

# The Museum of Modern Art

## MoMA PRESENTS THE FIRST MAJOR MUSEUM EXHIBITION TO FOCUS ON THE JUDSON DANCE THEATER'S CROSS-DISCIPLINARY INFLUENCE

### Presentation Includes a Robust Performance Program, alongside Photography, Film, Scores, Archival Materials, and Oral Histories

#### ***Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done***

September 16, 2018–February 3, 2019

Second-floor Collection Galleries and The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium

#JudsonDance

**NEW YORK, September 12, 2018**—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done***, a major exhibition that looks anew at the formative moment in the 1960s when a group of choreographers, visual artists, composers, and filmmakers made use of a local church to present groundbreaking cross-disciplinary performances. Featuring celebrated dance works by Judson artists, *The Work Is Never Done* includes a gallery exhibition, a print publication, and an ambitious performance program in the Museum's Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium. On view from September 16, 2018, through February 3, 2019, the exhibition highlights the group's ethos of collaboration and the range of its participants through live performance and some 300 objects including films, photographic documentation, sculptural objects, scores, music, and archival material. *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* is organized by Ana Janevski, Curator, and Thomas J. Lax, Associate Curator, with Martha Joseph, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art.

Taking its name from the Judson Memorial Church, a socially engaged Protestant congregation in New York's Greenwich Village, Judson Dance Theater was organized in 1962 as a series of open workshops from which its participants developed performances. Redefining the kinds of movement that could count as dance, the Judson artists would go on to profoundly shape all fields of art in the second half of the 20th century. Together, these artists—including Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Philip Corner, Bill Dixon, Judith Dunn, David Gordon, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, Rudy Perez, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Rauschenberg, Carolee Schneemann, and Elaine Summers, among others—challenged traditional understandings of choreography. They employed unconventional composition methods to strip dance of its theatrical conventions, incorporating "ordinary" and more spontaneous movements into their work, along with games, simple tasks, and social dances.

"This exhibition emphasizes the cross-disciplinary activities and experimental spirit of Judson Dance Theater and New York's Downtown scene in the 1960s," said Ana Janevski. "That spirit is especially resonant today, as the Museum has made a demonstrated effort to work cross-

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departmentally and to highlight the central role played by dance and performance in the visual arts throughout the 20th century.”

Titled after a phrase used by choreographer Steve Paxton, *The Work Is Never Done* reflects both the Judson group’s spirit of experimentation and the ongoing importance of their work today. The exhibition attempts to account for the way the history of live work is mediated by the passage of time through retrospection, archival material, and oral history, including excerpts from interviews with Al Carmines, Steve Paxton, and Carolee Schneemann from the Bennington College Judson Project (1980–82). “Through our exhibitions, acquisitions, and live programs, the Department of Media and Performance Art is committed to considering how history is felt, sensed, and perceived, so as to place the past within its larger social context both then and now,” said Thomas J. Lax. *The Work Is Never Done* is organized into five galleries: the performance program in the Marron Atrium; 3 Dances: What Is a Dance?; Workshops; Downtown: Sites of Collaboration; and Sanctuary: Judson Dance Theater.

### **The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium**

The program in the Marron Atrium is organized into multiple-week increments, each of which features the work of one artist: Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, and Trisha Brown, as well as classes and events by Movement Research. In addition to live performances, a video compilation designed by artist Charles Atlas highlights historical material related to the respective featured artists. Editing material from both Judson and the post-Judson era, Atlas includes both individual and group pieces, emphasizing the relationship of the soloist to the ensemble and picturing how Judson Dance Theater influenced the future careers of this group of artists. For the weeks dedicated to Trisha Brown, Atlas has collaborated with Trisha Brown Dance Company’s former archivist, Cori Olinghouse, to create an installation that highlights Brown’s trajectory from Judson’s time to her later works. In the final weeks of the exhibition, the Museum will host Movement Research, a dance platform with a direct lineage to Judson, which will organize classes and workshops in the Marron Atrium.

