

Constance DeJong interviewed by Kristin Poor, December 11, 2019

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Kristin Poor: Today is December 11, 2019. My name is Kristin Poor, and I'm here with Constance DeJong. We are going to talk about Joan Jonas for the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. Thank you so much for doing this.

Constance DeJong: It's really a pleasure. I'm glad to be doing it.

Kristin Poor: Let's start with how you met Joan.

Constance DeJong: Not sure. I don't remember the initial handshake. The world was a bit smaller than it is now in terms of an art community. I lived in SoHo as did she, as did many artists, which is a little unbelievable in 2019 for people coming in. Anyway, the world was smaller. I was a graduate school dropout. I lived in SoHo, and I was fiercely trying to find and make my work. I went to everything that was presented. People knew each other. So short answer is there were some people we both knew, so we became acquainted. I just don't remember who they were; just in some social and art context of SoHo.

Kristin Poor: Got it. Can you tell us a bit about what the SoHo scene was like at that time, artistically?

Constance DeJong: Yes. It was very fortunate for me and probably for some others as well. It was a time of hybridity and cross-discipline work. Neither of those words was used: it's not that no one was thinking, it's just that that language came later. Even though I've said the world was small, I'll contradict myself to say that over time I've realized there were separate planets within that constellation that I didn't know about, like a serious Color Field painting one, you know? I don't know what bars they went to.

Constance DeJong: I was very aware of what we would call cross-discipline, interdiscipline work, of which there was a fair amount. It was also done by ... Yes they were artists, but they were frequently artists first identified with a particular form. Yvonne Rainer is a good example: from dance to film to the person we know now. I forget Joan's original identity, if there was one.

Kristin Poor: Sculpture. I think she studied sculpture.

- Constance DeJong: Sculpture, that's right. Meredith had one, Meredith Monk had original music but more, much more classical and so on. And I am a hybrid person.
- Kristin Poor: Let me close this door, one second.
- Constance DeJong: Testing.
- Kristin Poor: We are back in action.
- Constance DeJong: Okay. So that was a microcosm that I was very aware of and drawn to in my early twenties, doing that fierce thing that everyone has to do. One could with some regularity see a fair amount of work without getting in a taxi or a subway. It was rather geo-specific. That was the first neighborhood that got one of those acronym names, SoHo. Not quite an acronym, it's South of Houston. So it's a completely walkable, knowable terrain. There were, with the agency of the artists coming in and sweat equity building out of living and working quarters, other kinds of spaces followed where performances could be presented and concerts and film and that sort of thing. Again, all within this very geo-specific part of the city.
- Kristin Poor: How did you first come to write about Joan? And why did you decide to write about her work?
- Constance DeJong: She asked me or she suggested or we talked.
- Kristin Poor: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Constance DeJong: Again, I was this ... If I'm a hybrid artist, my primary material—no matter what the forms that I work in—is language. I think it was known or there were conversations that in addition to, or as a part of what I came to consider my work, I was interested in writing about art as a peer. I've studied my share of art history, and it was rather alarming at this codified history that was written pretty up close to the present moment and a distance between the professions if you will, the people of one profession being very distant from the people who made the work and about which they were writing. It was very discomforting. I was very aware of it as a young person.
- Constance DeJong: At the same time, I was quite taken with Apollinaire's writing about art, Gertrude Stein's writing about art, Baudelaire writing about other writers. I'd read Leo Steinberg and thought he was something special. I wanted to study a bit with him, but he was already gone from the city. Anyway, that was somehow known

among friends, who knows, friends of mine would say, “What about Constance?” or ... That's how we came together.

Constance DeJong: I'd seen her work, and I think we were friendly. I wouldn't call us friends at that point, but we were friendly. I had seen work, and I think I went over—I don't know if it was the Mercer Street or before that—and we had a conversation. So I don't know if it was an outright, “Do you want to, would you ... Some publication is interested, blah blah blah.” It was a suggestion in her company.

Kristin Poor: Were you writing about other artists at the time too?

Constance DeJong: I just had an interesting moment all in and around the same time when I was asked by Nancy Graves and Trisha Brown. You don't say no.

Kristin Poor: No. It's a great trio.

