

WHITNEY

Press Release

Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street
New York, NY 10021
whitney.org/press

Contacts: Stephen Soba, Molly Gross
Tel. (212) 570-3633
Fax (212) 570-4169
pressoffice@whitney.org

THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT *OFF THE WALL*, A TWO-PART EXHIBITION DEVOTED TO ARTISTS WORKING WITH PERFORMATIVE ACTIONS AND THE BODY

Part 1

Thirty Performative Actions
July 1 - September 19, 2010

Part 2

Seven Works by Trisha Brown
September 30 - October 3, 2010



Jimmy DeSana (1949-1990), *Marker Cones*, 1982. Silver dye bleach print. Image courtesy of the Jimmy DeSana Trust.

NEW YORK, May 28, 2010 -- Conceived as a two-part exhibition, *Off the Wall* brings together thirty performative actions by artists, in works made from 1946 to the present, and seven iconic performance works by Trisha Brown. The exhibition takes place at the Whitney Museum of American Art in the second-floor Mildred & Herbert Lee Galleries and the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery,

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and extends beyond the Museum in the fall with Part 2's presentation of Brown's works, which includes the performance of *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* on East 75th Street, on the outside of the Museum's Breuer building, and works performed in the Museum's Sculpture Court.

Part 1: *Thirty Performative Actions*

On view from July 1 through September 19, *Off the Wall: Part 1—Thirty Performative Actions*, focuses on actions using the body in live performance, in front of the camera, or in relation to a photographic or printed surface, or drawing. Each action displaces the site of the artwork from an object to the body, acting in relation to, or directly onto, the physical space of the gallery. The wall and floor become the stage for these actions: walking on the wall, slamming doors, slapping hands against the wall, gathering sawdust up from the studio floor, walking on a painting, striding and crawling around a small cylindrical space, writing or drawing on the wall and floor, or performing a striptease behind the transparent plane of Duchamp's *Large Glass*.

The exhibition also includes a number of works that reveal the underlying theatricality of the performative action and the ways in which artists stage the self in images that question conventions of identity, gender, and the body. Included are re-performances of iconic early works by John Baldessari and Yoko Ono, as well as recent works by young artists.

Part 1 is curated by Chrissie Iles, the Whitney's Anne & Joel Ehrenkranz Curator. As Iles notes, "The performative gestures that have been brought together in this exhibition demonstrate what can be described as the end game of Modernism, in their various rupturings of the autonomous space of painting and its primary location – the vertical plane of the gallery wall. Their Oedipal parent was Jackson Pollock, whose drip paintings of the 1950s, made by moving around a canvas placed horizontally on the studio floor, prompted Harold Rosenberg to observe at the time that 'at a certain moment, the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act ... what was to go onto the canvas was not a picture, but an event.'"

In the earliest work in the exhibition, Maya Deren's film *Meditation on Violence* (1948), the re-orientation occurs through reversal. The performer Chao-Li Chi enacts three degrees of traditional Chinese boxing in an apparently single continuous fluid movement; yet the film begins and ends in the middle of a movement, and the last portion has been printed backwards. A similar disorientation of perception occurs in Bruce Nauman's *Bouncing in the Corner No. 2: Upside Down* (1969), in which an action (first performed at the Whitney in 1969 as part of the seminal exhibition *Anti-Illusion*) is re-

performed with the camera turned upside down, so that Nauman appears to be bouncing out of a corner of the wall while hanging from the ceiling.

Another dramatic switch of orientation occurs in Andy Warhol's *Dance Diagram 5 (Fox Trot: "The Right Turn – Man")* (1962), in which Warhol silk-screened a diagram of ballroom dance steps from a popular magazine onto canvas and displayed it on the floor. By relocating the plane of display and the viewer's attention from the wall to the floor, the reading of the image shifts from a pictorial representation to a diagrammatic instruction that the viewer could potentially perform. A year earlier in 1961, just as he was moving from commercial work into painting, Warhol had positioned a blank canvas on the floor outside his front door, hoping that people might step on it. Warhol's action echoes Yoko Ono's instruction *Painting to be Stepped On*:

PAINTING TO BE STEPPED ON

Leave a piece of canvas or finished painting on the floor or in the street.

1960 Winter

Ono showed a realization of her instruction in an exhibition of her conceptual paintings in New York in 1961. The instruction has been realized again for this exhibition by contemporary artist Nate Lowman, some of whose own recent paintings have incorporated the traces from the floor of his studio-mate Dan Colen's painting process.

In the early 1970s, this reorientation of the painterly process to the floor was distilled even further by Paul McCarthy, who (in an echo of a similar action by Nam June Paik made a few years earlier), removed the canvas and paintbrush completely, drawing a line across the floor by holding a bucket of paint in front of his prone body and inching slowly forward on his stomach. Carl Andre further collapsed the boundary between the art object and the body in works such as *29th Copper Cardinal* (1975), in which the viewer is to walk along a 48-foot-long line of square copper plates laid on the floor.

