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Joan Jonas

"It's the shamanistic idea—the performer goes through the actions so that the audience can experience them also.... It takes you into a space that you wouldn't otherwise be in."

## View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.



*The most obvious thing to ask you is about the etching, to start with. Have you ever made visual work like that before?*

I went to art school; my background was--

*But, I mean recently?*

Yes. I do a lot of drawing. I use drawing in my work a lot, in my performance. And I draw a lot, just by myself.

*Have you ever made any separately, for sale?*

No, not yet. No, I haven't sold them. I thought about it. But in order to sell drawings, you have to show them, and I never had a group of--I never really developed that aspect of my work enough so that I felt I could show it, you know, have a show.

Yes.

Whereas, now, doing these etchings is kind of like presenting that work in a certain form that can be shown--that's the way I see it. I mean, it can be seen as something in itself, instead of as part of--my performance.

*Yes, right. So--were you hesitant when Kathan asked you to come, or did you know--feel that you were ready to do it?*

I was ready.

*Yes. Did you know what you would do when you came here?*

Yes, I did. Because I had five drawings--they're from the chalk drawings from a performance that I did in 1976, called *Mirage*.

Yes.

It was a series of drawings, and--it interested me to do the white image on the--I thought of it first as a chalk drawing, but then it became a negative image, you know, on the ground. So, it interested me to do that.

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*In the group of etchings, there's that image of the sun, and there's--*

That's an old image I've been using for a long time, actually. The sun image.

*With the double--circle.*

Yes, usually I erase that so it looks more like a new moon. But I left that circle this time.

*Yes. And then there's a--it looks like a rainbow, sort of.*

A rainbow. I thought of it as a rainbow, but now--people seem to see other things in it, which is interesting.

*I see--a music sheet, you know, also.*

A crude music sheet.

Yes.

Somebody just told me that it looked like tire tracks. Which I like, also.

*One very striking image is the one that looks like a bull's head, in a way--with the horns coming out. And then there's another one which looks like--branches coming together, or sticks, which you would build a fire with, almost.*

Well, actually, the bull's head is a heart.

*It's a heart?*

Yes. But also I like the double reading of that, too, because--it does look like a bull's head and it looks like--somebody said a bug, once, with--

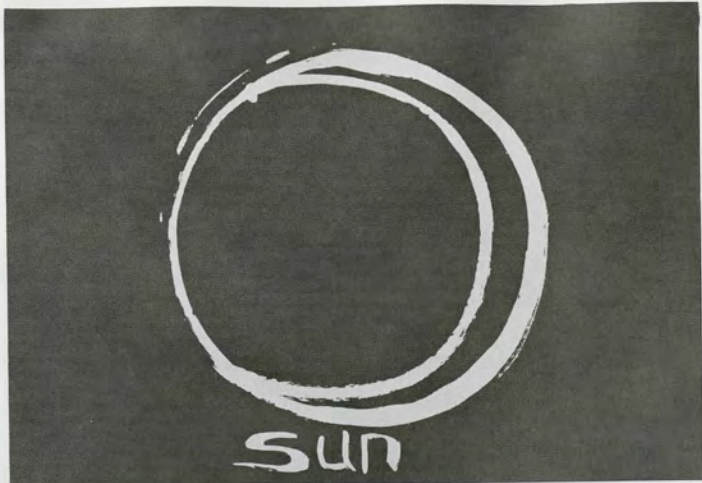
*Yes, with antennae. I thought they were horns.*

Yes--well, it does look like--in my performance, when I draw it, it can be read as the devil. But it's originally a heart. And the other thing is an image from Leonardo, one of his drawings--of rays, reflecting in a concave mirror, I think.

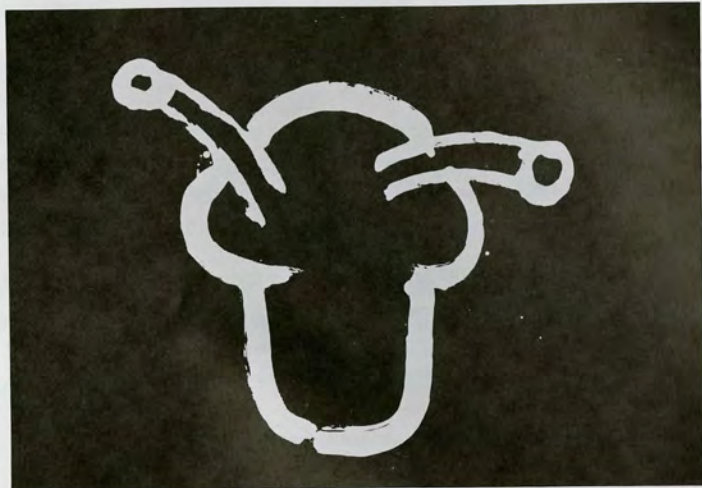
*Oh. And--the very large etching, with the orange and blue double lines, is completely separate?*