Constance DeJong: I didn't think that way at the time, but it set my bill, do you know, to ... I wanted to, I was interested ... I also wasn't, although language is my beat, I think it's an idiotic binary between fiction and non-fiction. I understand it. I mean idiotic for me. I understand the binary out in the world to an extent, although it's overly codified in binary eyes. For me non-fiction, especially art as the subject or an artist as the subject, was a writing exercise and endeavor. How do we invent ... They invented something as the artists, and I felt that the writer needed to invent how to put into articulation and images, a response to the work. Does that make sense?

Kristin Poor: Yes.

Constance DeJong: It was utterly interesting to me. Double or triple because those three people I mentioned, I thought a lot of their work, I thought ... They didn't have the reputations they have now, so it's not like saying, *Trisha Brown* ... But the work was so good and worthy. Anyway I was completely intrigued. I don't know. Also I think when I was young, I didn't realize it. You just put your neck out. You just do it, take the risk.

Kristin Poor: Because why not?

Constance DeJong: Yeah. Because it's what you want to do and are doing ... You just do it.

- Constance DeJong: I had seen *Organic Honey*. I'd seen something in the space ... In advance of seeing you today on the train this morning I was trying to remember where possibly did I see this other performance she did. Because in my memory, it's in someone's loft. It might have been hers.
- Kristin Poor: Was it *Choreomania*? Was it that early? Was there a large flat—
- Constance DeJong: The wall.
- Kristin Poor: ... wall.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah.
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah.
- Kristin Poor: Yes. It was in ... I'll have to double-check.
- Constance DeJong: Somebody's loft, right?
- Kristin Poor: It was someone else's loft because there was a hole cut in the floor [Joan Jonas's loft at 66 Grand Street].
- Constance DeJong: Oh Jesus.
- Kristin Poor: I believe. Anyway, *Choreomania* and... Oh right, we switched teas. *Choreomania* was in a loft space. You saw that one. What do you remember about that?
- Constance DeJong: It was ... You know, it was a moment. It was like being in the presence of somebody who was doing something and was thinking and manifesting an unknown to the viewer right in that moment, and we're all living in that moment. It was one of those, which I had also with Meredith, the first time I saw a Meredith Monk production.
- Constance DeJong: The lights go on in your mind. They turn the lights on. I didn't know art could do that, right? And it wasn't nameable. We weren't really throwing around "performance art" yet as a term, which I wouldn't choose to use for Joan anyway. It wasn't nameable, which was also rather thrilling.
- Constance DeJong: I saw that work. I don't mean that I was just physically there; I mean I think I *saw* the work. I could be a viewer for her or a receiver for her send.

- Kristin Poor: Got it. Message received.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah, and you don't feel that way about everything, one doesn't. It stayed with me, and it's just probably in this little bit foggy time when we were ... I'm going to just use the word "friendly", not friend. That would be an overstatement. I guess I saw *Organic Honey* [*'s Visual Telepathy*] at what became the Kitchen, yes? At LoGiudice.
- Kristin Poor: Yes. So—
- Constance DeJong: Wooster. Where was it?
- Kristin Poor: LoGiudice. LoGiudice.
- Constance DeJong: LoGiudice.
- Kristin Poor: LoGiudice.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah.
- Kristin Poor: LoGiudice Gallery.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah. There.
- Kristin Poor: Yes. That was in February 1972.
- Constance DeJong: Was it?
- Kristin Poor: What do you remember about that performance? That's one of the ones that you wrote about.
- Constance DeJong: That is the first one I wrote about.
- Kristin Poor: That's the first one you wrote about.
- Constance DeJong: I'm pretty sure. I remember a lot of things. I remember the use of sound and audio. I didn't even know I was to become a sound audio nerd. She banged the mirror with a spoon and the howl and the other ... What could have been just seen as incidental was not incidental. It was a part of a very detailed, specific work. It was great to have an audio detail, a sound detail. That got to me.
- Constance DeJong: The big thing was ... Performance is time-based, and it's happening in the moment. *Organic Honey* was the first time I ever saw—and maybe many of us—a simultaneous double

perception, because of the camera, the live camera. So that you had a close-up and the full frame view at once. One, the body, the viewer, hadn't moved, so this was an impossible thing to see in real-time without this incredibly apportioned mediation and intervention of Babette [Mangolte] with the camera. It was huge. It was just ... Now it's a language. Now, Broadway, rock ... We don't even think of it as a thing, and you do, you get the close-up and the non-close-up simultaneously, a little bit not simultaneous because—

Kristin Poor:

A tiny delay.

