergence. In "Rituals of Rented Island" from 2013, J. Hoberman wrote: "In the 1970s, there was a time when the New York art world materialized as a stage—later known as SoHo—a place where theatrical, domestic, and gallery spaces overlapped and wondrous psychodramas were enacted in the streets." The multimedia performances of this period reflect the profound cultural and political transformations of the 1960s—counterculture, the civil rights movement, and second-wave feminism—alongside the increasing commercialization and mediatization of the 1970s.

Driven by the desire to reintroduce "narration, emotion, and light" (Heyward) into a period dominated by Minimalism and Conceptual Art, Heyward turned to the motifs and aesthetics of both the church and popular television, including "Saturday Night Live." In her performances from the mid-1970s onward, projections, props, music, and text come together to form what she termed "live cinema experiences." Her conceptual video album "360," 1981 anticipated the genre of the music video and ushered in the subsequent MTV era. Since the 1970s, she has both used and shaped the medium of video: mobile, accessible, and comparatively affordable, early camcorders enabled self-determined productions outside established film studios.

Her performance style and keen sensitivity to timing, emotion, language, and emerging video technologies exerted a lasting influence on artists such as Ericka Beckman and Mike Kelley. In parallel to her video works, Heyward pursued an active musical practice. Performing solo under the pseudonym Duka Delight, with the band T-Venus, she became part of the New Wave and postpunk scenes of the 1980s.

Further musical releases followed in 1996 and 2017 with "Miracles in Reverse" and "29 SpaceTime/ Gabriel Frequency" (the latter in collaboration with Perry Hoberman). These releases were accompanied by performances and a video game in which Heyward experimented with interactive elements for the first time, with processes of self-reflection and trauma at their core. "The outside noise traveling inward never stops. This is ordinary. The internal voice traveling outward, however, is unusual and for some, this can afford a sacred moment," she reflects.

"Miracles in Reverse" brings together Heyward's self-portraits, documentation, storyboards, video performances, and music, some of which are shown for the first time, presented in a scenography by Celeste Burlina.

The exhibition is accompanied by a video and film program curated by Elisa R. Linn and Lennart Wolff. The program brings together moving-image works produced in New York from the 1970s through the early 1990s by artists including Ericka Beckman, Dara Birnbaum, Joan Jonas, and Howardena Pindell, reflecting the artistic and political milieu that shaped Heyward's practice.

Julia Heyward (*1949, USA) completed a BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) at Washington University in 1973 and the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York City, where she lived and worked until 2017, before relocating to Twentynine Palms, California. She received the Bessie Award for dance and performance in 1984 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1999. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; The Kitchen, New York City; the Daejeon Municipal Museum; the Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City; the South London Gallery; and the Bonner Kunstverein. In 2015, the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco presented her first institutional solo exhibition.

On March 6, 2026, a subsequent solo exhibition by the artist curated by Theresa Roessler will open at the Westfälischer Kunstverein. A monograph jointly published by both institutions will be released by Mousse Publishing in summer 2026.

Curator: Nele Kaczmarek
Assistant Curator: Leonie Schmiese

Press materials and images: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1O4wO2k5goCyI9CVPMFJhvUwuXb09pnA2?usp=drive_link

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