Yes. That's just a drawing I've been working on for a few





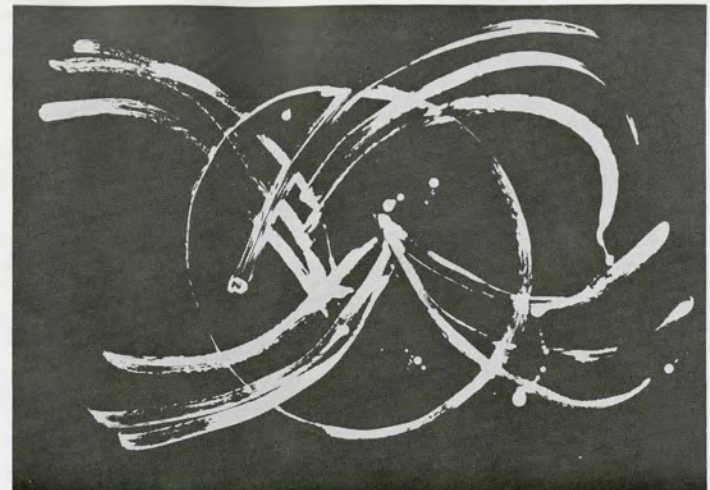
Sun



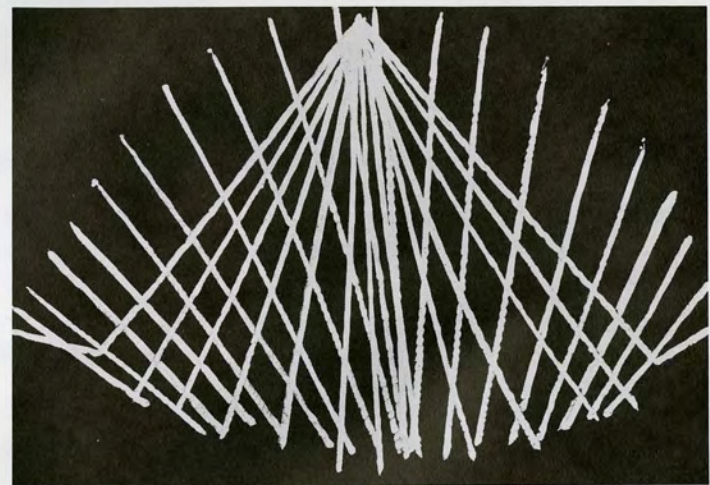
Heart



Rainbow



Hurricane



Reflection



years, and I used the landscape part of it in *The Juniper Tree*, as a backdrop.

*You must have drawn these thousands of times. One of the printers told me that you drew each drawing over and over and over again until something clicked, until you thought it was right.*

Yes.

*So, it's a combination of spontaneity and something that's very studied and precise.*

Yes. At least insofar as it comes out of practice, I guess. It's funny, I don't necessarily always draw like that, but it just--I think I got into the habit of doing that kind of drawing in this recent performance, *The Juniper Tree*.

*The actual activity of drawing is a very important part of all your performances?*

Yes. Ever since the early ones, I used drawing. Not always, but, for sure, since the first video piece.

Yes.

In *Organic Honey* I used drawings. I called them "Drawings for the Monitor". I drew while looking at the monitor instead of at what I was drawing.

*In the workshop that you taught recently you asked everyone to paint something while they were laughing, or while they were having an argument. Was that because laughing or talking preoccupies your conscious mind so that the other part of you is free to do something else?*

Yes, right.

*How did you come to this?*

Drawing something in performance in front of an audience is about the same process. If you're concentrating on the performance, you can't worry about what the drawing's going to look like. You just make the drawing. But, somehow, a lot of strange things have come out, a release of partly unconscious archetypal images. These have surprised me, and I could never duplicate them, and I think that they were only there because I was in the performance.

*These drawings--the sun, you say, you've worked with for a long time, and the heart, and the rainbow. Do they have specific meanings, for you, in the context of each performance? And do these meanings accumulate?*

Yes. The sun represented--when I first did it, it was like an alchemical sign. That's why I have the sun and the moon together, the opposites, ambiguity. And then--let's see now--the heart. I wanted to put a heart in my last piece. The fact that a sign is its opposite and that an image can represent different things enriches my vocabulary.

Yes.

And--the rainbow, I'm not sure how I got that. But it has something to do with weather changes, and day and night, and--that circle with the lines coming out of it is a symbol of the hurricane.

*Oh, really?*

Yes. And then, the other drawing--I was using cones at the time, I think that's why I included the drawing of the mirror reflection. I was looking for things that related to cones, that form. And they all end up having something to do with energy, each one of those things has--

*Natural energy.*

Yes. So now I think of them as something together, to be read--to me they're kind of like a visual language.

