



PITTSBURGH (1981- Formerly the Arts and Crafts Center of Pittsburgh (1945-1980)) CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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CENTER SHOW—Jan. 3-25
Performance Art and Exhibitions from
Los Angeles and New York

11 visiting artists, dancers, performers, and
lecturers.

LAST MINUTE SHOPPERS; X-mas gifts;
Class and Membership gift certificates

WINTER 1981 CLASS SCHEDULE

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE ART?*

One of the most difficult things about what is defined as Performance Art is defining the term. Critics have a hard time with it. Art Historians have no ready category in which to place it. And with good reason. Performance, as the phenomenon is often called, is not, strictly speaking, painting, sculpture, architecture or film. Nor is it theatre, dance, opera or mime. It does, however, draw on all these sources, and for that reason has always been attractive to artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms.

Indeed, since the very nature of the form is about the cross breeding of the arts, performance aggressively defies precise or easy definition. If this ephemeral genre possesses any common denominator it is that performance is "live art." Created by artists who closely relate their public confrontations to fine art modes of the time. The decision to perform live with an audience rather than to work in an isolated studio, or to exhibit in galleries removed from any direct relationship with the public, is the key to performance art. Performance is the expression of artists who wish to challenge the viewer's perception of art and the limits of those perceptions. Thus each work becomes an entirely unexpected combination of events. The form allows artists to make a "collage of media," and the means by which they do this are as diverse as the imaginations of performance artists themselves.

** excerpt from "The Challenge of Performance Art," by Rosalee Roldberg in Portfolio magazine, Nov. '79*

JANE ZINGALE

Jane Zingale uses a process called "color xerography" to create brilliant color prints resembling movie stills and exotic color posters.

Using her own face and hands as a subject, the artist is herself the performer/sculpture/painted canvas—the visual reflection of her vision.

The preparation for her art-making and performances is an elaborate process requiring many hours. Jane paints her face and hands with various colors of fluorescent grease, making designs of luminous stripes, concentric circles, zigzags or landscapes. She has found that the special grease paint refracts light and gives more intense colors.

In some of her works, Zingale also uses her hands to spell a message or title in sign language. For her, the machine is just the method by which she documents her changing performances in different colors. She views herself as "an explorer of the situation" and the color copying machine as "an explorer of the imposed."

"Human moments frozen and recorded as fragments of performance speak with the eloquent silence of mime," reflected a critic after viewing her performance.

Her work has been presented in many galleries, museums, and universities throughout the U.S. Zingale, who received her Master's degree in Fine Arts at the University of Minnesota, and studied at the Yale School of Art and Architecture, is also an actress and will perform as Mary in Guy de Cointet's play "Tell Me" here at the Center. She has taught art at a number of art institutions, including the University of Oklahoma. Many of her performances and works of art have been reviewed in some of the finest art periodicals in the country. A resident of Los Angeles, Jane comes to Pittsburgh regularly to visit her brother Norman Anderson.

Jane Zingale will present an individual performance using a color xerox machine and sign language on Tuesday, January 6, at 8:00 p.m. at the Center. Her prints will be on display January 3-25.

JANE ZINGALE
Mary in Tell Me

Q. How much do you improvise, add to or interpret Guy's scripts?

A. The pieces are developmental. We get the script, read it, get together, and begin. Little direction is given. We go over and over it, taking many hours. And the piece grows. Guy knows what he wants but he doesn't direct at the beginning. There is no response from him until we hit what he has in mind and then he says, "Ah, yes." Then more direction takes place. Eventually a character emerges, a conglomeration of Guy's work and the actress's personality. It is very much yourself, very much the actresses themselves. Then the edges are polished. The more we do a piece, the more evolved it is. A piece is as finished as there is time to work on it. There is a wide latitude for interpretation, of course, because when Guy wrote those books, he never had performance in mind. They were visual pieces.

