Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done

For a brief period in the early 1960s, a group of choreographers, visual artists, composers, and filmmakers gathered in Judson Memorial Church, in New York's Greenwich Village, for a series of workshops that ultimately redefined what counted as dance. The performances that evolved from these workshops foregrounded everyday movements—gestures drawn from the street or the home. Spontaneity and unconventional methods of composition were prized. The Judson artists made works that were structured around games and simple tasks and that incorporated social dances and autobiographical information, putting the artistic process and artists' daily lives center stage. They investigated the very fundamentals of choreography, stripping dance of its theatrical conventions, and the result, according to the Village Voice critic Jill Johnston, was the most exciting new dance in a generation.

This exhibition, through live performance, film, photography, sculptural objects, musical scores, poetry, and archival materials, traces the history of Judson Dance Theater both in and outside the church, from the classes that led to the group's formation to the events it held at other spaces around downtown New York, where artistic disciplines crossed into each other and collaboration reigned. The ethos of assembly, experimentation, and safe harbor that the group espoused is as necessary today as it was in the 1960s—as the choreographer Steve Paxton recently said, "The work is never done; sanctuary always needed."

The exhibition is organized by Ana Janevski, Curator, and Thomas J. Lax, Associate Curator, with Martha Joseph, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art.