*In the large etching, which is very different, there's a childlike quality. It's like a fairy tale; there is a landscape and then there are these little--things that could be huts, or, plants--and this face of a dog. Is it actually a dog, or a wolf? I thought it was a wolf.*

Well, it could be a wolf. It's a dog's head, but it doesn't really matter. Probably it's better if it's a wolf. A wolf is a wild animal. It's out in the desert someplace. I didn't want it to be specifically a dog. It's something more primitive, maybe it's the Animal Helper.

*You don't object to the word primitive?*

No. I like the word primitive. But I don't do primitive things on purpose, it's just that they come out that way. I



think it's because they--they're naive, in a certain way.

*Well, I think it's because you're trying to go deeper into something. And the deeper you go into the layers of things, I think, the more you get rid of the sophistication and the complication, the refined quality. What you do reflects the amount of energy that you put into it. When I saw Mirage, at Documenta, you were generating such energy, in spite of the heat, and the lights, and the people walking in and out. You were like a hurricane on stage! And there was a kind of hauntingness, too. You were running back and forth, from one place to another, picking up one prop--leaving it--picking up another one. Is The Juniper Tree like that? Or, are most of the things you do more calm?*

You saw one of my most agitated performances. Usually they're more calm than that one--that was really an unusual situation. In *The Juniper Tree* I do a lot of things, but hopefully they're done in a controlled way. Not overly controlled, but a way that conveys an ease with the material. I don't like to be rushing from one thing to another, although things do whiz by sometimes. But I always put a lot of details in my work, so that it seems very--full of--well, crowded in a certain sense.

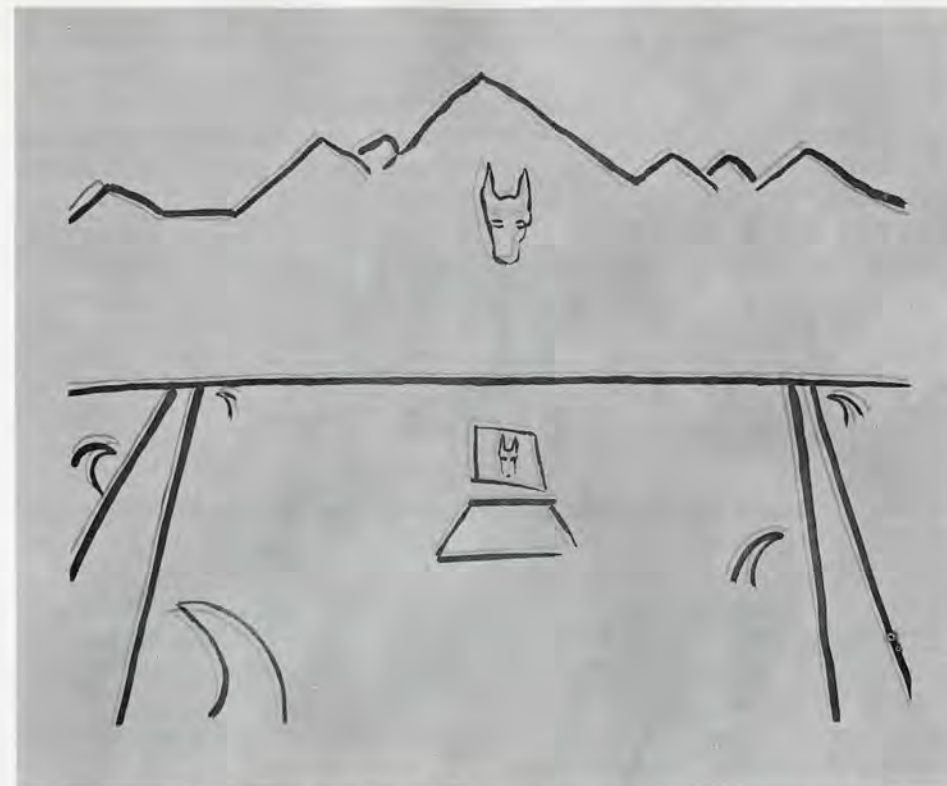
*Yes! And as soon as you get into things like "primitive", then you start to deal with things like ritual, too. It seemed to me that in Mirage, you were presenting certain private rituals.*

I guess that it's sort of like play, you know, you feel that you're watching somebody playing? Maybe that's why it seems private. To start with an object, and to play with it is very childlike in a certain sense. It's just my natural style, it's very hard for me to be intellectual about it. I'm just trying to think why people have always said my work looks like ritual. I think that in the beginning my sources were literary. I read books like *The Golden Bough*, and also anthropological books about primitive rites.... At the time I was reading *The Golden Bough* I remember I was reading also about the Australian aborigines.

*When was that?*

It was about seven years ago. Also I read a book called *Spiritual Disciplines*, a collection of essays. I got some ideas from that, some drawings, "The Endless Drawings".

