

Five Works: Joan Jonas

December 14, 2003 - March 14, 2004

Opening Reception: Sunday, December 14, 2003 3:00-6:00 pm

The **Queens Museum of Art** presents *Five Works: Joan Jonas*, the first survey of the American artist Joan Jonas's work in a New York museum. The exhibition includes the artist's most significant installations, a video room, and a survey of Jonas' drawings, photographs, sketchbooks and props. Curated by the Queens Museum Art's Director of Exhibitions Valerie Smith, the show brings together early and late works from Jonas's career including *The Juniper Tree* (1976), *Volcano Saga* (1985), *Revolted by the Thought of Known Places...Sweeney Astray* (1992), and *Lines in the Sand* (2002). This selection includes her portable *My New Theater* series (1997-1999) and *Lines in the Sand* (2002), which she will perform at The Kitchen in February. ***Five Works: Joan Jonas* will be on view December 14, 2003 – March 14, 2004.**

Joan Jonas (b. 1936) is one of the most important women artists to emerge from the late 1960s and 1970s. Supported by adherents to Minimalism and Conceptual Art, she moved from that aesthetic as a sculptor into what was then considered new territory – mixing performance with props and mediated images, situated outdoors in natural or industrial environments. In her early works, such as *Wind* (1968), Jonas filmed performers stiffly passing through the field of view against a wind that lent the choreography a psychological mystique. *SongDelay* (1973), an adapted performance filmed with telephoto and wide-angle lenses, drew on Jonas' recent travel in Japan where she saw groups of performers clapping wood blocks and making angular movements like Noh and Butoh dancers.

Jonas' video performances between 1972 and 1976 pared the cast to one actor, the artist herself performing in her New York loft as Organic Honey, her seminal alter-ego invented as an "electronic erotic seductress" seen reflected bits on camera explored the fragmented female image and women's shifting roles. Drawings, costumes, masks, and interactions with the recorded image were effects that optically related to a doubling of

perception and meaning in the work. For Jonas, the mirror became a symbol of (self-) portraiture, representation, the body, real vs. imaginary.

In 1976 with *The Juniper Tree*, Jonas arrived at a narrative structure from diverse literary sources, such as fairy tales, mythology, poetry, and folk songs, formalizing a highly complex, nonlinear method of presentation. Using a colorful theatrical set and recorded sound, *The Juniper Tree*, a Grimm Brothers fairy tale of an archetypal evil step mother and her family. *Volcano Saga* (1985), a surreal video performance set live professional actors in manmade hot springs against animated images of volcano images in a discussion of the origin of the fishing net, which according to an Icelandic myth, was invented by a woman. In the 1990s, Jonas' *My New Theater* series moved away from a dependence on her physical presence. The three pieces investigate, in sequence: a Cape Breton dancer and his local culture; a dog jumping through a hoop while Jonas draws a landscape; and finally, using stones, costumes, memory-laden objects, and her dog, a video about the act of performing.

In her installation/performance commissioned for Documenta 11, *Lines in the Sand* (2002), Jonas returned to writer H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and the female archetype explored in her poem "Helen in Egypt" (1951-55), which reworks the myth of Helen of Troy to Egypt. The non-commercial aspect of Jonas' investigation into film and video, and her early rejection of traditional theater and dance, framed Jonas in a city (New York) and an art world driven by trends and market economies. While Jonas is widely known in Europe, her groundbreaking performances are lesser known in the United States, where her installations were first performed for some of the most influential artists of her generation; as critic Douglas Crimp wrote of her work in 1983, "the rupture that is effected in modernist practices has subsequently been repressed, smoothed over." Her own work continues to evolve, finding new layers of meaning in themes and questions identity that fueled her art for over thirty years.

Biography

Joan Jonas was born in 1936 in New York, where she currently lives and works. She received a B.A. in Art History from Mount Holyoke College, Mount Holyoke, MA

(1958), studied sculpture at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts from 1958-1961, and received an M.F.A. in Sculpture from Columbia University, New York, in 1965. In the late 1960s, Jonas danced with Tricia Brown, Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer and others, and later acted with the Wooster Group. She has taught at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, since 2000. Her first performance retrospective was at the University Art Museum, Berkeley (1980) (Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, 1981). She has exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Institute of the Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; The Kitchen, New York, and Pat Hearn Gallery, New York. Jonas has had major retrospectives at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1994), and Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany (2000), and was represented in Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany (2002)

Catalogue

A 160-page catalogue on Jonas's work is being published by the Queens Museum of Art on the occasion of *Five Works: Joan Jonas* at the Queens Museum of Art. The book contains a conversation with Jonas, poet Susan Howe, and writer Jeanne Heuving, as well as essays by Carlos Amorales, DJ Spooky, Sung Kim, Astrid Klein, John Miller, and Marina Warner. The monograph *Joan Jonas: Works 1968-2000* (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000) will be available in the museum shop.

Funding

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