Q. Do you ever think or speak this way?

A. Oh yes, all the time and especially when I'm working on a piece. Wherever I go, my lines are right there. Either someone says something or something happens, and I take off. The edges that Guy catches with his humor are in all our day to day circumstances. Maybe all of a sudden you are frightened or surprised, and you start talking this strange language. Then as quickly you return to normal. This juxtaposition of emotional attitudes and eccentric little experiences belongs to all of us. And you become convinced soon enough that Guy's pieces are quite normal in the social context.

GUY deCOINTET

Guy deCointet has written the one hour play and designed the unusual set of "Tell Me," which will remain on view between performances in the Main Gallery of the Center. Eight performances are scheduled.

"Tell Me" is a performance about abstraction and language, and how they are perceived by the mind and the senses. Therefore, the piece is primarily about communication. The way the three characters communicate with each other using a great variety of means to express their feelings and thoughts, and the way they react to their everyday surroundings make up the base of the play.

Various visual elements of form and color, pictures, furniture, books, common or uncommon objects, constitute the set: a living room. During the performance all these elements are used, discussed and experienced by the characters in unexpected ways. The relationships between what is seen and what is heard question perceptions of reality.

Flash Art Performance magazine described "Tell Me" as . . . a melodrama which revolves on the relationships and chatter of three housewives . . . as if three computers had gone mad . . . beautiful women are brought together for an hour of contrived nonsense . . . which seems to be poetic ambiguity . . . it is alternately baffling but amusing, indigestible but appetizing, legible but impenetrable."



Guy deCointet creating graphic designs with words which are used as props.
Photo credit: Helene Gaillet

Guy deCointet will discuss *Performance Art* with Ben Shaktman and Barbara Braathen in a Panel Discussion on Monday, January 5, at 8:00 p.m. Free to members; \$3.00 non-members.

A *WET* magazine critic wrote of deCointet: "If you crossed James Joyce with Marcel Duchamp, added Harold Pinter, Roland Barthes and a dash of Sesame Street, you'd get a lumpy prototype of Guy deCointet. He's a mild-mannered Frenchman who braves the outermost wilderness of language by fashioning plays, operas, books and drawings that make alphabet soup of our most cherished linguistic packaging. Orthodox thinkers beware."

Born in Paris in 1940 to a French Army father and a mother who was a gifted linguist, deCointet was exposed early to a series of alien tongues. He moved to Los Angeles, California, in 1968 and in 1971 started to make books, their text composed from a mixture of found and invented codes, languages and symbols. His third such book became the basis of his first performance, "Espahor Ledet Ko Ulaner."

His work has been presented in museums, galleries and universities throughout the United States and Europe, and he has taught courses on performance art. In 1979, deCointet received a National Endowment Artist Fellowship Grant. "Tell Me" was presented at the Museum of Modern Art; following the performance at the Center, "Tell Me" will be presented in Paris. Mr. deCointet will also be included as one of the 19 American artists in a January 1980 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

new art form from L.A.
PERFORMANCE ART
presented for the first time
in Pittsburgh by:
THE ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTER
from Jan. 2-12

"TELL ME"
by Guy de Cointet

"a masterpiece of mischief and subversive dialogue."
was performed at the Museum of Modern Art.
Next...Paris.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GUY deCOINTET

By Barbara Braathen

B: *Your first performance was in 1973?*

C: Yes. It was a presentation for the black book. (ESPHANOR LEDET KO ULUNER) A novel. I wrote a script for Billy Barty. It was just presenting the book in a different manner. I wanted to give the people a different idea of what I am sure they had from the book alone. The book was so abstract. The performances are the visual complement to the writing.

B: *Were you exposed to performance art as a young man in Paris?*

C: No. There were not such things that I knew of.

B: *Or to any vanguard art? Dada or Surrealism?*

C: I knew them later but not at that time.