*That's very interesting.*



*Spring Mountain, 1979. Sugar aquatint, image size 45 x 36", paper size 52 x 42". Published by Crown Point Press.*

Films have influenced me also. I remember especially Maya Deren's footage shot in Haiti. She made a film of a man making a sand drawing. It interested me a great deal. He repeated the gesture over and over. It was like watching somebody do something that's very private, you know, to watch somebody draw. And--I think drawing is a ritual, in a certain sense. I like to draw, I find it very--soothing. In making my film of drawing on the blackboard and erasing, I was inspired by Maya Deren.

*Drawing is totally personal, like writing your signature.*

Even though my drawings are full of--they're kind of aggressive looking, they are really close to the way the Japanese draw--what do you call that drawing?

*Calligraphy.*

Yes, calligraphy. It's some kind of meditation, to make a certain kind of drawing. Because you have to do it in a



certain--mood, or frame of mind. You get to that by making a lot of ones before that, getting rid of extraneous tightness in your body so you can move your arm.

*Yes, yes. So, you were reading about anthropology and primitive societies, and that's very close to getting into fairy tales.*

Perhaps, in a way. But the original impetus was a commission to do a piece for children in Philadelphia, at the Institute for Contemporary Art.

*Oh, in 1976? That's when you first did The Juniper Tree?*

Yes.

*How was using a fairy tale different from using your own material completely?*

I found that overall my work came out the same way; some things were different, but the images have a similar quality. I mean, they're all archetypal images, as much so out of this fairy tale as before, when I was kind of grasping in the dark. And although I am still out in chaos it interests me to have a source, a definite source.

*Would you tell me what the fairy tale's about?*

*The Juniper Tree?* You haven't read it? Well, it's a--a family drama. It starts out with a man and a woman, who love each other very much but they don't have any children. The woman is standing under the juniper tree, and she cuts her finger, and all of a sudden she thinks that she's going to have a child. And when she has a son, it's "red as blood, and white as snow"--and--

*It's what?*

As red as blood and as white as snow. Everything relates to that in the piece. The woman is so happy that she dies. And the man takes a second wife, and they have a daughter. The stepmother resents the little boy, and eventually she kills him and makes him into black pudding. She cooks the little boy, and--serves him to the father, who comes home for dinner--

*Oh!*

Saying, "Where's my son?"--the father has no idea what happened. So, then, the father eats; the daughter's weeping, the

father's eating, and he finishes the entire pudding, and then throws all the bones under the table. The daughter gathers the bones together, and takes them out under the juniper tree. And the juniper tree stirs itself, and a fire shoots up and a beautiful bird flies out from the tree, and the bones disappear. And then the bird goes to three different craftsmen, a goldsmith, a shoemaker and a miller, and he gets three objects. The father hears the bird singing, and he goes out under the tree, and the bird gives him a golden chain, puts it around his neck--and then the daughter goes out, and the bird gives her a pair of red shoes, and then the stepmother goes out thinking that the bird will have something for her, and he drops a millstone on her head, and she's--killed. And then the bird turns into a boy and then they go in the house and they eat.

*You said a moment ago that you have been dealing with archetypal images. Can you be specific?*

Well, I've talked about this with my friends but I've never tried to articulate it before in public, so it's pretty difficult.

*That's okay.*

For example, the ladder I use in *The Juniper Tree* is the tree, and it represents a passage from earth to the sky.

*And the tree can also be the tree of life.*

Yes, and my climbing up and down the ladder/tree represents going through changes. In *Organic Honey* I wanted to create the idea of a magic show where the woman would be the transformer, or the one who is transformed. It's the shamanistic idea--the performer goes through the actions so that the audience can experience them also. The *Organic Honey* characters were a series of becomings, you could say. The dog represents instinct, or the Animal Helper, the force that drives one through obstacles. Also, it's involved with opposites.

*Yes.*

In *Mirage* I was attempting to integrate opposites. For instance, stepping through the hoop is a metaphor--

*Represents a rite of passage?*

The "Endless Drawing" is a rite of passage.



*So the performances represent, in a way, symbolic rites of passage in your own life?*

Yes. For instance in *Mirage*, there was a dance done on a gridpattern--I called it Demon Dance--driving out the demons by striking the squares with a stick as I jumped from one square to the other. In *The Juniper Tree* all the images are made much more specific. The heart represents the way of the heart as opposed to the way of the warrior, to begin with.

*The right way.*

But the heart image represents the devil in this story, as well, because I wanted the image to stand for the thing and its opposite, evil. Now the women in the story--there's the good woman and the bad woman, and the bad woman really takes over. I thought of her as the devouring female. I was interested in playing that archetype; it was a kind of blood-letting. It takes you into a space that you wouldn't otherwise be in.

*Wouldn't let yourself be in. Playing the role allows you to feel what the character is feeling.*

The thing about that story is that it's really a resurrection myth. Wouldn't you agree?

