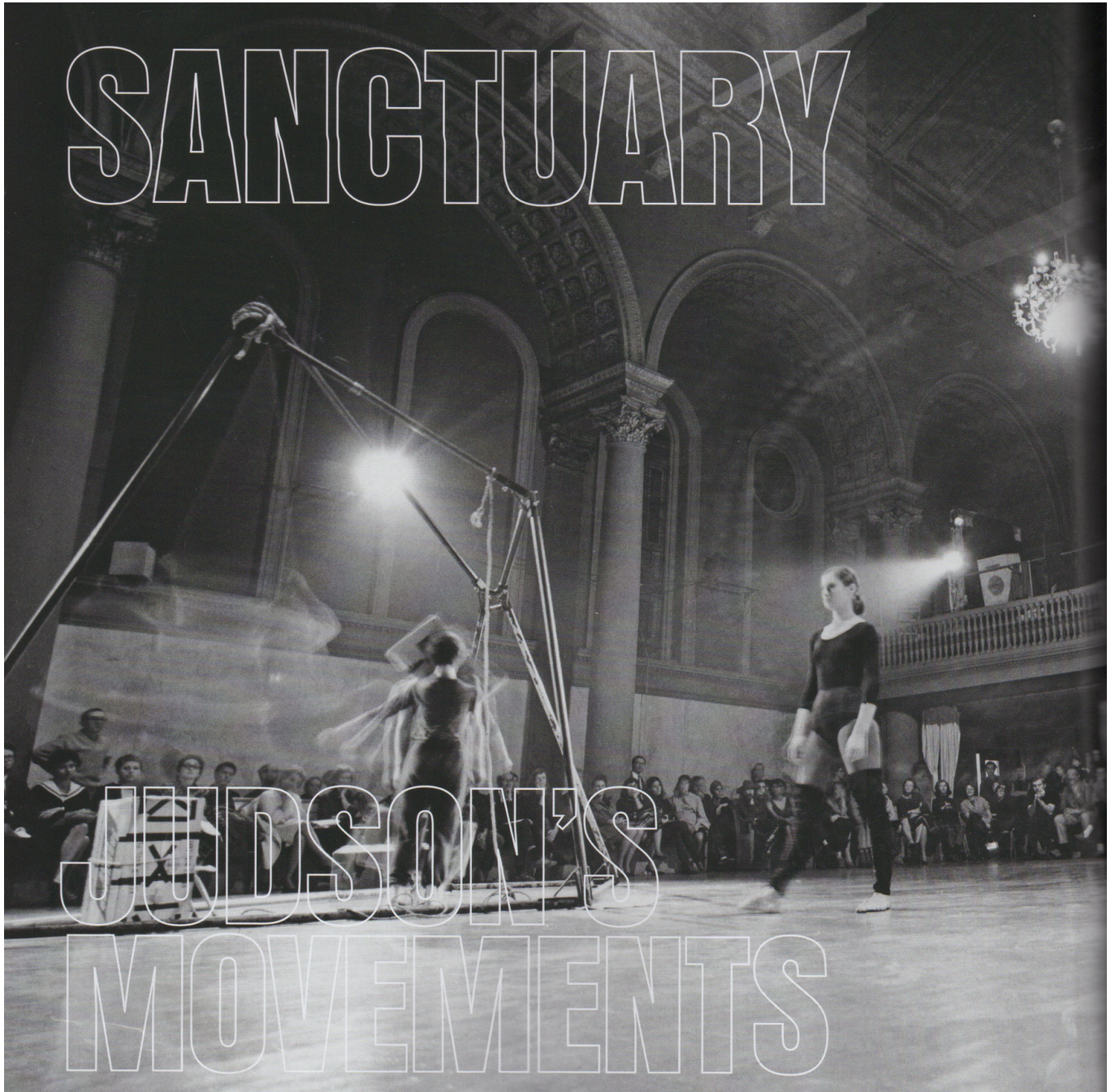


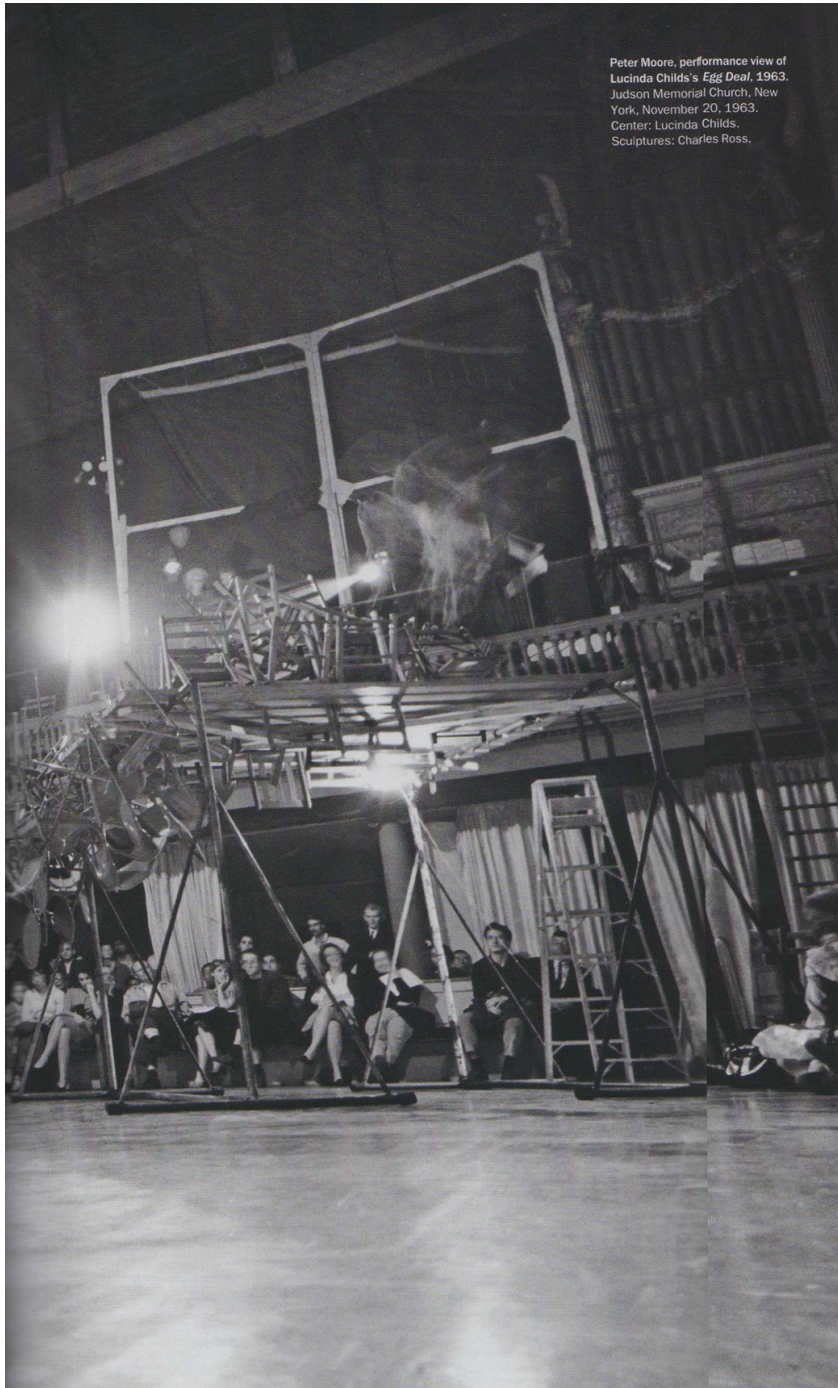
H A L E S

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

Carolee Schneemann, 'Sanctuary: Judson's Movements', Artforum, Volume 57,
September 2018

ARTFORUM





Peter Moore, performance view of
Lucinda Childs's *Egg Deal*, 1963.
Judson Memorial Church, New
York, November 20, 1963.
Center: Lucinda Childs.
Sculptures: Charles Ross.