Constance DeJong:

... a tiny delay. But that was magnificent and really meaningful. I thought it just changed the nature of time and temporality and perception. I mean what the hell? Those are huge subjects, huge. That mattered to me as much as anything—

Kristin Poor:

At the time and—

Constance DeJong:

... at the time and still.

Kristin Poor:

And continuing.

Constance DeJong:

And continuing. It's not that I'm adverse to content, but those things that I just spoke of, to me, had monumentality to them. It's just ... big. Almost never—this is just the kind of perceiver I am—does content do that for me. It's just never going to deliver that kind of change. Things of now are not what they were a minute ago. This content will never do that. I'm not that kind of ... That's not how I'm put together.

Constance DeJong:

As interesting as I think content is in Joan's work for a lot of people, I'm not the one to best unpack that. I was very interested in and aware of the obvious things: the masks, costumes, the kind of gowns, and again all this detail. I think in that first piece I raised the subject of persona. Because indeed that was interesting, this masked being who couldn't quite be encapsulated as a she, a girly-girl, a vamp, like all these trite, capsule-sized ideations of a woman. Do you know? She wasn't any of that, and the presentation wasn't—in that one—it wasn't sexual. It wasn't delivering this kind of woman. So, for me, a little bit, that in itself was, and I hate to say this, but a kind of statement. It didn't fulfill an entity identity.

Kristin Poor:

A pre-existing form.

- Constance DeJong: A pre-existing one or even opposite. Like, “I'm a feminist; I don't go for any of that girly shit.” It just, it was beyond, it was other than that. It was making a being. That entity unmistakably, you never forget that yes, it's a woman, but it was a kind of being, which is larger than an encapsulated identity. For me that's how I saw that work.
- Kristin Poor: Did you see it multiple times?
- Constance DeJong: I did. I also was trying to think of that on coming down today, and I can't name that out. I know I did. You probably know where it might have been, in certain places in the city or somewhere, but I don't recall. But I did, I saw it more than once.
- Kristin Poor: Did you visit her studio beforehand when she was working on it? You mentioned a conversation you had at her studio but—
- Constance DeJong: That was after.
- Kristin Poor: Ah, okay.
- Constance DeJong: That was after. We could have that conversation because we had become friendly through social network probably. So no, I wasn't an insider. I wasn't a friend.
- Kristin Poor: So you really came to the performance fresh but with your experience of her previous works that you had seen?
- Constance DeJong: Work.
- Kristin Poor: Work.
- Constance DeJong: Singular.
- Kristin Poor: *Choreomania*. Yeah.
- Constance DeJong: Of course, I was there. No way on Earth would I not be there. I didn't come with expect—I didn't go to that with an expectation, which is kind of lovely.
- Kristin Poor: You hadn't seen the pre-recorded video?
- Constance DeJong: No, no, no. I was completely ... I may have seen it there, but did she do it a few times at LoGiudice?
- Kristin Poor: She did. There were, it looks like, I think four performances.