*Yes, definitely.*

And I die twice in the story--

*Because you play both women. And also, it is the resurrection of the little boy--*

Who must die and who is reborn. It also symbolizes for him the rites of passage into the next stage of growing up. In mythology, the women are the healers, the transformers, and the men are always the heroes. So I really thought of the women as the ones who bring new life forth. For example in this story it is the sister who gathers the brother's bones and puts them under the tree. In *The Frog Prince*, the girl lifts the spell from the boy by throwing the frog against the wall. In *The Boy Who Went Out to Learn About Fear*, it's the wife who finally teaches the boy by throwing water on him.

*Right, I remember, she wakes him up with a bucket of cold water. Well, why did you choose to do The Juniper Tree? Why is it special?*



*The Juniper Tree, 1979. Performance at The Whitechapel Gallery, London. Photo: Boyd Webb.*

For several reasons. I didn't want to choose one of the well-known ones. And, I liked this because it wasn't about a prince and a princess--it was about a family--a mother and a father and a son and a daughter. And also, I liked the epic quality of it.

*And it's a tragedy.*

Yes, it is. It really is a tragedy, it seems ancient. A lot of fairy tales are bloody, but that's one of the more brutal ones. This story's a little bit over-balanced on the brutal side. But, when you take all the bad stuff out of the fairy tales, they lose their meaning. Then they have no more substance.

*Is it the same performance that you did for children, that you do for grownups?*

No. No, it's very different. In my first version, that I did for children, I didn't illustrate any of the--gory parts, but I didn't leave them out, because in all the versions I used reading from the original text. Somebody was sitting and reading the story simultaneously with the action--later, the story was on tape. I did enact the grisly parts in the later versions. And also at first I used a lot of my old



props, and it was visually very similar to my other work.

*Like the cones that resemble a dunce cap or a megaphone?*

All those images, yes. I had a ladder, and all those cones, and a table. And then I started working with other people, and we did a collaboration, more or less. And they almost forced me to get into the difficult parts. I was actually very disturbed by that story for at least a year. And then I got beyond being disturbed. When I represented the story through my own imagery, when I was somehow able to pull out some image that represented the story for me, then I sort of went beyond. Because of being a performer, and not an actress, I didn't know how not to identify. So, I identified with the story. But finally I stopped identifying with the story; I was able to--have more distance on it, you know. It didn't disturb me anymore. The piece that I do now is not at all like the piece I did at first, at *The Kitchen*; maybe it is more theatrical. It is dealing with language a bit more, I think.

*Perhaps this one had to become more theatrical because there's a plot. I mean, in *Mirage* there wasn't really a plot, you know?*

No, *Mirage* never had a plot form.

*That's an interesting distinction that you made between being an actress, and being a performer. You said, I think, that *The Juniper Tree* has evolved from being more of a performance to being more theatrical. Does that have to do with obvious things like plot?*

It has more to do with the approach to playing character, I think. People in the theatre, more conservative, wouldn't think I have anything to do with acting at all. I perform tasks, and play with objects that have symbolic reference to the story, and I do it as a symbolic character instead of as a neutral performer. Sometimes I change character with masks, or there is only just a hint of an alter ego or a changing character.

*Well, if there is change, it is symbolic change.*

Yes.

*Do you think that you might start writing your own fairy tales? Did you write *Mirage*? There is a script for *Organic Honey*, isn't there, and also a script for *Mirage*?*

I made those after I did the performances. Sometimes I write one down because someone will ask me to publish it. Actually the only ones I've written full scripts of are the ones that I've published.

*So, now that they are published, do you think other people will be interested to make performances of them?*

I don't know. I've never heard of anyone doing that. I can't imagine anyone else doing one of the pieces. But I suppose they could at some point--it would be odd.

*Would you say there's a difference in the way that objects are used in theatre and in performance?*

Well, the objects I use are not literal adaptations of the elements in the story but they are symbolic of some archetype; they are metaphors, they are really the archetypal element.

*You seem to use some objects over and over again.*

Yes, I use balls, for instance, so I can push them around the floor in a geometry. I got that idea from reading Zimmer, I think. The magic ball that you follow to the source. And in *The Juniper Tree* I put extra things in there that were references to fairy tales and myth in general, so that the activity would characterize a fairy tale, and suggest a wider context than just *The Juniper Tree*.

*But I was thinking of the cones, for example. They're not in this latest version.*

No. I used those for ages and just stopped using them.

*It looks like, on the surface, a very big switch. Is it?*

Well, it's a new area because I'm using a narrative, and speaking, and trying to depict a character, and I have to think about time in a different way because of having a more definite structure set up. Actually, what I am doing now is structuring my pieces much more. I had to figure out how to use a narrative. In *The Juniper Tree* I didn't change the narrative at all, I just told the whole thing verbatim, but interrupted it with inserts that were words, songs, actions that augmented the narrative or emphasized an aspect of it.