### **3 Dances: What Is a Dance?**

On view in the first gallery of the exhibition, Gene Friedman’s film *3 Dances* (1964) attempts to answer the question, “What is a dance?” by presenting various forms of movement that newly counted as dance in the early 1960s. The “three dances” referenced in the title of the film capture the group’s feverish spirit and encompass the wide range of movement happening in the circle of artists, musicians, and choreographers associated with Judson Dance Theater.

### **Workshops**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Anna Halprin, James Waring, and Robert Ellis Dunn and Judith Dunn held workshops for artists to explore ideas related to improvisation, composition, and structure. Many of the artists that participated in these workshops would go on to form Judson Dance Theater. Featured in the exhibition are photographs of Halprin’s Dance Deck at her home outside San Francisco, where her classes took place. Included here are photographs of Halprin’s *Branch Dance* (1957), in which she used improvisation and

simple tasks to encourage her students to explore and develop new approaches to art making that emphasized art's relationship to its surrounding environment.

In New York, in a downtown building near Judson Memorial Church, the ballet dancer James Waring taught a class in composition that brought together different elements of a theatrical performance. On display in the exhibition is his work *Untitled* (1959), which exemplifies how the logic of collage, in which disparate elements are tied together into one composition, was used for live performance. In the same building the pianist Robert Ellis Dunn and his wife, dancer-choreographer Judith Dunn, taught courses that took John Cage's ideas of chance and structure as their starting point. The Dunns encouraged their students to observe one another's scores rather than approve or disapprove of one another's explorations. Cage's scores, on view in the center of the gallery, serve as examples of the types of performances made in the workshops.

### **Downtown: Sites of Collaboration**

Throughout downtown Manhattan, artists came together to use churches, warehouses, bars, and streets as places to make and show their artwork. They supported each other's work by offering creative encouragement, as seen in the exhibition through photographs and scores of the first happenings by Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman, performed at the Reuben Gallery. Judson artists also participated in one another's pieces, including in the performances that took place at Yoko Ono's Chambers Street Loft Series, where Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer were photographed participating in the first instance of Simone Forti's *See Saw*. New magazines, literary newsletters, and publications written by local residents, like *The Village Voice*, the *Floating Bear*, and *An Anthology* (copies of which are on display in the gallery), reported on the collaborations, disagreements, and personal stakes involved in sustaining these communities.

During this time, Forti began developing *Dance Constructions*, nine pieces based on ordinary movement, chance, and simple objects like rope and plywood boards. *Dance Constructions* are a pivotal series in Forti's early career and a watershed moment in the history of art and dance. First performed in 1960 at the Reuben Gallery, this suite of nine works explores the nature of social relationships by often directing performers to cooperate or collaborate to carry out a set of task-based instructions. *Dance Constructions* also frame a connection between the sculptural object—such as the seesaw, which will remain on view in the center of the gallery—and the body in motion that prefigured many of the concerns addressed by Minimalist sculpture. To allow audiences to experience *Dance Constructions*—presented at MoMA for the first time since entering the Museum's collection—Forti and MoMA staff worked closely with Danspace Project to organize the performance of five works in a program that repeats at 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 3:30 p.m. every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday throughout the run of *The Work Is Never Done*.

### **Sanctuary: Judson Dance Theater**

Between 1962 and 1964, the Judson group held workshops in the basement of Judson Memorial Church that led to performances organized into 16 concerts. They redefined the kinds of movement that could be considered dance, introducing everyday objects, clothes,

and gestures into choreography. The artists brought onto the stage gestures typical of the street or home, emphasizing the real time it took to complete these tasks rather than the artificial time associated with theater. An example is the video of Lucinda Childs's *Carnation* (1964), in which she introduces everyday objects like sponges, hair curlers, and a colander with great care, the contrast between her cool demeanor and the absurdity of her actions resulting in a kind of slapstick. Some of those activities are represented in this gallery through series of photographs; films; musical scores; a slideshow of the entire evenings of Concerts of Dance #3 and #13, arranged in sequence; and oral histories.

