

LIVE ART

<https://www.joshuasofaer.com/2011/06/what-is-live-art/>

<https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about-lada-old/what-is-live-art/>

As Sofaer mentions in his “infotainment” *What Is Live Art?* (2002), the term Live Art came into use “as an attempt to acknowledge the diversity of live based arts practices” after Performance Art had already been established as a genre by the 1970s. The history of that genre is traced back to Dada, Futurism, Bauhaus, action painting and the Japanese movement Gutai, which really influenced Fluxus. The Fluxus and happenings movements of the 1950s-1970s solidified Performance Art as a contemporary art genre.

Live Art is, on one level, always about the body as it is existing in the present moment. It is about being *here now*.

Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019)



A pioneer in the rise of experimental art and performance art in the 1950s, '60s + '70s, American artist Carolee Schneemann started out as an abstract expressionist painter but turned to performance as a way of rejecting the “male genius painter” model of the time - but always considered herself first and foremost a painter. As Sofaer described in his video, Schneemann was one of those artists who worked “at the margins” of her discipline. Nowadays, she is best known for her live art pieces that explored the objectification/oppression of women, taboos around women’s bodies and women’s desire, and breaking down systemic binaries. Some of her most famous performances include *Meat Joy* (1964), *Interior Scroll* (1975), and *Up to And Including Her Limits* (1973-76). Nudity in performance art has been prevalent since this era, and continues to function in similar ways (among others) to how Schneemann deployed it in her work. In a letter to a friend, she wrote: “I do not show my naked body, I am being my body.” She is also associated with the Fluxus, Neo-Dada, and Beat Generation movements.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZKYHeJYD7I> intro to Carolee Schneemann’s posthumous retrospective at the Barbican

Yves Klein (1928-1962)



A contemporary of Schneemann's was the French artist Yves Klein, whose practice was deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism. He was interested in the concept of "the void as the far side of the infinite," driving his work towards more and more immateriality. This well-known piece *Anthropometrie* (1960) utilized nude models for figure drawing as "living brushes," resulting in body-scale prints of the models' bodies created by themselves as opposed to observational renderings. Klein is regarded as one of the forerunners of the genre of Performance Art.

“I used to wonder why it was called Live Art. After doing it for over 25 years, I realize it’s because Live Art is about aliveness... about making myself fully available to life, all of life: the sorrow, joy, anguish, excitement, jealousy, shame, gratitude, disappointment, sadness and love. Live art feels a lot like dying. Like living inside a hole. An ass hole. An art hole. Yes. Art is in that hole.”

-Stacy Makishi on receiving the Arthole Award in 2019

Klein died prematurely at the age of 34 after a series of heart attacks. This quote from the Hawaiian-British artist Stacy Makishi, in her signature sincere and humorous style, astutely illuminates the paper-thin life/death divide in Klein’s work, especially with regards to that concept of “the void” beyond the infinite. Live Art, Stacy says is about aliveness. Life and death are interconnected, complementary forces - continuing with Zen Buddhism, consider the symbol of yin and yang. Consider also the practice of mindfulness. *Be here now.*

Guillermo Gomez Peña and Coco Fusco

The Couple in a Cage: Two Amerindians Visit the West (1992-93)



In the early '90s, the artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Peña presented themselves in a “living exhibition” called *Two Amerindians Visit the West*. This performance, first performed in honour of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival to the Americas, exposed the historical violence against and abuse of Indigenous peoples through colonization. Drawing on the colonial phenomenon of human zoos, Fusco and Gomez Peña's costumes and activities while on display were anachronistic, appropriative, and stereotypical: they played with the expectations audiences might have of indigenous “authenticity” and “aliveness” in the late 20th century.

Cassils, *Tiresias* (2011, 2024)



Here is the Canadian artist Cassils, with documentation from their durational performance, *Tiresias*. Named after the Greek mythological figure who was transformed from a man to a woman for seven years, Cassils pressed their body - transformed through years of bodybuilding and gender transition - against a neoclassical sculpture made of ice until it melted. The heat from their living body resulted in the fusion of solid to liquid: a poignant reminder of the fluid, ever-changing state of all things (identity included).

Sofaer: "But at least part of the definition of Live Art has to be its resistance to definition. Maybe it's called 'live' precisely because it hasn't yet solidified into a category; it is a live process of change and challenge."

Audiences & Live Art



Paul Walde, *Requiem for a Glacier* (2013)

Live Art (not the documentation of live art, but the ephemeral action which happens in real time) is remarkable for its direct contact with an audience. Live Art comes from the body, and as such, the artist is always immediately present when the audience is experiencing the work. There is such potential in Live Art for affect! Audiences can witness the entire work unfold, or they can come in and out if the work is durational. They might participate in the creation of the work alongside the artist(s). They might happen upon the work unknowingly, as in the filming of Sofaer's *What Is Live Art?*

In this work by the Canadian sound artist Paul Walde, the audience of the concert that is being performed is also the subject of the work itself: the disappearing glacier.



Tania Bruguera, *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008)

Here, Tania Bruguera orchestrated a choreographed performance by two mounted police at the Tate Museum in London. The police used crowd control tactics on the museum-goers, who were unaware that a performance was happening.