*We've been hearing a lot about the new image painting and that whole trend toward representation. I just wondered if*



*you felt that you are in any way related to that?*

I have always considered my work to be about images. Initially, I was very influenced by Imagist poetry: Ezra Pound's way of describing imagist work, how images create a metaphor. That's the way I started out, and that's always been the way I've worked.

*But, unlike painting, your work creates a three dimensional image.*

I guess so. It's like three dimensional poetry.

*And the fourth dimension, time, too, I suppose?*

Yes--at first my time was linear; one thing after another like film, now there are more layers so that while going forward, it also gets thick.

*Does The Juniper Tree include video?*

No. Just a sound tape. I wanted to do a piece without video. This is the first piece I've done indoors without video since 1971.

*Are you getting tired of using it?*

No, not exactly. I used it in several different ways, and sometimes you just can't go on using things. It seemed like I was depending on it, on a certain kind of technology.

*When I saw Mirage, I was struck by the juxtaposition between all the primitive material in it and the TV screen. But the video wasn't an element that took precedence over other elements. The work was not a collage, but a composition, composed of elements that are moving: video, drawing, sound, actions, color, whatever.*

Theatre comes into that also--using theatrical devices. I used the idea of video as I use everything else. All those fragments in there, from different sources, back and forth. Magic shows, also, they were a big influence on me as a child.

*So a viewer gets information in lots of different ways when watching a performance. But you didn't mind concentrating on one specific thing when you were asked to make the etchings.*

No, I found it relaxing. I loved it. It was a relief. It made me think that I really should do more drawing. Concen-

Photo: Roberta Neiman.



*Mirage, 1976. Performance at the I.C.A., Philadelphia.*

trate on my drawing a little bit more. I want to find a way to get drawing into my performances more.

*But why can't you just make it separate?*

Well, I can, but I find it's hard to know what to draw, or why to draw, something like that. If it comes out in performances there's a reason. I can't just draw images out of thin air. That landscape piece, the one the large etching is based on, was something I used as a curtain in *The Juniper Tree*, in an earlier version. I took a slide that I had taken in the Southwest, and I copied it. It was just a road going through the desert and the mountains. I changed it from the slide. But that work did come out of the performance. That gives the drawing another dimension.

*I see a parallel between that etching and the work that you've been doing, especially when you were working quite a lot with video. When you were beginning, I think you were very concerned with the idea of space, the way that people perceive things, depending on their point of view. And also the way that, on a television screen, things that exist three dimensionally become totally flattened out. Now this image, a landscape from the Southwest, has a vast sense of space in it. It suggests huge, three dimensionality, but at the same time*



*it's completely flat. And I recognize your interest in combining two dimensional space and three dimensional space. And the etching also incorporates the symbol of the little wolf or dog, and there are some of the other symbols on the side: new moon, or whatever the crescent shape is. So I think it is a very expressive image for all those reasons.*

Yes, you are right, it is a combination of all those things, but it really wasn't intended. I had a table and a window with the image on the window. So the floating image is from that. I thought of it as a reflection. But the way you are talking about it makes a lot of sense. All of these things are not conscious when you are doing them and I know they are all parts of earlier work.

*Like the dog image.*

Yes. And I am interested in that kind of optical switching. I really got away from dealing with space. I've recently been less interested in space than I was in what was going on in the space. I am going to use the idea of the double line in my next piece. I want to get back into the other thing.

*You do?*

Yes. In *The Juniper Tree*, I had to concentrate on a narrative. But now I'd like to get back to some ideas of visual perception. Because I think that one of the most interesting things about dealing with--you know, the theatre situation, or the performance situation, is what the audience sees, when they see it.

Yes.

In *The Juniper Tree* there was a lot to see. It was--based on a kind of luring, and--

*Luring.*

Yes. The sets. A lot of imagery. But not so much concern with space. The way I like to deal with space is for it to be an ambiguous situation, where the audience is seeing something in a way that's strange to them. *The Juniper Tree* was about this kind of picture-making, you know? But not altering the space--I mean, it's very hard to say this, but I was making stage sets, and doing something with the lighting--that's what I'm most interested in now, is really the lighting--how the lighting changes the space and mood. I used those screens to reflect the light and also to see through.

Yes.

But, anyway, this large etching, the idea of that drawing, is interesting because it's another way of getting back into a kind of ambiguous optical concern. And also, in a way, those two lines in the drawing represent the story, and what I'm doing next to it. Because in parts of the piece, I do things that seem to represent different states of mind, depending on who's interpreting the story.

Yes.

Sometimes they're close together, and sometimes they're--

Yes--

Not close together. But people who have seen the piece have told me that sometimes they have to concentrate on two things at once. I do this complicated, this mathematical thing in the middle of one of the scenes. It's actually very simple, but you have to sort of follow it in order to know what I'm thinking about doing--while you're listening to the story, so if you haven't heard the story, it's hard to do the two things at the same time. People have told me that sometimes they got away from the story because they were getting into what I was doing.

Yes.

