

Press Release

Julia Heyward **Voices of Many Voices** 7.3. – 31.5.2026

Press Tour:
Thu, 5 March, 11 am

Opening:
Fri, 6 March, 6 pm

Performance:
Sat, 7 March, 6 pm
Julia Heyward together with Perry Hoberman

“In her throat the devil lives among angels”¹ – so read a review of a 1978 performance given by artist and musician Julia Heyward. With her monologues and vocal experiments, she led her audience through extremes of emotion: the idiosyncratic orchestration of music, image and language moving – in its simultaneity of opposites – somewhere between a sublime descent beneath the brink of consciousness, psycho-sexual perversion, and the humorous mystification of the self.

Despite the radical subjectivity of her voice and her profound influence on the New York underground art scene from the 1970s onwards, Julia Heyward’s five-decade body of work has received little institutional recognition. *Voices of Many Voices*² now seeks to spotlight at least one aspect of her pioneering work: the manipulation of language and modulation of voice. This presentation, in parallel with *Miracles in Reverse* at Kunstverein Nürnberg - Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft (31.1. – 19.4.2026), curated by Nele Kaczmarek, will mark her first institutional solo exhibition outside of the United States.

Contemporary descriptions like the opening quote or attributions such as “frantic and exaggerated,” “paradoxically hectic and dreamlike” or “apocalyptic” convey perhaps a vague impression of what performances like *WAS HERE* (premiered 1973, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), *Shake Daddy Shake* (premiered 1976, Judson Memorial Church, New York) or *GOD/HEADS* (premiered 1976, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) elicited in audiences – at a time when performance art was not yet established as an art form.

Julia Heyward’s theatrical, slapstick-inspired aesthetic drew on vaudevillian theatre, yodelling, Mongolian throat singing, ventriloquism, onomatopoeia and diverse forms of phonetic distortion. She utilised these techniques to explore, dissect and expose linguistic material – and consequently, meaning itself – with the utmost precision.

The artist describes her use of language as “convoluted, associative, delirious/didactic.” With this, she established a form of writing that was highly affective, unusual for its time and, as is often quoted, “closer to the way we think than the way we speak.” As a rejection of the primarily idea and concept-oriented approach that dominated within minimalism and conceptual art at the time, Julia Heyward prioritised narration and emotion, which for her always included thematising vulnerability, shame and trauma. The autobiographical, her own personality and recollections, always ran through her work. In an interview with RoseLee Goldberg she stated: “What makes

this work more intimate, and more riveting, is that the distinction between the personality of the artists and the work presented is blurred in the performance.”³

But the media-critical examination of mass-media mechanisms and their respective language forms takes on a specific role here. Alongside autobiographical references, Julia Heyward employed an impersonal, anonymised language that cited formulae of security rhetoric and propaganda, slang, cultural codes and text fragments from television and pop music, aiming for immediate emotional effect. The phonetic and linguistic double meanings in particular function here as a conscious space of provocation.

Especially through her relentless contestation of gender roles, classism, religious conviction and the physical and psychological consequences of abuse, Julia Heyward exposed the symbolic and structural entanglement of socially consolidated power structures – patriarchy, Christianity and capitalism. Based on her own Presbyterian upbringing, ventriloquism – reinterpreted and employed as a medium of artistic criticism – offered an appropriate method of expression. She questioned the rigidity and dogmatism of religious and moral commandments and regulations, her unmoving face reflecting the formation and suppression of her own voice, yet at the same time, articulating political rebellion.

Voices of Many Voices throws Julia Heyward’s earlier solo performances into focus and underscores their language-based and transdisciplinary approach. From the start, her performances integrated live music, video projection and later, interactive visuals that effortlessly migrate between spoken word performance, concert and theatre.

Instead of restricting herself to a single medium, she continually and consistently translated her work into different formats, through which a continuous, media-defying and media-reflexive exploration of language, music and image arose. Julia Heyward utilised newly available media technologies early on and realised multimedia projects such as *Mood Music* (premiered 1988, The Kitchen, New York), *Miracles in Reverse* (premiered 1996, Waschhaus Potsdam) and *29 SpaceTime / The Gabriel Frequency* (premiered 2017, Roulette, New York). These works, her album *360*, as well as a range of collaborative music projects under the pseudonym Duka Delight on the New Wave and Post Punk scenes in New York, will be further expanded upon through tours and discussions as part of the accompanying programme.