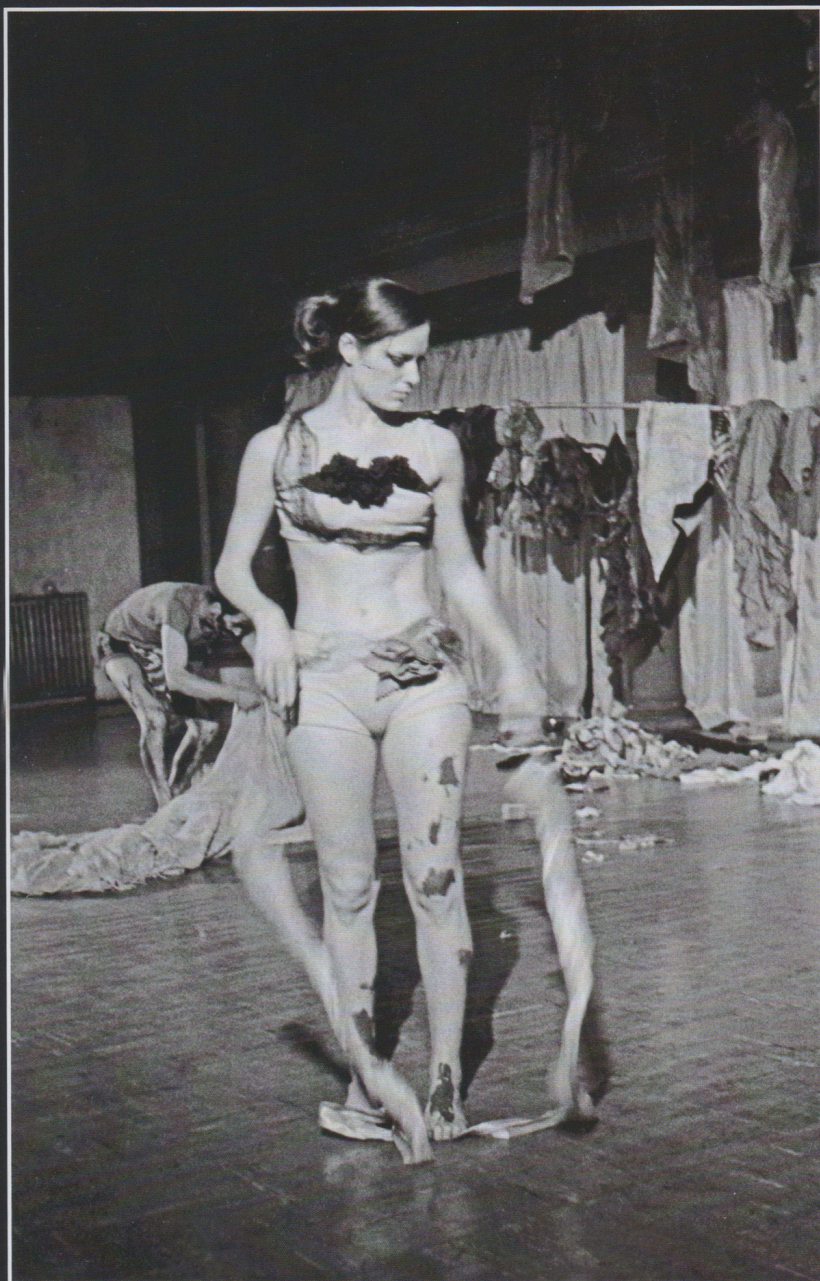
CATHERINE DAMMAN
DEBORAH HAY
CLAUDIA LA ROCCO
YVONNE RAINER
CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
DEBORAH JOWITT
LA MONTE YOUNG
DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE
BARBARA MOORE
STEVE PAXTON

ON JULY 6, 1962, seventeen members and affiliates of Robert Ellis Dunn's composition class convened at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village for an unorthodox concert of dance. "There should have been something for everybody, including a nap if desired," wrote the critic Jill Johnston in her ebullient *Village Voice* review. "In fact there was so much that special moments arose as expected and at least three dances provoked a big response from everybody."

That evening and some evenings after collectively became known as the Judson Dance Theater. The program was a signpost for both democracy and postmodernism, an unlikely pair. Probably it didn't have much to do with either. Probably the wax of nostalgia obscures harsh realities. But it remains an attractive parable for how some brilliant young people made movements together, and how that togetherness was—like all togethernesses—a tricky congregation of differences amid a sameness.

This month, "Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done" opens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In honor of the occasion, *Artforum* invited art historian CATHERINE DAMMAN and writers DEBORAH JOWITT and CLAUDIA LA ROCCO to consider the performances' influence and legacies. In addition, witnesses and participants DEBORAH HAY, BARBARA MOORE, STEVE PAXTON, YVONNE RAINER, DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE, CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN, and LA MONTE YOUNG reflect on the action and fill in the blanks regarding this historic series of events. —David Velasco

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I was drawing constantly, extending the energies of my own kinetic movements, which became the sequences that I brought to the Judson dancers.

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

*Painting as Theater: Improvised Movement—
Visceral, Tactile, Sensuous Variations*

I WAS SO READY to join an experimental movement group. Would they be ready for me? James Tenney and I had just completed our MFA studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana, his in experimental music, mine in painting. We were floundering. At the post office in Sidney, Illinois (population 686), there was a letter from Bell Telephone Labs inviting Tenney to join their electronic-music research staff. We decided to pack a U-Haul with all my paintings; his upright piano; our cat, Kitch; and our books and papers and move back to the East Coast. Philip Corner, one of Tenney's music collaborators, advised me to investigate a group of innovative dancers working in the basement of Judson Memorial Church. I would be the first visual artist to choreograph for them.