The assertion of the floor as an equal surface to that of the wall was underlined by artists' use of the camera to record performative actions that were, in the case of film, projected directly onto the gallery wall, re-positioning the wall as a projection surface rather than as the site of painting. In Richard Serra's film *Hands Scraping* (made in 1968 and screened at the Whitney in *Anti-Illusion* the following year), Serra's forearms and hands, and those of composer Philip Glass, are seen meticulously clearing a pile of sawdust from the studio floor, substituting the detritus of the making of a sculpture, and the

action of its clearance from the studio floor, for the physical object. David Hammons's video installation *Phat Free* (1995) shifts the performative surface from the floor onto the sidewalk, as a man kicks a can along a New York City street.

The vertical surface of the wall is similarly transformed from a neutral white surface into the subject and site of the artwork, written on, slapped, marked, walked on, painted, scraped, or imprinted, in works by John Baldessari (*I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971), Robert Morris (*Hand and Toe Hold*, 1964), Vito Acconci (*Shadow Boxing*, 1971), Dennis Oppenheim (*Echo*, 1973), Dara Friedman (*Bim Bam*, 1999), Jordan Wolfson (*Untitled, Frank Painting Co. Inc.*, 2006), Bruce Nauman (*Bouncing in the Corner No. 2, Upside Down*, 1969), and Hannah Wilke (*Hannah Wilke Through the Large Glass*, 1976).

This shift can also be seen in five short films by Yvonne Rainer made between 1966 and 1969 and projected as part of dances (*Hand Movie, Volleyball, Rhode Island Red, Trio Film, Line*), in which everyday objects (a volleyball, chickens) are not so much props as mute characters. In Trisha Donnelly's video *Untitled (Jumping)* (1999), Donnelly is seen performing a series of jumps in slow motion that imitate the signature jumps of various rock musicians at the point where they reach physical transcendence through their music.

The 1960s and early 1970s saw an unprecedented crossover between artistic disciplines, and a profound influence of dance on art. Performances by Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Carolee Schneemann, among others, incorporated dance-like movement, while the work of dancers such as Yvonne Rainer, Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, Merce Cunningham, and Steve Paxton folded film, performative action, and sculptural references into their work.

Performative actions also became a powerful tool with which women artists challenged male definitions of the body, arguing that femininity is, in itself, always performed. Performative videotapes by Martha Rosler, Dara Birnbaum, Carolee Schneemann, Joan Jonas, and many others, recoded the body through the female voice.

The camera, a key element in the creation of performative actions in the 1960s and 1970s, embodied the play between presence and absence that those actions explored. By the 1980s, it had become not only the visible trace of a performative action, but had replaced the white cube as the stage upon which that action had occurred. As the 1980s began, the performative impulse remained strong, expressing

itself increasingly through the lens of the camera, often through portraiture. Central to the photographic work of artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, David Wojnarowicz, Peter Hujar, Jack Pierson, Lyle Ashton Harris, and Jimmy De Sana is a staging of the self, using make-up, wigs, clothing and theatrical poses and lighting, echoing the formal inversions of spatial relationships in earlier performative actions. Lyle Ashton Harris's photographs of himself as the singer Billie Holiday mirror, as Anna Deavere Smith has pointed out, Holiday's tendency to invert a song's meaning to create the opposite of what the composer intended.

At the same time, Lucas Samaras and Francesca Woodman each stage theatrical photographs in which their naked bodies appear to merge with fragments of wallpaper, another form of elision between the self and other. Cindy Sherman's photographic tableaux, similarly theatrical, intensify the artifice further, to the point where the body is replaced by mannequins arranged in staged performative actions. In Laurie Simmons' *Walking Camera II (Jimmy the Camera)* (1987), another kind of split occurs between the body and technology. In Robert Longo's photographic series *Men in the Cities* (1976-1982), created as studies for larger drawings, figures are caught frozen in mid-leap, as though either at the point of death, or dancing. A similar ambiguity of meaning occurs in Longo's *Body of a Comic* (1984), a large sculptural wall piece in which three large black cylinders bang loudly and intermittently above a large photographic light box depicting a man playing a pair of bongo drums held between his thighs. The piece switches on and off in a kinetic performative action in which sound and image are split apart.

Part 2—Seven Works by Trisha Brown

Off the Wall: Part 2—Seven Works by Trisha Brown, features the Trisha Brown Dance Company, on the occasion of the company's fortieth anniversary, performing iconic works from the 1970s.

Performance videos and the performative sound installation *Skymap* will also be presented.

Performances will take place daily from September 30 through October 3, 2010, in the second floor galleries, in the Sculpture Court, and on an exterior wall of the Whitney on East 75th Street. Works to be performed will include the legendary work *Walking on the Wall*, originally performed in the second floor gallery at the Whitney in 1971, the spectacular *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, *Falling Duet I*, *Leaning Duets I and II*, *Spanish Dance*, *Floor of the Forest*, and the sound installation *Skymap*.

