



Art Books

September 4th, 2014

NewARTtheatre: Evolutions of the Performance Aesthetic

*by Jess Wilcox***Paul David Young, ed.*****NewARTtheatre: Evolutions of the Performance Aesthetic*****(PAJ Publications, 2014)**

While many familiar with the long and fluctuating relationship between the visual arts and theater may be dubious of the choice of “new” in this publication’s title—artists from the Dadas to Rauschenberg have employed theatrical tropes in their work—its pages capture the questions and concerns of a particular and unique moment within this fraught history. As the editor Paul David Young recognizes in his introduction, in the past 10 to 15 years work in the nexus of art and theater has gained a new level of traction. For the first time, arts institutions have given significant space to present, collect, teach, and critically consider this hybrid practice, in turn highlighting artists working in this manner, which was previously either neglected or disdained.

This collection presents conversations Young initiated with artists who work in the union of visual arts and theater, covering topics ranging from authorship and alienation to embodiment and the social conditions of making. In his introduction Young posits theater as a “tool box” from which contemporary artists can appropriate, and the following chapters focus on these methodologies in dialogues with single artists or groups of artists.

The chosen artist groupings strengthen this examination of tools of the theatrical trade. In the conversation “The Rebirth of Character,” Young pairs artists who came to prominence in the ’80s—John Jesurun and Michael Smith—with artists of the ’90s—Elisabeth Subrin and Joe Scanlan, whose work may otherwise be lumped under the dated epithet of identity politics. Through inquiry into shared interest in the character as vessel, narrative reliability, and repetition, the former artists’ work gains a new perspective. The generational range of artists discussed suggests the pervasiveness of the art/theater work and point to an emerging genealogy.

Although only one conversation directly states process as the topic, the temporal unfolding of the work under the often conflicting guidance of many collaborators appears in multiple chapters. What rises to the surface is a simultaneous interest in and ambivalence toward participatory work in which behavior and subjectivities are scrutinized. For these artists theater proves a natural platform with a deep history and its own set of parameters with which to experiment and dismantle. Interestingly, questions of institutional, social, and economic power seem to be the undercurrents that seem to drive a lot of this work, yet are only touched on briefly. Since the majority of these conversations were presented by institutions in front of live audiences, one wonders how they may have evolved differently conducted in the privacy of correspondence.

It seems a lost opportunity that recent scholarly contributions such as Claire Bishop's definition of delegated performance or Shannon Jackson's perspective on social practice and civic engagement are merely mentioned rather than probed, expanded, or challenged. Instead, *NewARTtheatre's* greatest value may be that of a historical document of the understanding of a specific set of performance practices in its own time of making. The fresh and speculative perspective of these artists grappling with the evolving paradigm of the tightening entanglement between performance and visual artist is worth a read now and may be rich material for historians to come.

CONTRIBUTOR

Jess Wilcox

JESS WILCOX is Programs Coordinator at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, where she organizes public programs and has worked on the public artworks *Between the Door and the Street*, a performance initiated by Suzanne Lacy, and *A Butterfly for Brooklyn*, a pyrotechnic performance by Judy Chicago. She has worked on curatorial projects at Abrons Art Center, the International Studio and Curatorial Program, Performa, and Storm King Art Center, among others. She has contributed to *Art in America*, *Art Forum*, and *Modern Painters*, among others.

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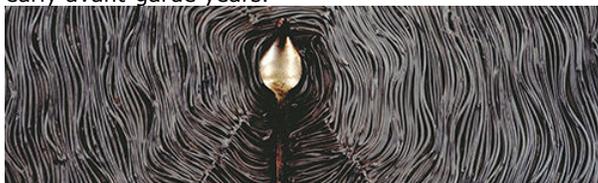


Dada & Surrealist Objects, Blain/DiDonna

by Valery Oisteanu

DEC 13-JAN 14 | ARTSEEN

Dada and Surrealist Objects at Blain/DiDonna Gallery encompasses a selection of 85 works by key figures from the early avant-garde years.



LUCAS SAMARAS *Offerings From a Restless Soul*

by Valery Oisteanu

JUL-AUG 2014 | ARTSEEN

Lucas Samaras: Offerings from a Restless Soul is a sophisticated multimedia exhibition by a reclusive artist that features more than 60 works drawn from the Metropolitan Museum's large contemporary collection.



MUNRO GALLOWAY *Belief System*

by Sara Christoph

NOV 2014 | ARTSEEN

Munro Galloway's recent exhibition at Soloway, entitled *Belief System*, begins with a Surrealist prompt and ends with pure pigment, rich and untethered.



He-Who-Must-Be-Named is Sigmar Polke!

by Terry R. Myers

MAY 2014 | ARTSEEN

Sigmar Polke was a master magician among the principal tricksters of art history, a mischief-maker of illusions of illusion itself, not to mention reality, whatever, of course, we believed prior to witnessing his slights of hand.

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