At the same time, Tenney's associate Billy Klüver suggested I go to a small storefront on East Second Street. There, I joined Claes Oldenburg's *Store Days*, 1961, alongside Patty Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras, Milet Andrejevic, and others. I was given a purple spangled dress and a knife and instructed to balance on a small shelf while stabbing the wall repeatedly for several nights.

As a graduate student in painting, I had suffered an "existential crisis," feeling that some aspect of painting was dead. I had extended the dimensionality of my paintings with motorized elements, and increased my collages' density with domestic objects. I had begun slicing through layers of my paintings to experience the "other side." I had composed my first live outdoor event, *Labyrinth*, 1960, after a tornado blew through our fragile cottage in Illinois, bringing down trees and raising mud, dirt, and rocks from the streambed. Friends were invited to follow instructions written on cards to crawl, climb, and interact with the landscape. The passage was initiated by my cat walking through a smashed kitchen window, in acceptance of this altered space. As a landscape painter, I recognized this gesture as breaking the traditional frame, which would soon lead me to develop movement principles within the Judson Dance Theater.

Besides being influenced by Oldenburg, I had been given a copy of Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* (1938). Tenney and I were reading all of Marcel Proust, theories of organic structure inspired by D'Arcy Thompson, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), and the essays of Wilhelm Reich. I was influenced by the consistency of Tenney's piano studies of Charles Ives, our friendship with the composer Carl Ruggles, and my work as a casual archivist for Edgard Varèse. The art world was small, intimate. We became friends with John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Earle Brown, as well as with contemporary poets and political activists.

In these early, wild days, artists came from all over the country to claim New York's expansive loft spaces, which small manufacturers had fled. I found Papadopoulos's fur-cutting loft on West Twenty-Ninth Street, and it was an

Opposite page: Peter Moore, rehearsal view of Carolee Schneemann's *Chromelodeon* (4th Concretion), 1963. Judson Memorial Church, New York, June 21, 1963. Lucinda Childs.

Right: Peter Moore, performance view of Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy*, 1964. Judson Memorial Church, New York, November 17, 1964. Unknown performer and Dorothea Rockburne.



enchantment: Half a city block long, two skylights, a twisted tree limb for a banister, for forty-seven dollars a month! A homeless man lived in my hallway and shared my sink. Piles of huge wooden cutting boards and various kinds of furs had been abandoned in the loft, so I had my visual materials at hand. I was drawing constantly, extending the energies of my own kinetic movements, which became the sequences that I brought to the Judson dancers.

The dancers became my palette. My earliest drawing experiments led to images they would enact by leaping off of ladders while spilling paint to activate the space around them. The gestures intensified a transformative dynamic where movement created marks. My earliest kinetic works for Judson were *Newspaper Event* and *Lateral Splay* (both 1963), which emphasized contact improvisation among the participants and the consistency of malleable materials.

With *Chromelodeon* (1963), I realized visual interplays of the principles of painting, Happenings, and dance based on collaboration and experiment. Interactive lighting cues responded to a rhythmic sound collage of barrel-organ music and Bach's cantatas, which I composed with Tenney. It was rollicking, remarkable, visionary. It was my belief that *Chromelodeon* would best represent my Judson work in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibition.

I conceived of specific actions for my wonderful collaborators: for Yvonne Rainer's intense, compelling presence; for Ruth Emerson's exquisite, elongated motions. I directed actions and sequences for Deborah Hay as if she were my alter ego. A consistent set of exercises to define contact, malleability, interaction, risk, and trust evolved. I usually crawled around the edge of the events wearing a mask, while holding a whistle and ringing a bell. It was only while instructing my performers for *Lateral Splay*, a prolonged exercise in extreme momentum involving bodies crashing and colliding, that I had to physically demonstrate what I was teaching them.

The concept of *Meat Joy* (1964) demanded that I train participants who had no prior experience in dance or theater whatsoever. My cast included a poet, a painter, a balloon salesman, and a teacher. Envisioning the erotic rituals for *Meat Joy* incited a physical response to the actual flesh of chickens, fish, and sausages. I was now in a position to enter the arena I myself had choreographed to discover an ecstatic state. But by entering the work, I was separated from my painterly principles of consistent observation. I also lost the immense benefit of isolated concentration. Every moment was action.

This painterly realization of kinetic theater vitalized a public space of performance and challenged an audience's expectations. The inspiration of Abstract Expressionism and the writings of Artaud unfolded in a vibrant living collage, one rooted in the dynamic of the Judson collaborations. □

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN IS A PIONEERING MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST. SHE WAS AWARDED THE GOLDEN LION FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AT THE VENICE BIENNALE IN 2017, AND WAS CELEBRATED WITH A 2017–18 RETROSPECTIVE AT MOMA PS1, NEW YORK.