- Constance DeJong: I might have seen it there a second time. And not because I knew I was going to write about it, because I didn't.
- Constance DeJong: I hope Joan doesn't remember this differently, but I am certain that it wasn't my idea. I wasn't savvy enough to be working that side of the street. I was thinking, I wanted to write about art, but I wasn't going to the journals that existed or newspapers and asking for work. It wasn't my idea.
- Kristin Poor: That first piece was in June 1972.
- Constance DeJong: Oh was it?
- Kristin Poor: That issue of *The Drama Review*, so it was just a few months after the performance. Then you wrote about *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* in 1973 for *Arts Magazine*. Do you remember that?
- Constance DeJong: I remember that one much more vividly because I had found ... Oh, sorry. Did I interrupt you?
- Kristin Poor: No, go ahead. Please.
- Constance DeJong: Well, because I had found a little bit of what I was thinking about, that art writing, to call it that, could be—which is something that I do to this day—which was to realize that we had taken the page and formatted it into this, again, binary of, “Pictures go here and words go here.” A minor light went on in my head about the integration of different kinds of materials as being an entity: an essay, an article, call it what you will. I worked very hard on it and had the category of—if you want to call it—it's not a metatext, but the main text material, the material that accompany the images, and the images pre-computer. I literally typed, cut, pasted it together the way I wanted it to flow. I wanted you to read through the three kinds of materials in succession because of the way we read, line for line. Publishers weren't having it.
- Kristin Poor: Did they use your layout in the end?
- Constance DeJong: Very modified. I got turned down flat by *Artforum* with something I did along those lines for Trisha. I got an arrogant editor in chief's message, “Thank you dear girl”, you know basically like: “We have our way of formatting the magazine, and that's the way it is.”
- Kristin Poor: Not interested in what you were trying to do?



- Constance DeJong: Not at all, which it might have ... It doesn't occur to them. But in a little bit in that second one, which I just heard you say was 1973, I think it was maintained ... Are you digging it out?
- Kristin Poor: [Showing the article] Here's one page from it.
- Constance DeJong: Let's see.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah. This is an extreme modification that doesn't ... Oh wow, look at this. You can see a little bit of what I was talking about. I would never, I didn't do columnar and this white ... I was very, to make it an entity, composing it, making it a composition, a singular composition. These white spaces, these columns, even what was once called the leading in between space, everything. This is standard. It's a standardized imposition if you will onto a way that I was trying to work. As you can see, I—forgive me if this is just stupidly nerdy—but I was ... When we have a book or page of a magazine, your reading tends to be from top to bottom, so another thing I was interested in was a read left to right of images that wasn't a single image. Here you have a sequence moving left to right that's the way that words move. I'm sorry if that sounds idiotic.
- Kristin Poor: No, it's very interesting. It's a strip that interrupts this top to bottom.
- Constance DeJong: Exactly. I did that in numerous places in the piece. The sequences have different meanings. [Showing on the article] This one is three very different. These are three of a moment. This is three of an even smaller moment, so—
- Kristin Poor: They did keep some of your original intent for the—
- Constance DeJong: They kept some of this, yes.
- Kristin Poor: ... in the strips of images.
- Constance DeJong: In the strips of images, which is kind of it. None of this, and all of that spacing was just the spacing of ... What, who was the publisher?
- Kristin Poor: *Arts Magazine*.
- Constance DeJong: Three columns, that much white. It just goes to a graphic designer, and it's put together but ... Oh my, I even had footnotes. I didn't remember that.

- Kristin Poor: For this one, you saw the January performance at Leo Castelli Gallery?
- Constance DeJong: Yes.
- Constance DeJong: Bless Leo. One saw quite a number of artists perform there. That wasn't the footprint of what a gallery did at that time. Well it still isn't, really, is it?
- Kristin Poor: No.
- Constance DeJong: No.
- Kristin Poor: Although Pace has their new building with the—
- Constance DeJong: Yeah, yeah, we'll see.
- Kristin Poor: What do you remember about that performance at Castelli?
- Constance DeJong: I think that things have merged in my head. I think that performance at the LoGiudice kind of merged because this is ... There's no camera at LoGiudice or there is?
- Kristin Poor: There was.
- Constance DeJong: Okay. I think I just ... I have had—
- Kristin Poor: You merged them.
- Constance DeJong: I think I truly have. I know the difference, and there were conceptual elements in [*Organic Honey's*] *Vertical Roll* that were more conceptual, if you will, than in the earlier—
- Kristin Poor: [*Organic Honey's*] *Visual Telepathy*.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah.
- Kristin Poor: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Constance DeJong: Jumping the video line. It's very conceptual, brilliant. It takes an element of ... Well it takes a flaw really, a flaw of technology that anyone who owned a TV experienced. We don't even know what a vertical roll is now, but you know what it is, right? An image that would flip so there's a line that's the end of the frame that moves up, and then the frame moves up from the bottom and so on. To capture that, that flaw, in the technology and incorporate

it into a physical action, I mean it's just brilliant. She jumps it like a rope.

