



# JOAN JONAS

stream or river  
flight or pattern

06.25.16 >> 10.16.16

*Performance is the form I use. It is the medium I use to construct an object in time, that only exists in time, and which is worked out in space with, with bodies, with my body. Performance for me is poetry, three-dimensional live poetry in space.*

Quoted from: *Joan Jonas, Study of the Artist with Dog*,  
a film directed by Brigitte Cornand and produced by Les Films du Siamois, 2006

**About the exhibition.** Tales and rituals are fundamental to the expression and the transmission of culture: they somehow express the recurrent concerns, joys and fears of humankind, regardless of time or place. In that sense, they are universal and can be traced back to the most ancient forms of human social organization, thousands of years ago.

Joan Jonas's work is informed by rituals she has witnessed, and tales, poems or novels she has gathered while traveling extensively around the world, and through her reading and watching films. Having trained in art history, drawing, poetry and sculpture, she then sought to enrich and enliven these forms with others such as dance and sound. She has developed a unique language, which she has used to construct multilayered performed narratives, presented either as live actions, installations or films.

At the core of each new project is often a specific text that she uses as a catalyst to compose her piece, using literary or factual sources, as well as the many images her camera has captured during the course of her trips. She works iteratively; in a sense, each work leads to the next. The six pieces presented here cover a span of 15 years, culminating with a new installation composed with images captured during recent travel and her discovery of Cantabria.

**JOAN  
JONAS**  
stream or river  
flight or pattern

# stream or river flight or pattern, 2016

Joan Jonas's new work reflects her recent thoughts and ideas about our existence and takes its cue from images she has gathered from recent trips she took around the world: mosaic floors in Venice, caged birds in Singapore, Genoa's graveyard, redwoods in California and various trees of Cantabria. She performs with and against those images, in slight disguises of hat, dark glasses, dress, and paper jackets. A second video projection features an experiment involving four artists who participated in the workshop the artist directed at Villa Iris prior to the exhibition, using various landscapes of the Nansa Valley as a backdrop. A set of framed drawings as well as wall drawings in a colored environment complete this visual narrative. The piece is also inspired in part by a poem made up of fragments from several Noh plays taken from *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*, a book by Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound.



*stream or river, flight or pattern (caudal o río, vuelo o ruta)*, 2016. Multimedia installation: colored walls, mural drawings, 32 framed drawings (ink on Japanese paper), 2 video projections. Dimensions variable. Performers: Saverio Bonato, Galia Eibenschutz, Allison Janae Hamilton, Thao-Nguyen Phan. Singer: Allison Janae Hamilton. Assistant: Elena Mazzi. Video Assistants: David Sherman (New York), J.R. González Soutuollo and Laro Sánchez-Palacín (Santander).

*Lines in the Sand*, 2002/2004. Recording of the performance that took place at The Kitchen, New York, 2004. Video, color and sound, 47'54". Performers: Ragani Haas, Joan Jonas, Sung Hwan Kim, Henk Visch. Video by Joan Jonas. Video mix: Astrid S. Klein. Soundtrack and music: Steven Vitiello, Paul Miller aka DJ Spooky



**LINES IN  
THE SAND  
2002/2004**

This work is based on *Helen in Egypt*, an epic poem by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), which explores the myth, taken from classic texts, that Helen of Sparta went not to Troy, but to Egypt. Thus, the myth of Helen as the cause of the Trojan War is a phantasm; the Greeks and the Trojans fought for an illusion.

Greek history and mythology are deeply intertwined, leaving us to untangle the tendrils of fact and fiction; something that very much informs our experience of reality today.

Central to this work is Joan Jonas's paramount experience of the Hopi Snake Dance ritual, which she experienced in the mid 1960's, and her reading - years later - of Aby Warburg's account of the same, written long after his trip and while in a sanatorium, as a means and proof of his recovery from a nervous breakdown. The German art historian recalls a groundbreaking reaction, which profoundly altered his view on art history. Issues pertaining to mental mapping of territory and to mythology inform this work.

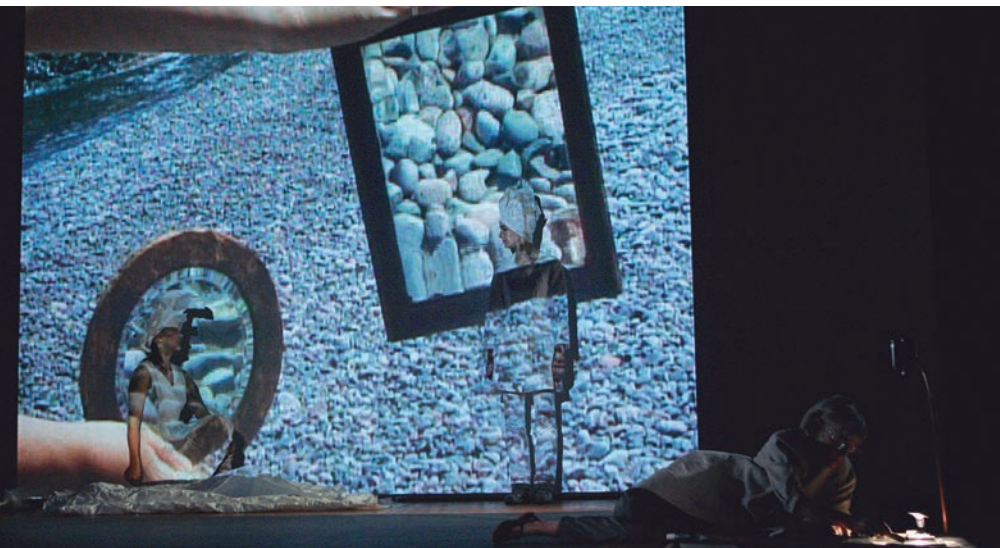
**THE SHAPE,  
THE SCENT,  
THE FEEL  
OF THINGS  
2004/2006**