Part 2 is curated by Limor Tomer, the Whitney's adjunct curator of performing arts. Tomer commented, "The Whitney played a huge role in the trajectory of Trisha Brown's career. By presenting her so-called "Equipment Cycle" pieces in the second floor gallery in 1971, the Museum effectively

removed the 'rogue' aspect from the work, which had been presented until then in SoHo streets, lofts, and on roof-tops, and allowed it to be viewed as an organic continuation of work that was being explored by visual artists, musicians, dancers, and performance artists of that era. *Off The Wall* is an opportunity to examine Brown's achievement within a larger context of actions, performative instructions, and installations."

Some of Brown's most important early works including *Walking on the Wall* (1970), *Leaning Duets II* (1971), *Falling Duet I* (1968), *Falling Duet II* (1971), and *Skymap* (1969), were performed at the Whitney on March 30 and 31, 1971, as part of an evening titled "Another Fearless Dance Concert." When asked recently about her relationship to the Whitney, Brown commented, "The Whitney? I was born there!"

Brown has created nearly one hundred dance works since 1961, including several operas, and is currently at work on a new operatic evening featuring the music of Jean-Philippe Rameau. Increasingly recognized as a visual artist, her drawings have been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions including Documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany, Sikkema Jenkins Gallery (2009), and most recently as part of the *Year of Trisha*, a celebration at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis of Brown's entire body of work.

Trisha Brown was born and raised in Aberdeen, Washington. She graduated from Mills College in 1958, studied with Anna Halprin and taught at Reed College in Portland before moving to New York City in 1961. Instantly immersed in what was to become the post-modern phenomenon of Judson Dance Theater, her movement investigations found the extraordinary in the everyday and challenged existing perceptions of what constituted performance. In 1970, Brown formed her company and made the groundbreaking work, *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, one of many site-specific works created in, around, and hovering over the streets and buildings of Brown's SoHo neighborhood. The first of her many collaborations with Robert Rauschenberg, *Glacial Decoy*, premiered in 1979, followed by *Set and Reset* in 1983, with original music by Laurie Anderson.

Brown was the first woman choreographer to receive the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. Other honors include Brandeis University's Creative Arts Medal in Dance, two John Simon Guggenheim Fellowships, a New York State Governor's Arts Award, and the National Medal of Art. In 1994 she received the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award and she has been named a Veuve Cliquot Grand Dame. Brown was named a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the government of France in 1988, elevated to Officier in 2000, and to Commandeur in 2004. She served

on the National Council on the Arts from 1994 to 1997, has received numerous honorary doctorates, and is an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Trisha Brown Dance Company has presented the work of its legendary artistic director for more than thirty-eight years. Founded in 1970 when Trisha Brown branched out from the experimental Judson Dance Theater to work with her own group of dancers, TBDC is regularly seen in the major opera

houses of New York, Paris, London, and throughout the world. The repertory has grown from solos and small group pieces to include major evening-length works and collaborations between Brown and renowned visual artists.

History of Performance at the Whitney

The Whitney has been home to a long and varied history of performances, from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's support of the experimental music scene in the 1920s to profiles of American jazz innovators like Gil Evans, Jimmy Giuffre, and the Modern Jazz Quartet, presented in the galleries in the 1960s. By the 1970s, the Whitney regularly produced a full range of performing arts events, which took place in the Museum's second-floor galleries. The Whitney presented Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, Cecil Taylor, Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Ned Rorem, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Duke Ellington, Eubie Blake, William Bolcom, Luciano Berio, Terry Reilly, Laurie Anderson, and Philip Glass. Such artists as Steve Reich, Meredith Monk, Deborah Hay, and Trisha Brown, among many others, have premiered groundbreaking works at the Whitney over the years.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the preeminent institution devoted to twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States, with a special focus on works by living artists. The Whitney's collection, which comprises over 18,000 works by more than 2800 artists, includes major works and materials from the estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, as well as significant works by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in America today. Founded in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and in 1966 inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue. The Whitney is currently moving ahead with plans to build a second facility, designed by Renzo Piano, located in downtown Manhattan at the entrance to the High Line in the Meatpacking District.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

2010, the Whitney Biennial	Through May 30, 2010
Collecting Biennials	Through November 28, 2010
Facing the Artist: Portraits by John Jonas Gruen	June 3-August 8, 2010
Heat Waves in a Swamp: The Paintings of Charles Burchfield	June 24-October 17, 2010
Christian Marclay: Festival	July 1-September 26, 2010
Off the Wall: Part 1—Thirty Performative Actions	July 1-September 19, 2010
Jill Magid: A Reasonable Man in a Box	July 1-September 12, 2010
Lee Friedlander: America by Car	Opens September 4, 2010
Off the Wall: Part 2—Seven Works by Trisha Brown	September 30-October 3, 2010
Paul Thek: Diver, A Retrospective	Oct. 21, 2010-Jan. 9, 2011
Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time	Opens October 27, 2010
Charles LeDray: workworkworkworkwork	Nov. 18, 2010-Feb. 13, 2011

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only: \$6. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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