

Call for papers: “Is performance an area of visibility for women artists?” (Paris, April 2018)



Mierle Laderman Ukeles,
Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance (Outside), 1973,
Part of Maintenance Art performance series, 1973-1974,
Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum,
Hartford, CT, Courtesy of artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

This study day is part of the larger interdisciplinary research program [“Visibility and invisibility of women’s knowledge: creation, knowledge and their circulation from the 16th to the 21st century,”](#) organised by the LISAA Laboratory (Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée) in 2017-2018. The study day is organised in partnership with [AWARE Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions](#).

Since a great number of women creators have practiced performance art and thus participated in the development of this medium throughout the history of art, this study day aims to question the impact of performance art on the visibility of women artists, exploring how it became grounds for the expression of feminist claims. Performance, understood as “an artistic manifestation in which the act or gesture of making has a value of its own” (Daniel Charles), is not only a form of knowledge in 20th-century art history, but also makes use of other skills that include the body, society or action in its broader sense. While we do not claim to put together a comprehensive survey of the medium, we wish to underline its capacity to utilise knowledge in which women are actors, creators and subjects. We usually trace the origins of performance art back to the beginning of the 20th century and to its development in the 60s and the 70s. However, we must acknowledge that it existed much earlier on in a cultural domain more commonly associated with women than with men: the representation of the body and its exhibition and valorisation for artistic purposes through movement or posing. We will consider Lady Hamilton’s *Attitudes*, at the end of the 18th century, as the foundations of performative gestures. The point from then on is to measure and question the hypothesis that “performance [could be] a woman,” the diversion of a man’s experience, if ever there were

one, to quote Nietzsche's formula from the *The Joyful Wisdom*, who stated that "Yes, life is a woman!" in conclusion of a famous aphorism on the place of the invisible within the visible. Therefore, performance must be considered from its historical angle, like a space that questions the visibility and invisibility of women's knowledge in dialectical terms and from the point of view of its historiography. The first book on the history of performance in the 20th century was written in 1979 by a woman, RoseLee Goldberg, and it still remains a domain often studied by women. Lastly, we will question performance in relation to feminism. According to Peggy Phelan, "the promise of feminist art is the *performative* creation of new realities." The visibility of a performance often relies on the visibility of the body, which is a crucial part of performance art. We will therefore organise the study day around the following 3 main themes:

- The exposed body: proportions and movements

From attitudes to poses and from dance to striptease, women artists have frequently used their body for the purpose of its being exhibited or viewed. Do these practices constitute an area of knowledge that many artists have played on in view of being "co-opted by a male culture" (Rozsika Parker et Griselda Pollock)? Another area in which knowledge has been diverted is the redefinition of the norms of feminine beauty, in an often subversive play on aesthetic canons and the representations of art history.

- Intimacy and sexuality

These two domains are often utilised in performance art and interact with various fields of knowledge like psychoanalysis, eroticism and pornography, as well as medicine and technology. Again, is the body becoming grounds for the exploration and redefinition of knowledge?

- Interaction with society

Performances can be carried out in the city, in the social sphere. As such, performance is a major tool for feminist claims (of activist groups or artists). A shift often takes place through performance: invisible knowledge that is culturally considered more feminine, like housekeeping, suddenly acquires critical visibility. Other types of knowledge culturally regarded as masculine (war, the military) become objects of appropriation or hijacking for women. Lastly, performance can provide a space for discussion, exhibition and the use of literary or, more generally, textual knowledge.

Practical information:

Study Day organised by Carole Halimi (MCF Histoire de l'art contemporain, UPEM) and Juliette Bertron (ATER, UPEM), LISAA EA 4120, UPEM, in partnership with AWARE.

Individual presentations will be limited to 25 minutes, and collective presentations to 40 minutes. They may focus on general themes or case studies, on major figures or lesser-known artists in the field of performance art, as well as feminist activist groups.

Applications for papers (approx. 300 words) must be sent with a curriculum vitae by 15 October 2017 to Carole Halimi and Juliette Bertron at:
performancefemmeslisaa@gmail.com.

Type: call for papers

Deadline: 15 October 2017

Type of event: Study Day

Date of the event: April 2018 (to be confirmed shortly)

Location of the event: Beaux-Arts de Paris

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