

Simone Forti interviewed by Barbara Clausen and Kristin Poor, December 4, 2020

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*This transcript is a condensed and edited version of the original interview.*

Barbara Clausen: This is the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, and we're really honored and happy to have Simone Forti here with us today, on the 4th of December, 2020. We're here today to discuss Joan Jonas's work in the early seventies, your relationship with Joan, and how you saw her work. We have a few questions, and we're going to start out by asking how and when did you meet Joan?

Simone Forti: I don't really remember. Strangely enough, we were kind of in different circles, so I was more around the people who had taken Robert Dunn's class at the Merce Cunningham Studio, the Composition class. I must have known about Joan, but I don't think I really met her until going to Italy. And even then, I don't think we were there at the same time in those first years.

Barbara Clausen: Interesting. You heard about her work in the early downtown context, in the early 1970s. Do you remember seeing her performances?

Simone Forti: Well, before talking about that, I want to mention that in 1972, I believe, I was invited by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, to come and do a book with Kasper König as part of their series of—I guess, of—minimalist kind of work. And at one point I needed, in the summer of 1973, to retype the whole manuscript of what eventually became *Handbook in Motion*. And Joan put out the invitation that I should come and spend the summer with her, and work on my book. So I spent the whole summer with Joan in Cape Breton, and we became close at that time.

Simone Forti: It took me two years and I went to Cape Breton to work on the book during the summer. And I remember that we would go down the cliffs to the ocean level. And that Joan had a wonderful collection of stones that she would find.

Simone Forti: I want to show you one of the rocks that she gave me.

Barbara Clausen: Oh, it's beautiful.

Simone Forti: Yeah. It's in some ways a little bit like a bicycle seat.

- Barbara Clausen: Yes.
- Simone Forti: And some ways like a heart.
- Barbara Clausen: Yes. Or a portrait of her dog.
- Simone Forti: Or a portrait of her dog. That's true.
- Barbara Clausen: Sappho, yeah. It's really beautiful. We're going to make a screen grab.
- Barbara Clausen: Joan also mentions that you met her in Rome. Would you talk a bit about that moment in Rome and seeing her perform in Rome?
- Simone Forti: Yeah. I remember. Well, Fabio Sargentini produced these festivals [Festival di Musica e Danza Contemporanea]. And, I don't think that Joan was in the first two festivals. I know Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, and Deborah Hay were.
- Barbara Clausen: Joan took part in June 1972. And she performed *Delay Delay* on the Tiber River and also *Organic Honey*.
- Simone Forti: Yes. And I must have been there too. I do remember Joan in Rome, but we didn't yet know each other. And I didn't see the piece in New York with the hitting of the wooden blocks, and then the time delay. What was that called?
- Kristin Poor: *Delay Delay*.
- Simone Forti: *Delay Delay*. I heard about it. I saw images of it and I was very impressed by it, but I didn't see it live.
- Kristin Poor: Joan performed *Mirage* [1976] in New York. And this performance is one that you wrote a poem about, that was published in her Stedelijk catalogue in 1994. Do you have any memories of that performance of *Mirage*, Simone?
- Simone Forti: I have memories of that moment of Joan dancing in front of the projection of the mountain, of the eruption of that mountain. And I thought of that as my favorite dance ever. I remember mirrors. I think there was a moment when the performers [were] carrying mirrors across the space, facing the audience, the mirrors facing the audience. And I think the performers were pretty close to the audience.

- Kristin Poor: So that probably was *Mirror Piece*. And you remember the volcano dance, the portion of *Mirage* with the *Volcano Film* projection. Are there any other images from her performances that stay with you?
- Simone Forti: I think *Organic Honey*, where she's jumping and the image is flickering, and it makes a certain kind of illusion. I remember seeing that, and liking it very much. I remember her looking at herself with a mirror, covering every inch of her body to see every inch of her body by moving this mirror and looking into it. I remember quite later when she was already in her loft, on Mercer Street in Manhattan. And I remember a party at Joan's place, and people were not in Joan's studio. We were more like, in, I guess, where the kitchen was. And then suddenly we went into her studio, because Sappho was performing. And Sappho did all these interesting things. She went to different objects and she did a whole performance for us.
- Kristin Poor: Joan was not the only performer in the family.
- Simone Forti: No.
- Barbara Clausen: Did you feel very related, with each other, in regard to your interests or a certain approach to your works and movement?
- Simone Forti: I don't think so, really. Mine, looking at the animals was more like, "Okay, the hip socket is here, and how did that bone change over the years?" And Joan was more image... She was manipulating images and more into magical... giving a feeling of magic, and also of characters. I was trying to adapt my body to the movements of the animals exactly as I saw them. So it was more a naturalist approach.
- Kristin Poor: It's interesting to hear you compare your approach with Joan's. How would you characterize the difference in the way that you each used objects?
- Simone Forti: Okay. I just started using objects quite a bit later, but I use them as arbitrary objects. So I'll choose an object the morning of the day that I'm going to be doing an improvisation. And I know that I'll incorporate it somehow at some point, but it kind of breaks the surface tension of whatever's on my mind. It's like all of a sudden there's that object. Well, here is the change. So it's not objects that I've developed a certain relationship with.
- Kristin Poor: Do you have other memories of Joan working in her studio, or of any works in progress that were happening while you were

spending time there, during social events, or otherwise as friends?

Simone Forti: Well, I remember her, I would call them “miniature theaters” that I first saw in Cape Breton.

Barbara Clausen: Do you think that the landscape of Cape Breton was influential?

Simone Forti: I'm sure it was influential. For one thing, Joan made friends with people... and I think that the culture of the place affected her. Talking to people, talking to neighbors. And certainly the land itself. And she was very much into reggae at the time. I don't know if she still is. Do you know?

Barbara Clausen: I think so. I think music is still a really important part of her work. I mean, in her love for composition and song, and possible storytelling.

Simone Forti: It was the time when we were both in SoHo. Her living on Mercer and me on Broadway. We were the kind of friends that could talk and call each other. If I needed to talk about something with a close friend, I could call Joan, and vice versa.

Barbara Clausen: This bond is also something that really reads and feels in the interview you did with her, the conversation with Carla Liss, that solidarity, and that kinship, and really, that understanding.

Simone Forti: Yeah.

Kristin Poor: Did you travel to see any of Joan's exhibitions, for example in Amsterdam, or in Berkeley?

Simone Forti: I saw the exhibition in Canada, in Montreal, and I saw an exhibition in New York, in Manhattan. And I've seen exhibitions of her work. And I love her work, I love her drawings, her fish drawings.

Barbara Clausen: This is very helpful, and I really want to just thank you on behalf of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base and everybody on the team. Thank you.

Simone Forti: Oh, you're very welcome.

Kristin Poor: Yes. Thank you.