B: *What about 50s or 60s art?*

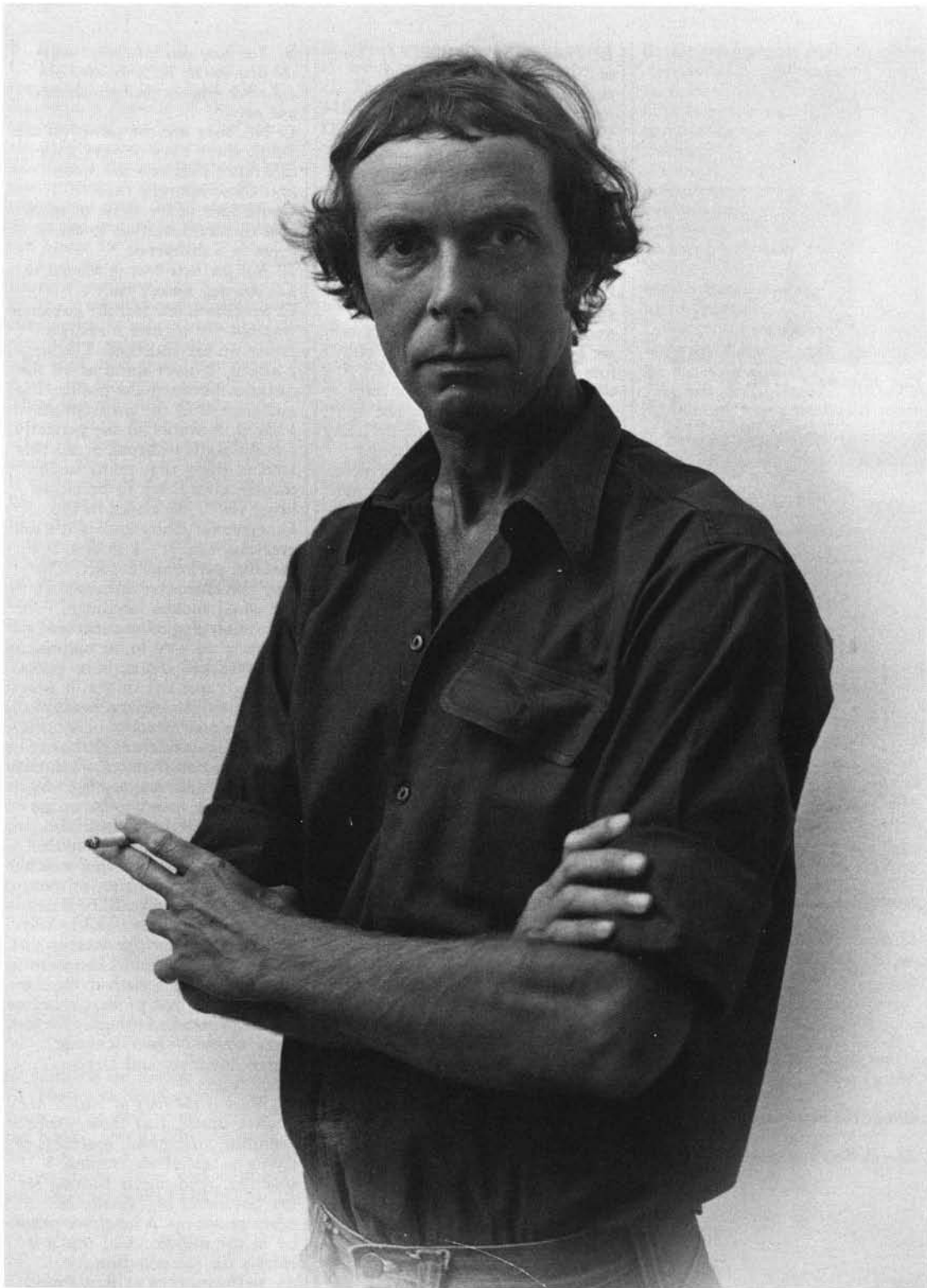
C: No, I was not doing much. I really started late. I was always doing something, painting or writing, but never thought I would do them publicly. I was very reluctant. I never found something I thought I could work on for more than 3 months, or 6 months. I was not going to repeat little shapes over and over. When I did the newspaper, I really recognized it. I saw something I could work on a long time, something which would develop by itself.

