

while she repeats lines from a song inside a cone. The artist is wearing a long dress, and attempts to climb up the walls of a hole. In the second scene, Jonas is portrayed in a flat landscape as she barks into the same cone, and several dogs seem to bark back to her. The video continues with a new scene: the woman is filmed on the banks of a river while she says the word "merlo" (Italian for blackbird) into the same cone and the wind blows through the leaves of the plants around her. In the last scene, the artist is standing facing an open landscape, imitating a bird's movements with a veil that is carried away on the wind.

*Merlo* is part of an artistic path that began with early performances like *Jones Beach Piece*, and which investigates the relationships between images and sound in an extensive reflection on aspects connected with the development of an action.

## **6** *Mirage* (1976/1994/2005)

Multimedia installation

Inspired by a trip to India undertaken in 1976, *Mirage* is one of Joan Jonas's most articulated works, and is conceived as a collection of references to different elements and media that the artist has added and/or modified during successive phases.

Thanks to its complexity, fragmentation and richness, *Mirage* is one of Jonas's most significant installations and testifies to the attitudes of an artist who ceaselessly reflects upon and returns to her own work as subject.

The performance that lies at the origins of *Mirage* has an open structure in which movements derive from a form of meditation the artist undertook during her travels in the Orient. The word “mirage” describes an intangible situation based on a precarious equilibrium, underlining the correlation – both fluid and unstable – between the artist’s body and the projection of her energy during the performance.

*Mirage* was conceived in 1976 as a performance designed for the projection room at the Anthology Film Archives<sup>7</sup>, a legendary locale in New York City’s cultural panorama, and a place where the artist often viewed experimental cinema, sharing the experience with an audience made up of musicians, dancers, artists and of course filmmakers. The use of film occupies a key role in Joan Jonas’s artistic production: the language of film offers infinite possibilities to alter and recombine both visual and temporal elements connected with the action.

Characterized by sequences of short, syncopated movements, the performance combines ritual, memory and repetition in an abstract game of contrasts between light and darkness: developed based on the dimensions of a movie theatre projection screen, it shows the artist working at carrying out a series of actions while interacting with diverse elements, both sculpture and video.

In 1994, as part of her solo show at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the artist began “translating” the work – moving from performance to installation – through a process distinguished by numerous reconfigurations. *Mirage* was one of the works presented for this occasion.

The installation – which took its current form in 2005 – is made up of several blackboards with drawings, diverse black and white photographs taken during earlier performances of the work, and a series of cones positioned on the floor. There is also a stage-like platform upon which various props have been positioned, including a metal cone that echoes the shape of the volcanoes shown in one of the work's videos, and a Greek mask. The videos *Mirage I* (1976) and *Mirage II* (1976–2000) are projected over the stage like structure. The first shows the artist as she repeatedly traces and erases drawings on a blackboard; the second is a montage edit of news program clips from the 1970s showing the President of the United States Richard Nixon, as well as sequences from the performance of *Mirage* and a scene in which the artist and another woman, seated on the steps of a Wall Street office building, blow into long aluminium cones as white vapour escapes from manholes in the street. As with the images, the sounds of the video are marked by a rhythmic montage that alternates the voices and sounds of the original extracts. Made of archival footage and originally screened during the performance at the Anthology Film Archives, *Volcano Film* is projected onto a wall over a second platform, displaying various excerpts of a volcanic eruption.

Three monitors positioned vertically broadcast the videos *May Windows* (1976), *Good Night Good Morning* (1976) and *Car Tape* (1976). The subject of *May Windows* is the window of a loft in New York where the artist lives. Through a series of superimposed images, the video describes the luminous passage from darkness into daylight. The sound, which was recorded live, is characterized by noises and the off-screen voices of Joan Jonas and the artist James Nares as they whisper incomprehensible

sentences through the cones. The room accentuates the reverberation of the sounds emitted, each of which has a different intensity and length, in turn overlapped with dogs yelping in the street down below the building.

Intended to be viewed vertically, *Good Night Good Morning* is made up of numerous recordings of the artist's face as she says «goodnight» before going to sleep, and «good morning» just after she has woken up, staring directly into the video camera from a variety of different contexts and environments. *Car Tape* is a video shot from the front seat of a car moving along a narrow road. The horizontal roll on the monitor creates a flashing illusion of the landscape.

In *Mirage*, film and video coexist, a practice that was quite unusual in the 1970s, a period when experimentation with the two different media was still markedly separate and distinct. Jonas's choice is representative of her pioneering approach to creating art through the use of these two technologies, which allowed her to bring to life a deceptive interplay of improvised speeds and timing, illusory passages and repetitions, based on their respective characteristics of definition (film) and the possibilities provided by live recording (video).

## **7** *After Mirage* (1976/2011)

Multimedia installation

This installation was first presented as a performance conducted by Joan Jonas together with the artist James Nares in 1976 at 112 Greene Street in Soho, New York City. In *After Mirage*, produced