

ALLAN KAPROW

Hauser & Wirth | New York



It may seem a stretch, but the image of ghosts coming back to haunt us is an apt metaphor for performance art. Unlike painting or sculpture, performances die. They are believed to be ephemeral or relegated to a single moment in time, doomed to collect dust as film or photo-documentation in museum archives. But one should take heart: performance can indeed be infused with new life—through *reperformance*, the ghost of performances past. For just like a clairvoyant, reperformance channels the departed in the world of the living. While the original can never exactly return intact, it can, as art critic Roberta Smith wrote in the *NY Times* in 2005, “be pulled into the present, stripped of some of [its] mysteries and returned to living art.”

Lately much attention has been paid to Allan Kaprow's happenings and situations. Just as Marina Abramović has now become the grandmother of ordeal art (the topic of a major reperformance at MoMA in 2010), so Kaprow is increasingly seen as the grandfather of conceptual performance. Coming into artistic maturity in the early 1960s, he immediately set about to oppose the stagnant supremacy of abstract expressionism. One of the ways in which he achieved this goal was through a series of actions meant to exist in perpetuity through reproduction. Indeed, it's no surprise that Kaprow's work has been consistently reperfomed. As he once said, “If a work is of value it will stimulate the creation of related works later on, thus the tradition will stay alive this way.”

In 2008 Los Angeles' MOCA hosted the largest Kaprow retrospective to date. Part of the programming for the exhibition included the reperformance of some of the artist's roster of over 200 performances. This was undertaken by a variety of groups and organizations at sites ranging from the museum itself to art schools and local community centers. The curators seriously battled with how to sustain the legacy of someone who once compared putting lifeless art in a museum to making love in a cemetery.

In all fairness, contemporary museum going does little to advance the visitors' experience. While in the museum, any interaction with the artistic process is protected, even forbidden—the division between artist and spectator is made very clear. Nevertheless, the polite viewer must still respect Kaprow's philosophy of art: “The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible.” According to Suzanne Lacy, one of the participants in the MOCA reperformance, she wanted “to capture the past of Allan's work that was the most significant to him and the most ephemeral. And that is the experience of his work as it becomes part of, and lives on in, someone else's memory.” As it turns out, the 2008 retrospective brought to life the entire troubled history of performance art over the last half-century.

This recurrent thorn in the institution's side recently emerged in Hauser & Wirth's reperformance of Kaprow's 1961 *Yard* (through last October 24). Selected as the new location of their New York wing, the gallery sits on the site of the former Martha Jackson Gallery, which was the setting for the first visitation of *Yard*. Helen Molesworth, then curator at the Harvard Art Museum, commissioned three artists to take on the task of “reinventing” *Yard*. The jewel in the crown was William Pope.L's reperformance in the main gallery. Pope took full artistic license in transforming *Yard* into a cramped dungeon of flickering red and white lights. A mountain of dirty rubber tires in the back corner was further amplified in wall-to-wall mirrors.

The space was noticeably plagued with a deafening soundtrack blasting through a large speaker. Pope.L's voice, delivered in Nazi rally style, barked at visitors to rearrange the tires. The inclusion of foghorns and train whistles reeked of the melodrama we have all come to expect from this artist. All done in tandem with Pope.L's irresolvable political agenda, these sounds were as nothing compared to the commentary's diatribe on race and environmentalism. The dichotomy between the original and its reperformance was made all the more apparent by body bags



ALLAN KAPROW (TOP TO BOTTOM), *Yard*, 1961, PERFORMANCE STILL. WILLIAM POPE.L, *Yard (To Harrow)*, 2009/1961, MIXED MEDIA INSTALLATION, DIM. VAR. © HANNAH HEINRICH. COURTESY HAUSER &