Constance DeJong: My sense of language, I guess ... To me that was very conceptual, wonderfully conceptual. It was a technological phenomenon, just to repeat myself. It became a physical interaction. It was very cool. I don't want to make a stand out moment of that piece because there are a lot of things in it, but it endures in my mind.

Kristin Poor: Mm-hmm (affirmative). You really remember it.

Constance DeJong: Yeah. It's very memorable. Again, as a contribution to this hybridity so that the technology she's now started to work with and been working with, that technology now becomes a structural and physical interaction between her body and it on the stage. That's a really interesting movement on her part, to engage with the technology that ... And she does it in "This is my right eye versus my left eye", in the single-channel work [*Left Side Right Side*, 1972], but it even has more consequence for me in the performance. Again, because it's this bunch of electrons behind glass becoming a constructive element of the piece that she responds to and works with.

Kristin Poor: And interacts with.

Constance DeJong: Interacts with, yeah. It's a moment.

Kristin Poor: Yeah, that certainly is a thread that's continued through her work.

Constance DeJong: It truly is. To speak of threads, for me Joan's use of a relationship with technology since the earliest works that we're speaking of has been continuous and vital and refreshed and interesting. I don't know another person who does live performances who has done that with technology. I can't. I don't care there's not another ... It's very singular.

Constance DeJong: It's a very ... It's only one part of her work, but it's a very singular accomplishment. For me as a viewer and as an artist it matters. It has a lot of meaning, to have done that. I worked—this is off record—I worked in 2000 something, I don't know ... [audio cuts]

Kristin Poor: [audio resumes] You were saying you worked on a theater—

Constance DeJong: I worked in a theater piece in the 2000s. I'm sorry. It's called *Supervision*. We'll Google it and get ... Someone younger than

Joan was the director and the visionary of it who'd integrated technology into her theater work, very thoroughly; front projection, rear projection, scrims, actors engaging with characters who only were a projection. The Joan connection was live camera: people were interacting with themselves or with ... Anyway, with immediate presentation of themselves in two forms, recorded and that.

Constance DeJong: That was a long arc of time from Joan to Marianne Weems where ... It's not that it's easy to do, and Marianne had a lot of her own ideas, but the arc is that within or over the course of thirty something years, that technology had integrated and become integrated with live performance and—I'm sorry—it goes back to Joan. There's no other place that that's initiated from. Yeah, that's all.

Kristin Poor: That's great. Thank you.

Kristin Poor: Do you remember seeing *Mirage*?

Constance DeJong: No.

Kristin Poor: This would have been after *Organic Honey*.

Constance DeJong: No, I didn't.

Kristin Poor: You didn't see it?

Constance DeJong: I don't think I did, no.

Kristin Poor: Any other performances of Joan's that you remember from that time?

Constance DeJong: Not in this standout way, which is a bit shameful. But I also became very preoccupied with what I was trying to do as an artist. I was lucky in that in my early-ish twenties I was a bit more social. I've become ... I'm not that social of a person. Not that going out to see artists is social, but in a way it is. I think I have a bit of a blank spot in the 1980s, when I was just closed in and making work and trying ... I've seen things since then and I've seen—and it's not satisfactory—documentations, and so on.

Constance DeJong: That is because—and I've seen more than I would if I was just on my own as Constance—but I have done a bit of teaching. I'm always teaching in cross-discipline media, part of the art department at Hunter. She is important content to my undergraduate and graduate classes. Again, there are histories

that are less visible, and she's a significant artist and contributor. So anybody who is taking my classes knows Joan Jonas. So I've become very fond of pieces I've never gotten to see live.

Kristin Poor:

Right. Through documentation and teaching.

Constance DeJong:

I think *Volcano [Saga]* is one where she has the ... We haven't spoken to this, I could have named early on the use of props.

Kristin Poor:

Sure, yes.

Constance DeJong:

And her relationship to material things. When you went to an early Joan Jonas piece—and to this day—there's this engagement with multiple kinds of real. The very ephemeral real of projection and technology and video—not material, if you will, ephemeral in that sense—and sound. Then her great relationship with material things: things she makes, things she finds, things she cobbles out of half-made and all. I have an appreciation for the spoon banging on the mirror, which you know what I'm talking about, that part of the piece which was both an audio and a visual [*Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*]. Then the camera is there so the reflection is becoming part of the video that's in real time with the woman doing the action. I mean, come on.

