

ART & DESIGN

# A Mail-Art Performance and Other Treats at Performa 15

Weekend Miser

By JOSHUA BARONE NOV. 12, 2015

The Miser has an ambivalent relationship with performance art. Some pieces can come off as esoteric or nonsensical; others can be profound, even moving. (Just ask the teary-eyed spectators who attended Marina Abramovic's Museum of Modern Art retrospective five years ago.) At Performa 15, a three-week biennial devoted to the art form, not everything will stick. But with about 30 artists taking part, it shouldn't be difficult to find something to love.

Sampling this weekend's offerings (a calendar is on the Performa website) won't cost anything more than your time. With a few exceptions, everything is free.

Starting on Friday afternoon, the artist Brian Fuata, based in Sydney, Australia, will don a white bedsheet like a procrastinator putting together a cheap Halloween costume in "A preparatory/predictive performance for a circuit of email and the living." He moves around the room like a ghostly persona, interacting with items from the archive of the artist Ray Johnson (1927-95).

In the 1960s, Johnson pioneered an art form based on mailed correspondence. Mr. Fuata, who began playing with text messages and emails as performance art about five years ago, eventually learned about Johnson's work

and began to incorporate pieces from that artist's archive into his own work. "In that sort of ephemeral way," he said, "we had a lot of similarities."

Now, Johnson's archive is the heart of Mr. Fuata's improvised performance about the art of correspondence and long-distance relationships — even ones with long-dead artists.

*(Friday and Saturday at 4 and 7 p.m.; Printed Matter, 231 11th Avenue, at 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-680-0569; 15.performa-arts.org; free. A related exhibition at Printed Matter, "Ray Johnson Books, Posters, Mail Art and Ephemera," is on view through Nov. 28.)*

## A Used Book Sale as Art

The artist Rainer Ganahl is similarly inspired by a bygone figure: His performance "Selling My Library" is based on the Walter Benjamin essay "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting." Benjamin wrote, "Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects." For his Performa contribution, Mr. Ganahl will see what happens when he renounces that relationship through a book sale.

Can a book sale be art? The question is what value books have as objects, and what it means for Mr. Ganahl to give up something that in all reality is still easily available online.

*(Saturday and Sunday, 2 to 8 p.m.; Kai Matsumiya, 153 Stanton Street, at Suffolk Street, Manhattan; free.)*

## Do-It-Yourself Ballet

The few performances with a price tag aren't too steep to break a Miser's bank. Among the offerings is the French choreographer Jérôme Bel's "Ballet (New York)." In this piece, which is being staged in different places and started its run last weekend at a Midtown art gallery, Mr. Bel takes a group of people — some classically trained, some amateurs — and gives them basic instructions for a dance. The result at a recent performance was a little awkward, but in a way that any of us who feel shy on a dance floor would understand.

Part of Mr. Bel's concept involves exploring how different spaces affect the

experience of performing or seeing dance. His next stop, the Martha Graham Studio Theater, is more traditional than an art gallery. Mr. Fuata said he was looking forward to this; if you go, you may see him onstage. Then again, you could be up there yourself.

*(Saturday and Sunday at 3:30 p.m.; 55 Bethune Street, Manhattan; Thursday at 8 p.m.; El Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue, at 104th Street, Manhattan; \$25, \$15 for students; Saturday and Sunday are sold out, but standby tickets will be available.)*

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