

CHRIS BURDEN'S METROPOLIS DAVID HOCKNEY at the ROYAL ACADEMY

KILLER TEXT ON ART

# artillery

VOL 6 ISSUE 4, APRIL-MAY 2012 \$5

# THE PERFORMERS

DAWN KASPER MOVES into the WHITNEY

**Skip Arnold**  
TELLS THE NAKED TRUTH

**Jackass**  
APES THE ART WORLD

GUEST LECTURE: **Ron Athey**







# DANCIN' FOOL

BACKWARD AND FORWARD BY JOHN DAVID O'BRIEN

THERE WAS A TIME IN WHICH PERFORMANCE art was unconventional, unsanctioned and even renegade. Now, although it is still favored by those artists seeking to disrupt or fracture any notion of a canonical standing in the arts, it has entered into the pantheon of accepted fine art practices. Looking across the event horizon as it now stands in LA there are two equal and opposite tendencies instilling energy into performance art: one is a serious look at its past and the other is a set of overlaps between it and other more traditional performance genres.

Looking back in time, the Getty-sponsored PST Performance Art Festival has allowed LA to revisit its performance heyday. A period when artists like Rachel Rosenthal, Barbara T.

Smith, Chris Burden, John White and Suzanne Lacy/Leslie Labowitz Starus among others, were making it up as they went. Quixotic and activist, rudimentary and well-honed, staged and enacted: a counterpoint of difference and a broad stylistic continuum were the characteristics of this non-movement.

My own wanderlust in search of performative significance had me roving around the greater LA area from a gymnasium in Pomona for a John White performance re-enactment to the plaza up at the Getty Center for a new work by Hirokazu Kosaka to the Van Nuys FlyAway, one of those new architectural elements from the landscape of public mass transit system, for an original dance performance, directed and choreographed by Sarah Elgart.



• • •

**THE GYMNASIUM IS FILLED WITH A LARGE** crowd, it's standing room only and it smells like a locker room. From the back of the gym, a group of young male athletes emerges, football gear in hand, walk to the center of the crowd, strip down and begin suiting up, pads and all. The crowd titters at the nudity and then at a whistle blast; they hurtle themselves at one another in a violent scrimmage psych-up. Eventually an older man steps into the chaos and leads the team with a series of physical directions. They have a hard time following his jumping, rolling and bodily contortions. The scrimmage gives way to an almost slapstick workout waltz. When the agitation reaches a maximum, they all stop and line up facing spectators in four directions and yell

and recedes to absorb their passage. A feeling of being in an oceanic drift is palpable. At the top of the marble stairs a large framework that houses numerous spools of multicolored threads has been erected. Four dancers make their way up there and then put what appear to be bridles in their mouths; they come down the stairs and into the crowd, dragging behind strands of glistening filament. By the time they have reached the spotlight at the other end of the Getty plaza, Oguri has ascended the stairs and is punching at the sky in silent awe and celebration. Hirokazu Kosaka's site-specific work "Kalpa," which means eon (a really long period of time) is based on the story that once every 100 years an angel comes down from heaven and swipes the surface of a stone with her silk sleeves until the rock disappears. (Maybe that's how raves started.)

the movements of the troupe conclude in a small garden next to the FlyAway in acrobatic and graceful groupings. As the projections are dimmed and the sound fades, those who were traveling head out and the performers pack up and depart from where they came.

• • •

**INCORPORATING MORE VISUAL ARTS** paradigms and techniques into their work, contemporary dance theater has become rife with hybrids; using more traditional dance and theater in performance art has likewise generated unlikely amalgams. Whether it is Diavolo Dance Theater using modular sculpture on its stages and basing their latest movement studies in skateboarding, or Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company's new repertory program with its confrontational stare-down of the audience by the dancers, the codes of separation which historically determined the relationship of the audience to performer and the genre to its inspiration have slipped out of the orthodoxy. Crossbreeding is inevitable and performance art is replenished in time, both backwards and forwards. ☉



ferociously to each wall before getting back into formation, out of their uniforms and back in their street clothes. As John White said of his "Preparation F" performance, the first time was a success when he had an audience of 30, now he wasn't sure what to think having it seen by more than a hundred.

• • •

**THE GETTY PLAZA IS SO CHOCK-FULL THAT** security is looking apoplectic. Lights come on in the middle somewhere and Butoh master Oguri together with four other white-clad dancers begin to unfurl into their slow, highly controlled movements. As they wend their way through the crowd and down the travertine walls to the stairway, the crowd swells

• • •

**IN ONE PART OF THE ROVING PERFOR-** mance, dancers are indiscernible from travelers: bags in hand, suits adjusted, they are perfectly camouflaged until they begin to break down the everyday quality of their gestures in favor of hyperbole and a loose collapsing chorus line. Later, outside the hall, dancers in immense wafting costumes move along stairways and external passageways, their saturated colors a contrast to the incoming dusk. Behind the arrival plaza and up on the parking structure, Stephen Glassman has projected images of white birds taking flight, using the grid of the parking structure as a foil. Over time, dancers framed against the darkness inhabit the open spaces of the structure. Finally

Left: "Kalpa," 2012, Hirokazu Kosaka, Getty Center Arrival Plaza, Organized by The J. Paul Getty Museum

Opposite: "Flyway Home," 2010, directed and choreographed by Sarah Elgart, original music by Feltlike, projections by artist Stephen Glassman, Organized by the LAWA Art Program in partnership with the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs

 PST