Kristin Poor:

That's fantastic.

Constance DeJong:

Yeah, it's—

Kristin Poor:

Many, many layers.

Constance DeJong:

Many layers, very well integrated. You never are going to sit in the audience and for one second ... It's not didactic, you don't sit there and think, "Wow, she's really good at layering the metatext with the subtext with the ..." No, the complexity is very living. It's very vivid and alive. I love that part of the work that is consistent in a sense but is also ever changing: the drawing, also the inclusion of drawing early on into the present and the chalk and her relationship to these multiplicities, if you will. And very elegantly composing with them in real time together, on stage, is very singular. It's a solo act. Not always, I know that she's ... I've seen—I don't know the name of it—but I've seen the one, the first one where she uses the sand. There's another woman and ... Do you know the one where she—

Kristin Poor:

*Lines in the Sand?*

- Constance DeJong: *Lines in the Sand*. There are other people now in the work in a way that there wasn't for a while.
- Constance DeJong: Anyway, I would want to go on record for having addressed the complexity of her compositional skills and way of thinking that brings the immaterial, the material, the time-based, the obdurate, all into the temporality of the performance. Really articulate and composed.
- Kristin Poor: Yeah, thank you. That's really a great point through the props and the technology, the way that these things can work together.
- Constance DeJong: And behavior.
- Kristin Poor: Mm-hmm (affirmative) and actually—
- Constance DeJong: Drawing, jumping over the line. There's that, the action if you will.
- Kristin Poor: Did you see Joan's exhibition at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, in the 1990s?
- Constance DeJong: No. No.
- Kristin Poor: Okay.
- Constance DeJong: No. I went to Queens immediately, and I knew ... Help me, the curator?
- Kristin Poor: Valerie Smith.
- Constance DeJong: Valerie. You know, Valerie. I knew Valerie. Yay Valerie. Really: yay Valerie. That's the first, isn't it, her first big show in a museum? In town?
- Kristin Poor: In New York. The Stedelijk show in 1994 in Amsterdam—
- Constance DeJong: That's right.
- Kristin Poor: ...was the first large show.
- Constance DeJong: I could have. I wasn't traveling in that part of the world at the time.
- Constance DeJong: So, I went immediately and several times to Queens. Before we started, I mentioned I was very grouchy and grumbly. Queens

now has a bit more vivacity and visibility than it did at the time. So my grouchy, curmudgeonliness was I wanted her in the damn city which is where you got your props and everybody would go. It was a great show.

Constance DeJong:

If I didn't in any way articulate it about her multiplicity, composing these multiplicities on stage, that was evident in that exhibition. I guess another thing that's very—maybe everyone speaks to this, I'm sorry if you've heard it a thousand times—but one also saw in that exhibition the mutations, I know they're called "iterations" but the mutations of material, again both obdurate material and recorded materials. This mutation of materials from one way of having presence in the world to another, from performance to exhibition to photograph to, you know—

Kristin Poor:

Yes.

Constance DeJong:

... to all those wonderful iterations. That was very well done in that exhibition. It could have been done very badly and not had enough ... The dynamics could have been drained. Like, "Oh, there's a costume hanging on the forum, who needs it?" It wasn't somehow. The variety of work that was in that show, the diversity that was in that show, was I thought very important. I had never seen the, what did she call them? The theaters, the plywood—

Kristin Poor:

*My New Theater.*

Constance DeJong:

*My New Theater.* I'd never seen *My New Theater*. I loved that.

Kristin Poor:

Yes.

Constance DeJong:

Brilliant. Really nice work, that was. I had a tree—I didn't go in thinking I know everything, but it was lovely to have a couple of total surprises. But *My New Theater* was grand. That was a really grand piece.

Kristin Poor:

Do you have any thoughts or advice or restaging and exhibiting Joan's work in the future?

Constance DeJong:

I probably ... Joan could sit here and blow some smoke on it but ... No, it's a little complicated because I feel that Joan's peer group—this is a huge generality Constance is about to make and there are exceptions—

Kristin Poor:

Disclaimer.