B: *Do you think in your languages in ordinary life? Or do you dream in them?*

C: Well, now I'm starting a little bit to speak or behave that way. Not when we're together, the performers and I, but when we're with others.

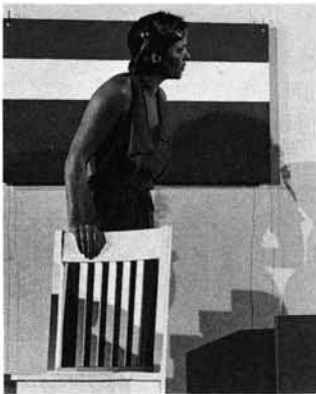
B: *How much improvisation is in your pieces?*

C: There is none. Well, at the beginning of rehearsals perhaps there is some. But later we almost always go back to the original text. I spend much time on the writing and the rhythm, so if you change the text you change the rhythm and things start to fall apart.





Guy deCointet's "Tell Me"



Actress Jane Zingale and the green painting in a performance of "TELL ME" at the Museum of Modern Art, 1980.

(Michael looks at the abstract painting on the wall)

Michael: What a pretty painting! No, it's not pretty. It's soft. God, so soft."

. . . later

(Olive looking at the painting on Mary's wall)

Olive: You've got a new one!

Mary: Yes, a little more complicated.

B: The newspaper [ACRCIT] (used in "Tell Me") was your first publication involving numbers and letters?

C: Yes. It is a mixture of everything. Here is a text. I switched a few letters. Here's the same one just broken into different units. Here's some Chinese text. Here is a Marshall McLuhan quote.

B: A critic described your work as "the demilitarization of language."

C: Well, my work, it is not a system, you know, to replace another system. I keep the system we have for a few things. It works fine for a few things. But my work, it's more to add to the present system, to open the existing system up a little bit using lots of different things. In the plays, sometimes the performers just talk with sounds. But sometimes they talk with touch. Sometimes they just talk with movement or gesture. Sometimes they talk normally. Sometimes they speak in foreign languages or made up languages. They are silent too, they talk completely silently. And they also sing, there is some music. There is a non-musical song in TELL ME.

One character sings with quick little movements. The other one who is listening marks the rhythm by tapping softly her feet and she closes her eyes and says, "Oh, that is such a nice song."

B: How do you see this related to standard language?

C: Well, there is very little to do to change standard language and yet the change, it means so much.

[Pulls out drawing of mirror writing.] Look. It's very pretty, this pattern. Simple. But when you see it from the other side, it is my handwriting. It is nothing fancy. It's not even calligraphy at all. It is normal, a little crowded perhaps because it was done with my left hand backwards. So there's no attempt to be fancy or pretty at all. But THAT side, look. It's completely different even though it is exactly the same. I think the props work the same way too a little bit: switch just one thing . . .

B: You have done five plays since the first one in 1976. Is there a difference between your performances and plays?

C: No, they are the same. At this point, there may be very little difference between my work and contemporary theatre. I would love to try mine in more of a theatre situation to see if there is a difference.

B: But you have been in theatres in Los Angeles, haven't you?

C: Several times. But the audience was not the theatre audience.

It was an art audience. The stage, I love it. I don't mind at all the distance between the public, the audience, and the proscenium.

I like it. It works for me perfectly. I don't want to break at all this kind of thing that many in the theatre always try to break, to bring the thing closer to life. I mean everybody knows it's not everyday life. It's a fiction, it's theatre, performance, art. The way the character speaks isn't the usual spoken language.

I am not trying to be natural at all. There is no way to be natural in this situation. There is no point to it.

B: Why do you only use beautiful women in your plays?