- What are some conceptual considerations an artist might make in planning a work of Live Art regarding audience? For example: in Walde's piece, the work laments the effects of climate change
- What about practical considerations? For example, Brugera's piece included two non-human animal actors
- When might an artist want their audience to be an active participant in the work?
- What are some ethical considerations for Live Art audiences, especially considering Live Art so often deals with intense, taboo, and/or triggering subject matter?
- Think about some works of Live Art you know: how were they presented? Who was the audience for those works?

Consider pieces such as - Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*; Marina Abramovic + Ulay's walk across the Great Wall; Guillermo Gomez Peña's *Brownout 2*; etc.

ASSIGNMENT: LIVE ART RITUAL

<https://x23-2.experimentalstudio.ca/live-art-ritual/>

Stacy Makishi, *Walking Each Other Home* (2025-ongoing)



From Stacy's website: "A project exploring how we gather, how ritual can heal and transform, and how we might build communities of connection: connection to ourselves, to each other, and to inspiration and mystery. Part ritual, part workshop, part story and part party."

What happens when our curiosity becomes larger than our fears? What happens to our hearts when we openly share our struggles? What does playfulness have to do with ritual?

Let's walk each other home, into the unknown together."

Stacy Makishi, *The Promise* (2020)



The Promise was a one to one performance over the phone where Stacy used her master storytelling skills alongside prompting the audience-participant to encounter a transformational and sacred ritual with the most mundane household objects. Opening the fridge door became a rite of passage. Flushing the toilet offered a radical act of healing. *How do we satisfy our longing to touch? How do we continue to make meaningful contact? How can being house-bound set us free?*

Stacy's work is not just embedded in or informed by *aloha* - that integral force of love or compassion that holds together all of existence - I think her work is *aloha*, or it gives us access to *aloha*. For Stacy, the live art ritual is a channel through which her audience-participants can experience *aloha*, be affected or perhaps even changed by it. Her commitment to channeling those connections was really exceptional during the early Covid-19 lockdowns.

Adrian Howells, *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding* (2011)



Adrian Howells was a British live artist well-known for taking on the gendered labour of service workers in his performance practice: hairdressers, launderers, care workers. In this one to one performance at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2011, he rented a nice hotel room and invited audience-participants to take part in a trilogy of highly vulnerable acts of care: being bathed, fed, and held. This ritualistic sequence encouraged audience-participants to surrender.

From a review by Dorothy Max Prior: “*The Pleasure of Being* creates a space into which narrative can unfold. Everyone’s story will be different, defined by past experiences, associations, memories. The experience is facilitated by a theatre-maker who knows his stuff: we are in safe hands, boundaries between performer and audience held in a delicate balance. Despite the intimacy of the situation, our roles are clearly defined.”

Marcus Coates, *Journey to the Lower World* (2004)



As part of an artists' residency called 'Further Up in the Air', Marcus Coates stayed in a 24-storey housing block in Liverpool, which was scheduled for demolition. After getting to know the residents, he invited them to participate in a ritual, where he would enter into a trance and communicate with animal spirits. Dressed in a stag pelt, he dances and makes animal and bird calls in front of the residents, before recounting how his encounter with these animals might relate to their question.

The Powers, live multimedia performances, 2014-present



The Powers are a Canadian trio of artists: Emily Pelstring, Katherine Kline and Jessica Mensch. From Mensch's website: "They are a band, an artistic collaboration, and a research-creation group committed to weaving alternate realities through video, music, story-telling, dance, and ritualistic performance. They create a speculative reality that is absurd, irreverent and terrifying, inhabited by animal kin and monstrous creatures, haunted by other-dimensional entities, and erupting with the repressed archetypes of classical myth. In this world, The Powers foster dynamic relationships with all sorts of beings--earthly, embodied, and otherwise. They draw inspiration from mythological trinities of sisters such as the Graeae, the Gorgons, and the Fates, and recast these icons in reclaimative, chaotic media events."

In their live multimedia performances, which are a mix of electronic music, burlesque, video projection, and performance art, they invite audience members to engage in the ritual that is taking place: at their appearance in Guelph last Halloween, a string tied to the fingers of several audience members created the magic connection that resurrected Jessica's blunt-smoking, skateboarding grandmother.

Zeus Bascon & Jordan Baylon, *Multong Bakla: A Silent Presence of Beauty* (2023)



Multong Bakla: A Silent Presence of Beauty was a live art séance presented at LIVE Biennale in Vancouver in 2023. Coordinated by Filipinx artists Zeus Bascon and Jordan Baylon, this multimedia work of live art connects trans-Pacific supernatural and physical bodies. Audience members entering the space before the official “start” of the performance encountered a spread of Pinoy snacks and an altar of various traditional and contemporary cultural offerings. The performance unfolded in many segments, including a sermon, a stand-up comedy set, multiple ghostly dances, and a fashion show; culminating in a participatory dance in the round. From LIVE’s website: “As Baylon sang, performers and audience members alike moved in a vortex, inscribing a circle on the void left in the wake of past and present colonial violence(s).”

Multong Bakla emphasized the Filipino cultural value of *kapwa*, the recognition of a shared inner self with others; kinship, community, fellows; and the moral obligation to empathize with and treat your *kapwa* with compassion and respect and love. All audience members were invited to engage in the event as *kapwa* regardless of their proximity to or knowledge of Pinoy culture. *Kapwa* is for everybody.