- Constance DeJong: Disclaimer. The curators ... Joan would have the ideas anyway about exhibition, but I think her peers around the work wouldn't know how to do it or they would have done it by now, quite frankly. Guggenheim, Modern—
- Kristin Poor: In terms of making an exhibition?
- Constance DeJong: Huge, huge exhibition where this multiplicity and the facets and the complexity and the layering could be exhibited and exist. Is that what you were asking me about?
- Kristin Poor: I was ... Sure in the present tense but also in the thinking forward to someone who might be thinking about—
- Constance DeJong: Oh, oh wow.
- Kristin Poor: ... putting on a show or doing a performance.
- Constance DeJong: I think not, but there's a performance that ... But people have done things like that. There's a performance that was in Performa—I think it's called *The Black Act*, it is—where an artist—I don't know her nor do I know her age. I saw her photograph. She's young-ish, maybe even in the thirties [Kia LaBeija]. Anyway, she's interacting with [Oskar] Schlemmer's third act from that ... What is it called?
- Kristin Poor: The *Triadic Ballet*.
- Constance DeJong: *The Triadic Ballet*, which is a really interesting engagement between past and present and something pretty iconic. But crucially the *Triadic* isn't made by or known from an artist as the performer. That's why I say, very hard.
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Constance DeJong: That in an act might get very hollowed out and dry without that ... That's her work. It comes out of her on stage as well as in all the other places that are involved in the making of the work. I'm not making some hyperbolic ... Saying that people drool on about [Vaslav] Nijinsky or something, but there's some truth, if you will, to a performance quality that it's only given to that person.
- Constance DeJong: I don't know why anyone would want to do that, from my point of view. Why anyone would want to do it. However, it's an interesting question. That's a larger question about the endurance of work that is time-based and performance-based.



Whereas the painters and makers of objects: there it is. It might get a little dusty, but ... It's a bit of a conundrum and a confounding problem. One wants it to have its ongoing life, but it's very challenging.

Kristin Poor: In terms of what form that takes.

Constance DeJong: And who could do that.

Kristin Poor: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

Constance DeJong: And who would want to.

Kristin Poor: You've spoken quite eloquently about this already, but I wanted to see if there was anything else you might want to say about Joan's influence on your work and the development—

Constance DeJong: On what?

Kristin Poor: On your work and the development of your ideas.

Constance DeJong: I wasn't aware of it. Some of my so-called development was initiated in a moment that was a moment made by her and some other people. It takes one a while to be able to reflect on what you do and did, if you know what I'm trying to say. She wasn't a direct influence. She wasn't something I carried around in my head as ... For one thing, the forms were very other, to me, in terms of what I was trying to do. I wasn't a theater person, to call it "theater". I've become this performer but in a very eccentric, idiosyncratic way. That's part of the reason why.

Constance DeJong: My constellation of influencers were language people, almost exclusively, when I was that age of forming myself, if that makes sense. I didn't see her as influential, but I know she was and is because that moment was influential. I was extremely fortunate to get my butt to New York City at a moment when something that was already in broken, tiny bits and pieces in me, that I could have resonance with, was present in this small community called SoHo. She was huge in that. Over time, something ... Because I'm having a show in March that has work from different time periods, and I've been talking to people, interviewing and such. I am an iteration artist. It oddly was a very long time. I had to, and I worked that way for my very first project. My very first project is a book, a series of performances and an audio work. I don't have a work that's only one thing. Is that a lie? Sometimes in collaborations.