C: This is accidental. It has just happened that way. Usually the performers are my friends, or else have asked to be in my works. People have said, also, that they didn't even know X was so beautiful until they saw her in my play. And I do use men, the other types like Billy Barty or Virginia Farmer. TELL ME was written for three women and a man, but at the last minute I couldn't find a man to do the part and we had to start rehearsing so I reworked the play for just three women—Jane Zingale, Helen Mendez, and Denise Domergue.

B: What is the story of TELL ME?

C: Not much. Just three women spending an evening together, or trying to spend an evening together. And one is waiting for her boyfriend and finally he never shows up. A neighbor passes by in the middle. And that's it. Here's the introduction for the performances at Rosamund Felsen's Gallery in Los Angeles:

It's late afternoon at Mary's. Her house is situated on the bank of the Sacramento River, in that stretch of the river which is as beautiful as the Danube between Ybbs and Melk, east of Vienna. A few miles away is the town of Courtland, a Chinese settlement for many years, where the famous Dr. Sun Yat Sen lived for a time in exile.

After her day's work, Mary is home planning to spend the evening with some of her best friends: Michael, Olive, and hopefully, the elusive Mark.

The way these young women behave, talking and listening to each other, how they understand or misunderstand each other, how they see and perceive their surroundings interest me. One of these days, I believe, I'm going to drive up North and pay a visit to Mary.

They talk about what they did in the morning and what's happening right now. The phone rings. I mean, just the normal activities. But with all this kind of abstract visual and various ways of talking.

B: A writer in the Los Angeles Times complained about the lack of a real ending in TELL ME, about its "circular structuralism," the absence of all classical format.

C: In theatre if you write a play you have a plot. And if you have a plot, you need a strong end. You need something that solves the problem or doesn't solve it. I don't have a plot. There may be plots, as in RAMONA, but no plot per se. My plays and performances just start abruptly, immediately. There is no preparation or something to bring something into being. There is no buildup towards something. And they stop just as abruptly as they start. My plays just start and stop.

B: *What is the structure of TELL ME?*

C: There is no overall construction but rather about fifty segments made into a tight chain. The segments, some short, some very short, some longer, some long, fit together with transitions between them. The transitions can be just a word or a prop or a sound, a movement, a quick look at something, etc. I work a lot on the transitions, the connections between the segments. They're important. That's when the characters change their mood, their behavior.

B: *What is the story in RAMONA?*

C: That one is too much story I think. Too much action. Ramona, she just moved into her house and it's a huge mansion, enormous. It was played outdoors in front of an old, grand building on the Cal Tech campus. And so she's in this house overlooking the sea and she goes out at night, she's not feeling very well, she can't sleep, she's very nervous. "What am I going to do?" she worries. She's a little bit neurotic you know. And she goes on the staircase, a double staircase, in front of her house and there is a storm and she sees a man in a boat and the boat sinks and there is the man swimming ashore and landing just at the feet of Ramona. So they start talking about it. And somebody comes, a girl, a distraught girl. And the man is her boyfriend who has been missing for a long time. So they get reunited. Then the father comes looking for his daughter. There are some passers-by too. One was Jane [Zingale] passing by and telling quite an extravagant story about her dog. She is looking for her dog. Another passer-by is a painter who thinks the house is so beautiful that she must paint it. She comes with her brushes and palette and canvas and starts painting the house. She comes with her children, a boy and a girl. But she can't paint. Impossible to paint. So she gets a little frantic. She hears some strange noises and she takes her brushes and her kids and leaves to go home where it's safer.

B: *How does it end?*

C: They all stay for dinner. Lucy, the father, the boyfriend, etc. Ramona is cooking at the beginning of the play. She talks about her cooking with her friend Lucy. But she is interrupted by these dramas—the storm, the night, her roses, her neuroses. So in the end, they all go inside the house for dinner.