Curator: Theresa Roessler
Assistant Curator: Vivien Kämpf
Project Assistant: Ellen Feldmann

¹ This is quoted from Peter Quehenberger’s review of Julia Heyward’s *This Is My Blue Period*, in Innsbruck during which he was impressed by her range of vocal techniques.

² The exhibition title is borrowed from another review of *This Is My Blue Period* by Wendy Perron, published on the 15th of December 1997 in The Soho Weekly News, in which she singles out Julia Heyward’s rapid changes between different voices/personas.

³ RoseLee Goldberg (1976). *Public Performance: Private Memory*, in: *Studio International*, July/August, 19.

Biography

Julia Heyward (b. 1949, North Carolina/US) received her BFA at Washington University in St. Louis in 1973. The same year, she moved to New York, where she completed the Whitney Independent Study Program and lived and worked until 2017, before relocating to Twentynine Palms. In 1973, she immersed herself in the New York art and performance scene and realised her first solo performance, *WAS HERE* (1973), at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 2003, she earned her MFA in Digital Art from the Arts Department of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Since 1983, she has directed and produced music videos for CBS, Warner Brothers, MCA, Capitol, and Elektra, including *Burning Down the House* by Talking Heads, *Girl in Trouble* and *Say No* by Romeo Void, as well as *You Ain't Fresh* by the Boogie Boys and *Translate* by The Triplets. In 1984, Julia Heyward was awarded the renowned Bessie Award for Dance and Performance for her multi-media performance *No Local Stops*. In 1999, she received a Guggenheim Fellowship and additional grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Greenwall Foundation.

Her work has been exhibited internationally, including Artists Space, Whitney Museum of American Art, The Kitchen, and Microscope Gallery, New York, US; Daejeon Municipal Museum, Daejeon, KR; Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City, MX; South London Gallery, London, UK; and the Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, DE. The Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art in San Francisco honoured her work with her first institutional solo exhibition in 2015 entitled *Consciousness Knocks Unconscious*.

Collaboration & Publication

Voices of Many Voices represents the second chapter of Julia Heyward's first institutional exhibitions outside the United States. The first chapter, which focuses on the musical and videographic aspects of her practice and is curated by Nele Kaczmarek together with Leonie Schmiese, will be presented under the title *Miracles in Reverse* (31. 1. – 25. 5. 2026) at Kunstverein Nürnberg - Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft.

Both institutions are collaborating closely on a comprehensive catalogue, which, in addition to introductory texts by the curators Nele Kaczmarek and Theresa Roessler on the respective focal points in Nuremberg and Münster, will also include contributions by Julia Heyward herself and previously unpublished archival material. The catalogue will be published in summer 2026 by Mousse Publishing, Milan.

Video and Film Programme & Scenography

For both exhibitions in Nuremberg and Münster, artist and set designer Celeste Burlina has developed a scenography. In addition, a video and film programme, titled *Circuit City: Three Sequences on Video Art in New York, 1970s–1990s* and curated by Elisa R. Linn and Lennart Wolff will be presented at both venues. The three-part programme features works produced in New York from the 1970s to the early 1990s by artists such as Ericka Beckman, Dara Birnbaum, Joan Jonas, and Howardena Pindell, and reflects the artistic and political environment that shaped Julia Heyward's artistic and musical practice.

Programme

Fri, 6 March, 6 pm

Opening with an Introduction by Curator Theresa Roessler

Sat, 7 March, 6 pm

Performance by Julia Heyward together with Composer Artist Perry Hoberman

Sat, 21 March, 2 – 5 pm

Sat, 18 April, 2 – 5 pm

was wir finden ohne zu suchen, Children's Workshop (ages 8 – 12) by Sophie Isabel Urban
(Registration required)

Wed, 25 March, 6 pm

Wed, 22 April, 6 pm

Wed, 13 May, 6 pm

Public Exhibition Tour

Mon, 27 April, 6 pm

In Conversation with Elisa R. Linn and Lennart Wolff

Sat, 9 May, 3 pm

guesting ['gestu] no. 4: *A Chorus Off Frequency*

Sat, 30 May, 2 – 6 pm

Small Changes, Writing Workshop with Jackie Grassmann and Tabea Marschall
(Registration required)