Or, they couldn't follow what I was doing because they were trying to follow the story. I like the--several things going on at once.

*Yes, that's been an element in everything you've done--I mean, from what I've read, even in the pieces that you did on the beach, there were always people doing different things simultaneously. In the indoor pieces there was always the video and you could watch the video, as a kind of detailing, or particularizing of something that was going on, and you could watch both things at the same time. That amplifies your perception.*

The video was like an ongoing mirror that added another layer of images.

*You pile on lots of layers, for people to pay attention to, and at the same time, while you're building up these layers, you're also getting rid of some other layers. I mean, we talked earlier about the drawings and how primitive they are,*



*and I think this implies pulling off layers and going back to a very simple, most basic, structure.*

So each part of the layer, each layer, whatever it is, represents, maybe, a kind of simple concept. But there's so many of them together that it becomes complicated.

*Yes. Would you say that you're not really interested in yourself as a subject matter anymore?*

No, actually I'm not. I did a tape once where I used myself, and I don't think I want to do it again.

*Is it too--exposed, or is it just not necessary, or--?*

No, the reason I don't want to do that is because I don't want to get into this whole thing where everybody's expressing themselves. The word "personal" is used too much, and people get confused about what they're seeing, you know; they think it's you, or they think it's something that is about you specifically. People have interpreted *The Juniper Tree*, why I did it, and everybody has a different viewpoint. But, really, no one knows why--my real connection to it--because I haven't told anybody. I don't like all that autobiographical connection. It's too myopic.

*I know that that's something that you've been accused of.*

What? That I--

*That your work is very autobiographical.*

Which one?

*I suppose it was Organic Honey.*

Oh. Actually, that one was, in a certain sense. I used objects my grandmother gave me--painted fans, knitted dolls, and then my dog whose image was in the piece, chewed them up and they were gone and I was the dog. It's interesting, like a Rorschach test, but who is going to read it, and interpret it, and why bother? I hope that the work had psychological content available through its formal elements: video, sound, image conjuring. I was a piece of material like the mirror or the monitor.

*How did you--you said that you began to be interested in dance, because the process of drawing and making sculpture was very like, or very connected to, the process of dance.*

*And theatre and dance--and drawing and sculpture--are all ways to approach the work that you're doing now. I wondered if you ever had studied any other kind of theatre, any primitive theatre, or Balinese or Japanese theatre?*

Well, I went to Japan in 1970. And I saw a lot of Noh theatre and a lot of Kabuki theatre and it made a huge impression on me. And then I saw a lot of Jack Smith's early pieces.

Yes.

That was very impressive.

*And, earlier, you were impressed by the dance activity at the Judson Church.*

Yes, the end of the Judson Church period, and some Oldenburg pieces from "Store Days".

*Which was about--'68, '67?*

Yes. 1967.

*And before that time you had been working making sculpture? And then you became very interested to work with movement?*

Well, yes, movement and objects. I was interested that people could use objects and sculptural elements as part of performance. I think that's what attracted me to it. I'd never been a dancer, or studied dance--but I was very athletic. Also just after I became interested in performance I was studying the Minoan mother goddess and Minoan imagery, and I went to Crete because of my interest in mythology. From looking at those sculptures I began thinking, maybe instead of making static figures I could have figures moving around in space.

*Did you study art history?*

I majored in art history, and I studied a lot of sculpture. I never studied painting. But I'd been looking at paintings all my life, you know?

Yes.

Looking at the space of paintings, really. How painters create illusions and how they deal with a framed space, that stays in the frame, and with depth and distance. And also, films, how people deal with space. So that's how it started.



And it seemed that that was what I should be thinking about, putting something into a space. When I first started doing pieces I used to just go to the space and look at it. The way I got an idea for the piece would be to just look at the space, until my vision blurred.

*Trying to perceive it.*

Yes. How it looks to an audience. What they're looking at. But then I, you know, then I got interested in the ambiguities of space, illusions about space.

*And video.*

Well, video came later, but yes, video.

*You have made video tapes, then, that are not part of the performances, but that are actually independent?*

Yes. A few. But performance and tape--the two fed into each other.

*And you've made films, too?*

A couple of films.

*How did you come to use masks? Is that from the Kabuki and the Noh theatre, too?*

Not entirely. Maybe. Earlier I was influenced by a filmmaker, Franju, who used little black masks. In doing a solo piece, taking on different disguises and personae, wearing different costumes, the mask is just a natural.

*I see.*

So I do put myself into a certain kind of a--the masks, I create certain moods, you know?

*In the piece that you'll be working on when you go home, you will be using two different fairy tales--one is The Frog Prince and the other is The Boy Who Went Out to Learn About Fear. Is that one of the archetypal situations that interests you? Fear?*

The minute you start doing fairy tales--fairy tales are, in part, about fears, I think. People keep telling me which fairy tales scared them the most; that comes up a lot in conversation. And the idea that one is afraid of a fairy tale,

or afraid of what happens--fear--comes up in a lot of different ways. It interests me. So, these two fairy tales--*The Frog Prince* and *The Boy Who Went Out To Learn About Fear*--are about certain kinds of fear. And I think fear is part of your life, you know, it's sort of a necessary thing.

