

EARLY PERFORMANCES

“The attraction for me in performance is the immediate pleasure of working for a live audience. I am totally in a concentrated present,” Jonas explains. Following studies in sculpture and art history in the 1950s and '60s, she turned her focus to movement, later becoming one of the preeminent artists to work in performance art. Her work in this early period drew upon diverse influences, ranging from experimental literature to the dance workshops and happenings she attended as an active participant in New York City's rich downtown art scene.

Inspired by her art history studies, Jonas grew interested in altering audiences' perception of space. Her *Mirror Pieces* (1968–71) deploy the mirror as a viewing device, prop, and tool for fragmenting space and reflecting upon identity and self-perception. In outdoor works, beginning with *Jones Beach Piece* (1970), the artist uses city and beach landscapes as a stage for interventions addressing how distance impacts the perception of actions and sounds.

ORGANIC HONEY AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

During a trip to Japan in 1970, Jonas bought a video camera, which she would use in 1972 for her first video work, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*. Since then, she has continued to incorporate technology into her works as she explores the relationship between video and performance. "The idea for Organic Honey," she explains, "was the simultaneity of an audience watching someone perform for the camera and seeing what the camera sees, and the discrepancy between the two." The character Organic Honey would become a recurring feature across Jonas's future videos and performances in the titular body of work. Named after a jar of honey and dressed in secondhand clothing associated with conventional notions of femininity, the alter ego allowed the artist to experiment with ideas of gender, representation, and technology. Later in her career, Jonas began creating multimedia installations developed from the sets and situations of her previous performances, including Organic Honey.

STORYTELLING AND FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

Drawing inspiration from fables, ancient myths, folklore, and poetry, Jonas often fragments and re-assembles textual sources as the framework for video, performances, and installations. The artist explains, “I was very interested in how a myth or a story could inform a picture, an image, or even a character. The text fragments become part of the fabric of the whole piece, carrying equal weight to an image or a movement or a sound.” Jonas has been focused in particular on representations of female protagonists. She elaborates, “I explore the place of women in history as outsiders—healers, witches, storytellers. I look for how the stories reflect basic human psychology and behavior, while laying bare the hidden taboos.”

PROPS, TEACHING, AND LEARNING

Displayed here are materials showing Jonas's processes of working, collecting, and teaching, shown alongside her video *Reading Dante III (Edit)* (2016). Among the items featured are the video's working script, which provides insight into Jonas's way of engaging existing texts, as well as teaching notes and video collaborations with students that testify to the importance of her role as an educator. The exhibited performance props, used and reused in many of her works since the 1970s, were mainly bought in an antique store in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada—where the artist spent yearly summers and whose natural scenery spurred her fascination with landscape and ecology. For Jonas, learning comes both from teaching and from being a student of the world: “You never stop learning and you have to keep studying. You just have to keep looking, keep exploring . . . and keep on being curious.”

BETWEEN LAND AND OCEAN

The environment is of utmost importance to Jonas, and her work since the 1960s has included the natural world as a protagonist. Reflecting a nonhierarchical worldview in which the environment, animals, and people are all interconnected, her performances and installations often dissolve the conventional relationships between species that cast one life form as more valuable than another. Jonas also foregrounds the urgency of climate change in her collaboration with children, as seen in *Moving Off the Land II* (2019): “The reason I involve children in my performances is because they will inherit this situation and I want them to be familiar with the beauty of our natural world.”