Sat, 30 May, from 7 pm

Born Hypnotized, Finissage with Music by Julia Heyward

Press Images

Press images are available for download at the following link:

<https://t1p.de/80eu1>

Video documentation of the performance

Can be viewed online at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIEw3XnMe7s>

Press Contact

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+49 251 394963 13

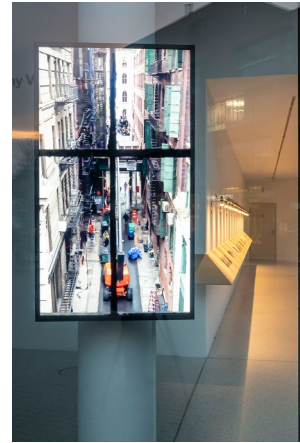
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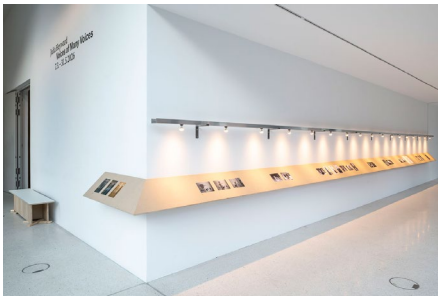
Self-portrait by Julia Heyward,
1969/70
Courtesy the artist



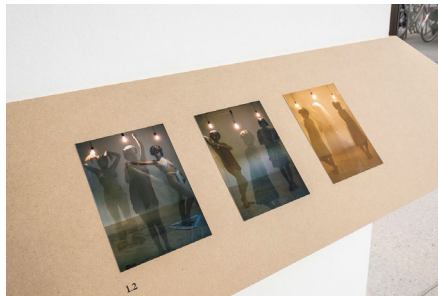
Julia Heyward, *Voices of Many Voices*, 2026, Installation view,
Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



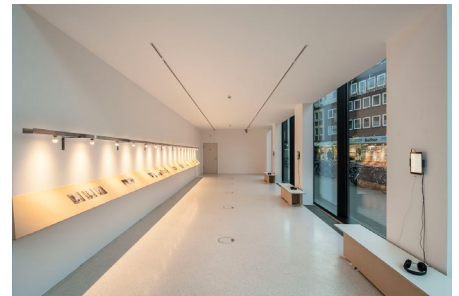
Julia Heyward, *Italian Perspective*,
from the series *Points of View*, 2007
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



Julia Heyward, *Voices of Many Voices*, 2026, Installation view,
Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



Julia Heyward, Self-Portraits,
1969/70
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



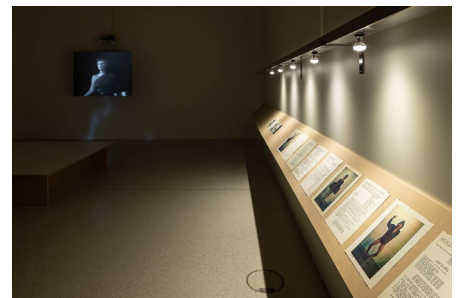
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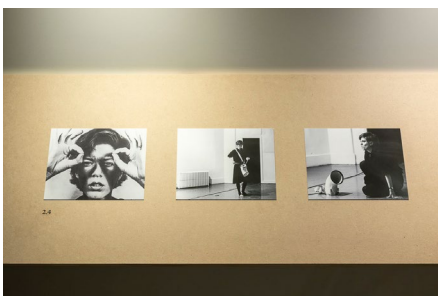
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Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