*Do you think that people learn from watching The Juniper Tree, for example? Do people come away with something to think about?*

I think every artist would always like the audience to either learn or experience something that will change their lives in some way. So, that's what I could say that I would like, to do something that would somehow alter people's experience of what they in future would be seeing. If I could do something in a certain way, and it alters someone's experience of the world, then that's all I could ask for. And I don't know how--I'm not sure--

*How that works.*

I mean, I'm not trying to teach anybody anything, although I think these stories are fragments of archaic teaching stories, but that's not my purpose, really. I do think that it's interesting to expose the material in fairy tales. It opens up a new area for people.

*Did the Grimm brothers write all their fairy tales?*

No. They just collected them.

*And, are they mostly from Germany?*

I think these fairy tales are. They're from Kassel. They got a lot of fairy tales from one woman who lived right near Kassel. All fairy tales were passed on like that, mostly by women.

*Until they wrote them down. And that was in the 19th century?*

Yes. They all came from various ancient sources, you know, handed down over the years.

*So, actually it's a tradition that you're picking up on--*

Yes.

\* \* \*



# Joan Jonas

Born, New York 1936.

Lives and works in New York City.

## SOLO CONCERTS & EXHIBITIONS (Indoor)

- 1968 *Oad Lau*, St. Peter's Church, New York  
1970 *Underneath*, Alan Saret's loft, New York  
*Mirror Piece*, 14th Street YMCA, New York  
*Mirror Piece*, University of California at San Diego  
1971 *Choreomania*, Loeb Centre, New York University, New York  
1972 *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, Lo Giudice Gallery, New York  
*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, Galleria L'Attico, Rome  
*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, Ace Gallery, Los Angeles  
*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, Documenta V, Kassel, Germany  
*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco  
1973 *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York  
*Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Festival d' Automne, Musee Galliera, Paris  
*Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Galleria Toselli, Milan  
1974 *Funnel*, The Kitchen, New York  
*Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, The Boston Museum, Boston  
*Funnel*, Project '74, Kunsthalle, Koln, Germany  
*Funnel*, Contemporanea, Rome  
*Funnel*, Texas Gallery, Houston  
*Funnel*, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis  
1975 *Twilight*, Anthology Film Archives, New York  
*Twilight*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
*Native Dance*, And/Or, Seattle, Washington  
1976 *Native Dance*, San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco  
*Mirage*, Anthology Film Archives, New York  
*The Juniper Tree*, A Performance for Children, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia  
1977 *Mirage*, Vanguard Theatre, Los Angeles  
*Mirage*, Documental VI, Kassel, Germany  
*Mirage*, Rome  
*Mirage*, Salle Patino, Geneva  
*Mirage*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel  
*The Juniper Tree*, The Kitchen, New York  
*The Juniper Tree*, St. Mark's Church, New York  
1978 *The Juniper Tree*, Vienna Performance Festival, Vienna  
*The Juniper Tree*, 112 Mercer Street, New York  
1979 *The Juniper Tree*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven  
*The Juniper Tree*, Whitechapel Gallery, London  
*The Juniper Tree*, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco

## SOLO CONCERTS (Outdoor)

- 1970 *Jones Beach Piece*, Jones Beach, Long Island, New York  
1971 *Night Piece*, University of California at Irvine  
*Beach Piece II*, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada  
1972 *Delay, Delay*, a work performed on the side of the Tiber River and viewed by the audience on the opposite shore, sponsored by Galleria l'Attico, Rome  
*Delay, Delay*, a work on a 360 yard long field, Documenta V, Kassel, Germany  
1974 *Crepusculo*, a night piece in a garden, Galerie Schema, Florence

## INSTALLATIONS

- 1976 *Stagesets*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia  
1977 *Drawing Room*, School of Visual Arts, New York  
*Three Tales*, Documenta VI, Kassel, Germany  
1979 *The Juniper Tree*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven  
*The Juniper Tree*, The Whitechapel Gallery, London  
*Upside Down and Backwards*, Sonnabend Gallery, New York

## FILMS

- Wind*, 1968  
*Paul Revere*, 1971 (with Richard Serra)  
*Veil*, 1971  
*Songdelay*, 1973

## VIDEO TAPES

- Left Side Right Side*, 1972  
*Vertical Roll*, 1972  
*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, 1972  
*Two Women*, 1973  
*Barking*, 1973  
*Three Returns*, 1973  
*Glass Puzzle*, 1974  
*Merlo*, 1974  
*Pool*, 1974  
*Good Night Good Morning*, 1976  
*I Want to Live in the Country (And Other Romances)*, 1977-78