The members of Judson Dance Theater participated in each other's performances, taking on varying roles, from performing to organizing. Judson artists also rejected the traditional dance company structure, in which all creative control is given to the choreographer. Instead, they adopted a group-based approach wherein roles were distributed across all of the participants. As Carolee Schneemann observed in an oral history included in the exhibition, women led many of the conversations at Judson, challenging the dominant masculinism of the art world at the time. The use of props as the main activators and centerpieces of their dances was another way to eliminate creative decision-making and to deemphasize the role of authorship in making art. The photographs of Yvonne Rainer and her ensemble carrying and pulling mattresses in *Part of Some Sextets* is one example of how the Judson artists used objects as active parts of the work rather than supplements for the actors.

The use of scores also provided new ways for power to be negotiated in choreography by giving performers flexible parameters for how they interpreted instruction, encouraging variation in how a dance was interpreted. This can be seen from the photographs of Steve Paxton's *Jag vill gärna telefonera (I Would Like to Make a Phone Call)*, which Paxton and Robert Rauschenberg performed in 1964. Based on their individual styles and experiences, both Rauschenberg and Paxton read the collaged graphic score according to their own movements rather than the choreographer setting predetermined movements. The scores presented in the exhibition include found magazine and newspaper clippings, expressive drawings of figures, calligraphic line drawings, and color-coded stage directions, as in Rudy Perez's *Take Your Alligator with You* (1963), in which he used photographs from fashion magazines and newspaper advertisements as the basis for his choreography. These different approaches to instruction also allowed the participants of Judson Dance Theater to incorporate improvisation into works like Bill Dixon's *Metamorphosis: 1962-1966*—the musical outcome in jazz of group play.

Judson Dance Theater organized many other performances in addition to the 16 concerts that extended to other venues beyond the Church. They expanded their influence on the larger artistic scene of the time, as seen through the multiple films in this gallery, including Elaine Summers's *Fantastic Gardens* (1964), Stan VanDerBeek's films of *Site* (1965) and the 81st Street Theatre Rally (1965), and Andy Warhol's *Jill and Freddy Dancing* (1963). Each of these artists used footage of material shot outside of the Church proper to create their own filmic interpretations that used the ideas of chance, collaboration, and everydayness inspired by Judson.

## **PERFORMANCE PROGRAM**

For additional information on the performances in the Marron Atrium and associated programs and screenings organized on the occasion of *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*, please see the brochure, which provides a full calendar of the performance program and corresponding moving-image installation designed by artist Charles Atlas.

## **SPONSORSHIP:**

The exhibition is made possible by Hyundai Card.

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## **PUBLICATION:**

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, edited and with essays by Ana Janevski and Thomas J. Lax, that charts the development of Judson Dance Theater through photographs, film stills, choreographic scores, architectural drawings, and other archival materials, and celebrates the group's multidisciplinary and collaborative ethos and its reverberant achievements. Newly commissioned texts by Malik Gaines, Danielle Goldman, Adrian Heathfield, Sharon Hayes, Martha Joseph, Benjamin Piekut, Kristin Poor, Julia Robinson, Gloria Sutton, and others highlight the history of Judson and its ongoing legacy. 200 pages, 227 illustrations. Paperback with jacket, \$35. ISBN: 978-1-63345-063-9. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada. Distributed outside the United States and Canada by Thames & Hudson. Available at MoMA Stores and online at [store.moma.org](http://store.moma.org).

## **AUDIO TOUR:**

Bringing together the voices and recollections of visual artists, choreographers, and performers, including Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, David Gordon, Anna Halprin, Alex Hay, Aileen Passloff, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Carole Schneemann, and Valda Setterfeld, the audio tour explores the culture of experimentation and collaboration that characterized Judson Dance Theater and transformed the world of dance. This exhibition is equipped with loop technology for sound amplification as well as captioning to make sound-based artworks and content accessible. MoMA Audio is available for streaming and download on MoMA's free app on iTunes, at [moma.org/audio](http://moma.org/audio), and free of charge at the Museum.

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