B: *Your characters always seem to be having a good time.*

C: Yes, I think they do. Sometimes they suffer, a sharp pain, they cry. Mary Anne [Duganne] cries very well, real tears. But these pains are forgotten quickly. They change their moods very quickly, they react fast to each other, to the things and objects around them. That I like. That is difficult sometimes in ordinary life. That's the thing I really like. Sometimes they cry and just in a split second, just after, it's forgotten completely. They never talk about it, and go on to the next thing.

B: *There is then this joie de vivre of sorts?*

C: Yes, a little bit. But I'm not trying to get it. It's just the way it is. These people always understand each other in the worst situations. Or when they don't understand, they don't understand. They accept it and go on to something else. So since they understand each other, it looks like they're quite happy. There is no problem. Because they are free, they are very free. They are so free that there are really no things that are impossible. This is what gives the impression of easiness. The problems are there but they're recognized and accepted by the characters. And they don't feel they have to understand everything.

B: *How did you develop your props?*

C: They just develop with the stories. The first props were the books, specifically one book for MY FATHER'S DIARY, a large shaped book. Also, two identical paintings for TWO DRAWINGS.

B: *What is that green painting with the white stripe and two holes?*

C: That's a painting for TELL ME. They use it as a painting. Denise likes it very much and she sits on it several times, and then they use it as a board for a game. They play on top of it.

B: *And the little orange cube?*

C: That's a book too. It's built like a sort of pyramid, one shape on top of the other, and Jane knocks them down accidentally and says, "Oh, I broke my book, my precious book." She's quite desperate, but she fixes it up and she starts to read it.

B: *How can you say that you are not intentionally being funny?*

C: Because I'm not looking for the ideas thinking that they have to be funny. I don't know exactly what is going to be funny either. I don't work on the humor at all and never write something to be funny. It's just funny. Probably because of the unexpected, the switches, the contradictions and their obviousness. That is very different from people working to be funny. They study everything for its humor and if its not funny they forget about it.

B: *Your entire sense of design has humor about it. Like that trapezoidal table. Or the green stripe painting with its rounded corners and nail holes the size of quarters.*

C: That's because the characters have to hang it and remove it from the wall several times. It's easier to do it with large holes. Everything is kept simple. And the color too. It just functions according to the text. Colors are just there when they are talked about. There is no color just to be pretty. They are just green, orange, red, blue, and that's it. All matte because of the lights, otherwise if it's shiny the color tends to disappear in the glare and reflections.

B: *Your latest props are of cardboard.*

C: Yes. They are more transportable. All of the props of TELL ME have to fit in the back of a VW and there are 29 of them. And the cardboard gives really nice edges when it's folded.

B: *Do you have any political futures: Any concept of how you would want the political situation to be in the future?*

C: I hate authority. But my commitment is different from working for a specific political system. I'm very aware of the politics of everyday life, the way I can function in a society like this, just doing what I want to do. In some countries you just can't. Some Communist countries. Full employment is great but not for everybody. I wouldn't like to be fully employed at all. Even in my own field.

B: *You have lived in Paris, in New York and in Los Angeles. Do you think that you are now a permanent resident of Los Angeles?*

C: I feel very free in Los Angeles. My family is in France and it is a very large family, and they all have large families. And I grew up there so I know a lot of people also. I felt freer in New York where I first lived when I came to the United States. I lived there for a year. But even there I knew too many people. It was like entering something I knew already. And I was not interested in it. But in Los Angeles, I knew just one person. So I could spend my time without having to explain myself or give reasons for what I would do. You can be quite isolated in Los Angeles, the distances are so great. But also it's a big city and there are lots of interesting people if you want to meet them. You can stay on the beach, or you can see many different and exciting people and none will ask you anything.

Barbara Braathen is co-director of the Braathen-Gallozi at 76 Duane Street, N.Y.C. She will participate in the panel discussion "What is Performance Art" with Guy de Cointet and Ben Shaktman on Monday, January 5 at 8 P.M.

Watch in our next issue for an interview with our 1981 Pittsburgh Artist of the Year: AARONEL GRUBER