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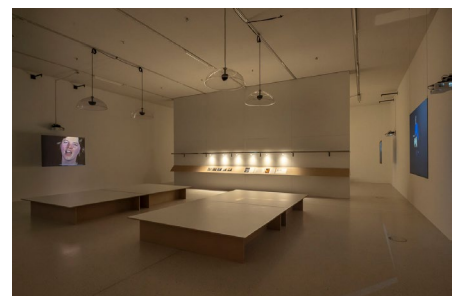
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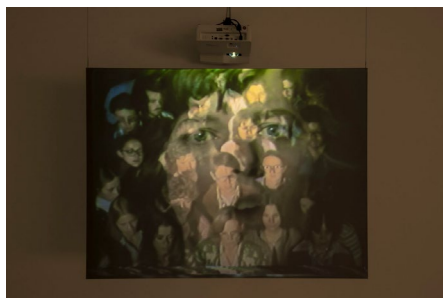
Julia Heyward performing *This Is My Blue Period*, 1977, Artists Space,
New York
Courtesy the Artists Space Archive, False Library & Special
Collections, New York University
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



Julia Heyward, *Voices of Many Voices*, 2026, Installation view,
Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



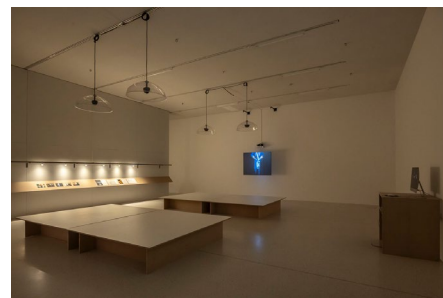
Julia Heyward, *Voices of Many Voices*, 2026, Installation view,
Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



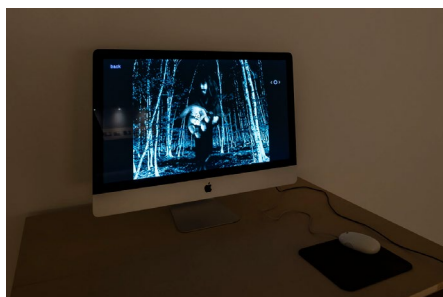
Julia Heyward, *This Is My Blue Period*, 1977, Video Still
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



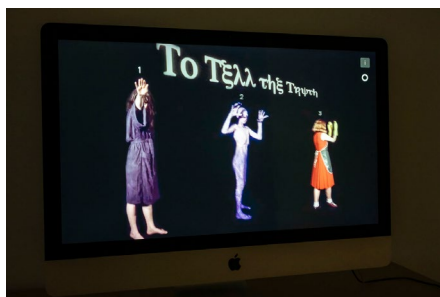
Julia Heyward, *Miracles in Reverse*, 1997, performance texts and storyboards
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



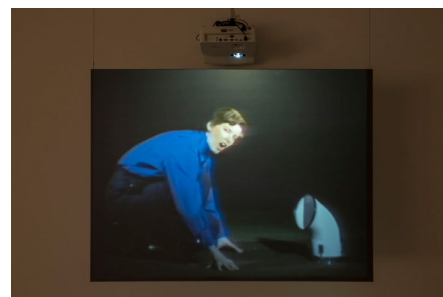
Julia Heyward, *Voices of Many Voices*, 2026, Installation view, Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



Julia Heyward, *Miracles in Reverse*, 2001/26, interactive video installation
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



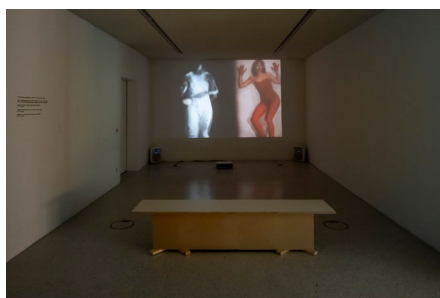
Julia Heyward, *Miracles in Reverse*, 2001/26, interactive video installation
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



Julia Heyward, *Conscious Knocks Unconscious*, 1979, Video Still
Photo: Thorsten Arendt



Steina Vasulka, *Violin Power*, 1978, as part of the three-part video and film programme *Circuit City: Three Sequences on Video Art in New York, 1970s–1990s*, 2026, Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt
Courtesy the artist, BERG Contemporary and The Vasulka Foundation



Erika Beckman, *Hit and Run*, 1977, as part of the three-part video and film programme *Circuit City: Three Sequences on Video Art in New York, 1970s–1990s*, 2026, Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Thorsten Arendt
Courtesy the artist



Julia Heyward performing together with Perry Hoberman, 2026, Westfälischer Kunstverein
Photo: Ygor Souza Bahia

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