- Constance DeJong: I was drinking that water, I was breathing that air. To an extent, these people who were, whatever they are, older than me, ten dah dah, into their careers, and I'm not yet into mine. Into their work—not that they had careers—into their work. I breathed that air. I drank that water. That was a sensical way to work in forms that are mutable: the mutability of language, the time-based nature of language. That's who I was and am. That mutability, including that it becomes a physical thing, object, attaches me to someone like Joan in that time period. It's just that simple.
- Kristin Poor: That's great. Thank you. Just to wrap up; are there any questions that you have for Joan or others? Or other people who you think it would be helpful for us to interview?
- Constance DeJong: Well, I don't ... The Wooster Group loves Joan and for very good reason. I would talk to somebody important there. I don't know if that's Kate or if it's Liz [Elizabeth LeCompte]. Kate Valk was called, but they go back, and Liz is in control. So if Joan did something, surely there's a reason.
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Constance DeJong: I think that would be very interesting because that's an admirable theater project—
- Kristin Poor: It did.
- Constance DeJong: ... in the world.
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Constance DeJong: for this venerable ... It's a huge accomplishment for this long time and all. That for sure. Have you talked to her peers, so to speak?
- Kristin Poor: Yes. We've spoken to people who were directly part of some of the performances, like Paula Longendyke, and we have a few other interviews that we are hoping to line up.
- Constance DeJong: I wish Carolee [Schneemann] was still around.
- Kristin Poor: Me too.
- Constance DeJong: That would be brilliant because she was so opinionated. It would be fabulous. Plus ... Are you talking to Yvonne?

- Kristin Poor: No. We haven't interviewed Yvonne. That would be interesting, also to see what she remembers about Joan being in her class.
- Constance DeJong: There you go. I was going to bring that up. There were a lot of opinionated movement people around. I mean MoMA just had that whole Judson thing, and they're of an age. I think there might even be, if it's of interest to you, people who didn't appreciate the work. It was a time of strong opinion and strong ideation about what art was and what it wasn't and what women did—
- Kristin Poor: And didn't.
- Constance DeJong: ... and so on.
- Kristin Poor: Right.
- Constance DeJong: And didn't. Even if it's a, you could call that a controversy in a teacup, but that could be of interest.
- Kristin Poor: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, that's an interesting—
- Constance DeJong: Yvonne is around. Maybe she's a bit tired out from having just gone through all of that stuff with MoMA. She would be a standout because she's so articulate and smart and dah dah.
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Constance DeJong: I don't know. Trisha's gone, so is Carolee. I don't know some of those other Judson people. I guess Lucinda [Childs] is around, but I don't know. She wasn't quite so embedded in this milieu that I'm talking to.
- Kristin Poor: Yes, mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Constance DeJong: If I think of someone, I'll mention it. What else did you ask me?
- Kristin Poor: That was it.
- Constance DeJong: No, no. There was another interesting question. What about? Who you might interview?
- Kristin Poor: Questions for Joan and others.
- Constance DeJong: And there was another thing.
- Kristin Poor: No, did we miss anything?

- Constance DeJong: It's not on your list of the last things you asked?
- Kristin Poor: Things I've already asked? Well, I didn't ask about the promise of Joan's work for future artists and critics. You mentioned you've been teaching her work to your students.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah. It would make her laugh. Please don't even mention it, but if she would ever hear it. I was an accidental professor. I didn't consider it purposefully for a long ... I just wanted to make my money and be able to focus on my work. I had no pride about how the money was made. Academia's just a monster that eats you alive. So it was very accidental. I was asked to teach one graduate elective one semester at Hunter, and it became something else.
- Constance DeJong: In me becoming the accidental professor, I became a Joan Jonas champion. I am a roaring Joan Jonas champion. Anyone who studies with me gets it. I don't shove it down people's throats, but dammit they have to know it. They have to know this is a significant artist who contributed something enduring in the individual works and then in these idea areas that I've tried to be articulate about. That is the contribution. We don't all get to make a contribution. You can have a long working life, and the work is decent and good but ... There are singular people who put something down as a kind of marker, as a kind of site. She's one of them for me. I think ... In truth, I don't think, it's just my opinion.
- Constance DeJong: We won't, of course we won't know, we'll be gone but ... I think it matters that ... What you're doing is what matters. I think it matters that there's, in addition to the work, that there's evidence of its meaning and value to people that's there also. People come in and out of fashion after they're dead. That just happens, but we want it to be findable. We want it to be accessible and known. And known. If that answers in anyway what you're asking.
- Kristin Poor: Yeah, it does. Thank you. I think that's a great place to stop.
- Constance DeJong: Then let's do.
- Kristin Poor: All right. Thanks again, Constance.
- Constance DeJong: Yeah.

*This transcript is intended to provide an accessible form of interview audio content. It has been edited for factual accuracy and clarity. Any alterations are noted with brackets.*