*The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, 2004/2006. Recording of the performance that took place at the Riggio Galleries, Dia:Beacon, Beacon, NY, 2005. Video, color and sound, 80'08". Performers: José Luis Blondet, Ragani Haas, Joan Jonas. Video performers: Ragani Haas, Geoff Hendricks, Joan Jonas, Antonio Rogers, Sur Rodney Sur, Zina Magical Dog Star. Singer: Kate Fenner. Video by Joan Jonas. Live sound: Joan Jonas and Jason Moran. Music: Jason Moran. Producer: Jim Bauerlein and Dia Foundation. Stage Manager: Sekeena Gavagan. Sound Designer: Patrick Heilman

READING  
DANTE III  
2007/2009

Joan Jonas's reading of Dante's *Divina Commedia* is at the origin of a piece that reflects upon the current state of our world - one the artist relates most to Inferno, the first of the three canticles of the epic poem - but also the way we perceive and account for our experience of an era of profound changes and resulting confusion. The artist relates her reading to the ones of Warburg (*The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Thing*) and H.D. -Hilda Doolittle-. (*Lines in the Sand*).



*Reading Dante III*, 2007/2009. Recordings of performances that took place at: MACBA, Barcelona, 2007; Sydney Biennial, Australia, 2008; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 2008; Orchard Street and Performing Garage, New York, 2009. Additional footage shot in Mexico City and Canada. Video, color and sound, 46'26". Performers: Barcelona: Ragani Haas, Cristina Hortigüela, Joan Jonas. Sydney: Ragani Haas, Joan Jonas. Boston: Andrea Anastasio, Marco DeMichellis, Joan Jonas, Ateya Khorakiwala, Adam Pendleton, Steven Prina. New York (Orchard Street): Michael Blum, Uchenna Enwezor, David Grubbs, Anthony McCall, Gwenn Thomas. New York (Performing Garage): Joana Aviliez, Ragani Haas, Joan Jonas. Video by Joan Jonas. Video Assistant: David Dempewolf. Singers: Kate Fenner, Alicia Hall Moran. Soundtrack by Joan Jonas with sound by Jason Moran

*Reanimation*, 2010/2014. Recording of the performance that took place at Hangar Bicocca, Milan, 2014. Video, color and sound, 51'33". Performers: Joan Jonas and Jason Moran. Video by Joan Jonas. Video Assistant: David Dempewolf. Music by Jason Moran. Assistant: Coral Turner. Technician: David Dempewolf



Proceeding with her reflection on the state of the world, Joan Jonas this time takes her cue from *Under the Glacier*, a novel by Icelandic author Halldór Laxness, published in 1968. The book tells the story of a young emissary sent by the Bishop of Iceland to investigate paranormal activity surrounding a glacier. This serves as a metaphor to reflect upon the advent of the era of Anthropocene, wherein a drastic cycle of changes to our natural environment are clearly identified as being the result of human activity.

REANIMATION  
2010/2014

*They Come to Us without a Word II*, 2015/2016. Recording of the performance that took place at Piccolo Teatro Arsenale, Venice, 2015. Video, color and sound, 62'46". Performers: Saverio Bonato, Zora Casebere, Noah Delorme, Melania Fusco, Lila Gavagan, Joan Jonas, Jin Jung, Elena Mazzi, Jonas and Malcolm Moran, Claudio Piscopo, Willa Schwabsky, g. olmo stuppia. Video by Joan Jonas. Video assistance: David Sherman. Music by Jason Moran



**THEY COME  
TO US WITHOUT  
A WORD  
2015/2016**

Inspiration for this work comes from ghost stories drawn from Nova Scotia's oral tradition. Concerns about the increasingly fragile state of nature continue to be central in this work, which is intrinsically linked to *Reanimation*. Jonas ponders the devastating relationship humans maintain with other species on the planet. Additional references include writings about bees by biologist Jakob von Uexküll, *Why Look at Animals*, a text by the English poet and art critic John Berger, as well as *The Open: Man and Animal*, a book by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben.

# JOAN JONAS

**About the artist.** A native of New York, Joan Jonas graduated with a BA in Art History from Mount Holyoke College in 1958 before going on to study sculpture at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She furthered her training in drawing and poetry while at Columbia University, where she received an MFA in Sculpture in 1965. Her encounter with the work of Claes Oldenburg, Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti convinced her to expand her artistic practice and stage actions, in which she soon became a main protagonist. While sculpture and drawing have continued to be essential in her work, performance enabled her to add sound and the spatiotemporal dimension, something that also enabled her to refer to film as much as to dance and theatre.

The recipient of many honours and awards, Joan Jonas has taken part in six editions of Documenta Kassel since 1972 and major



survey exhibitions of her work have been staged, such as those at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1983 and 1994; the Queens Museum of Art, New York in 2003, or the most recent at HangarBicocca in Milan in 2014.

Among her most noteworthy recent solo shows are: Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010), Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, Stockholm (2013), Proyecto Paralelo, Mexico (2013), Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2013), Centre for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, Japan (2014).

In 2015, she represented the USA at the Venice Biennale, where she received a special mention from the jury for her installation *They Come To Us without a Word*. Fundación Botín was an important contributor to the production of the related performance.