

Brooklyn Museum

Teaching Resource: Special Exhibition

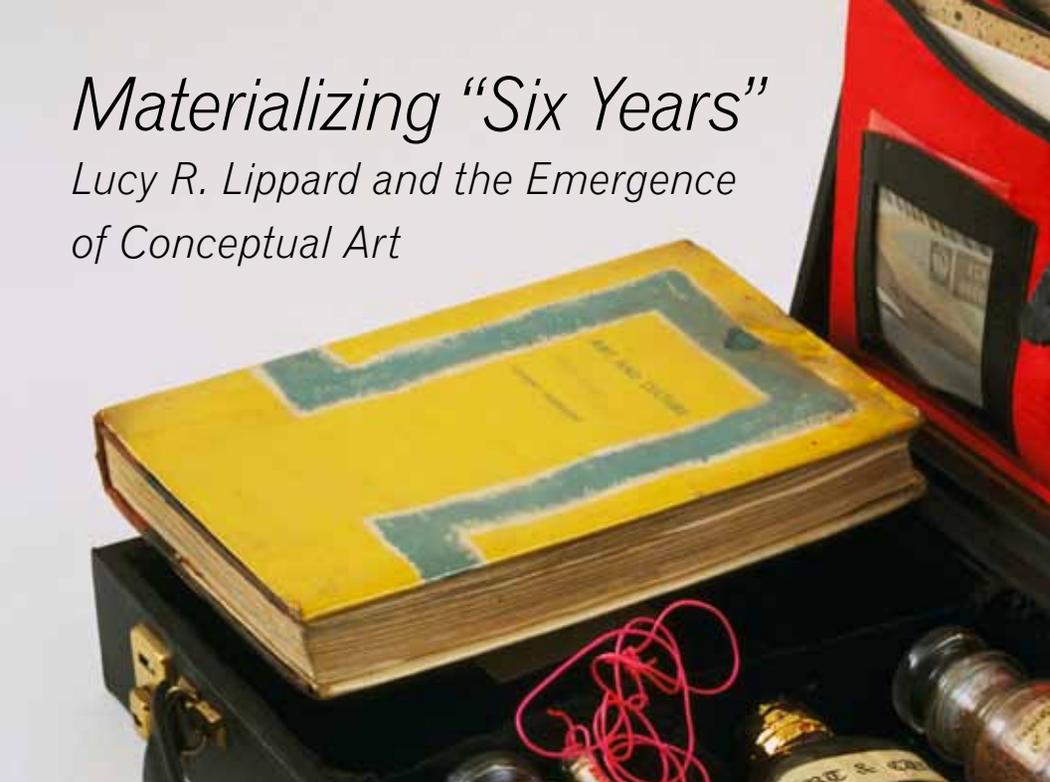
*Materializing "Six Years": Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence
of Conceptual Art*

September 14, 2012–February 3, 2013



Materializing “Six Years”

Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art



About the Exhibition

This exhibition explores the impact of Lucy R. Lippard's groundbreaking book *Six Years* on the emergent Conceptual art movement. Published in 1973, *Six Years* catalogued and described the development of Conceptual practices in the late sixties and early seventies. The book is now widely considered an essential resource for understanding this period. Using the book's structure to organize the exhibition, *Materializing “Six Years”* showcases the artists and practitioners brought together and championed by Lippard, including individual artists and collectives. The exhibition also focuses on the different ways that Lippard's curatorial projects, critical writing, and political engagement helped to redefine exhibition-making, criticism, and the viewing experience.

The exhibition features more than 170 objects by nearly 90 artists who were working internationally across a range of mediums, and it illustrates key exhibitions and events through catalogues, artist publications, periodicals, photographs, and printed ephemera. At the same time, the exhibition conveys the political energy of an era that witnessed not only Conceptual art but also the rise of the Women's Rights, Civil Rights, and anti-Vietnam War movements.

What Is Conceptual Art?

In the 1960s, some artists became increasingly concerned with artistic process and ideas rather than with physical art objects like paintings or sculpture. They started making art that did not necessarily take physical form, but instead manifested itself as a performance or a one-time event. Often, all that remained of the artwork was photographic documentation of the creative process or printed ephemera such as invitations or advertisements.

Lippard writes, “Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized.’”¹

In deliberately making a new type of art that was difficult to sell or exhibit, Conceptual artists were free to rebel against the established art world of dealers, galleries, and museums. Their works often critiqued social norms and intentionally agitated against the authority of the art market.

Lucy R. Lippard

Born in New York City in 1937, Lucy R. Lippard is an activist, feminist, writer, curator, and art critic best known for her writings on feminist and contemporary art, for which she has received numerous awards and accolades. Through her role as a critic, Lippard considers how artists can play a larger role in society. In 1969, she helped found the Art Workers' Coalition, a group of artists, filmmakers, writers, critics, and museum staff members seeking to change the art world, including by campaigning in favor of less exclusive, more diverse exhibition policies in New York-based galleries and museums.



John Latham (British, born Zambia, 1921–2006)
Art and Culture, 1966–69

Leather case containing book, letters, photostats, and labeled vials filled with powders and liquids: case, $3\frac{3}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{8} \times 10$ in. (7.9 x 28.2 x 25.3 cm).

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund. © 2011 John Latham. (Digital image: © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY)

About the Artwork

John Latham was inspired by the essay collection *Art and Culture*, written by the American critic Clement Greenberg, who favored a formalist approach toward painting and sculpture and wrote about abstraction as the purest form of art. This leather briefcase contains the following items: the remnants of a copy of the book *Art and Culture*, letters, photostats, and labeled vials filled with powders and liquids. These physical objects are the record of an event that took place at the artist's home in August 1966. The event, called "STILL & CHEW," is described in *Six Years*:

... many artists, students, and critics were invited. When the guests arrived they were each asked to take a page from Art & Culture and to chew it—after which they could if necessary spit out the product into a flask provided. About a third of the book was so chewed, and there was some selective choosing as to the pages. The chewed pages were later immersed in acid—30% sulphuric—until the solution was converted to a form of sugar, and this was then neutralized by addition of quantities of sodium bicarbonate.

The next step was the introduction of an Alien Culture, a yeast. After which several months went by with the solution bubbling gently.

Nearly a year after the chewing, at the end of May, 1967, a postcard arrived addressed to [the artist] Mr. Latham with a red label on it saying VERY URGENT. On the back was a plea for the return of the book "wanted urgently for a student, Art & Culture."

A distilling apparatus was assembled, and a suitable glass container procured for the book to be returned to the librarian. When this had been done a label was fixed to the glass saying what it was and together with the postcard it was presented to her back in the school, where for some years John Latham had been engaged as a part-time instructor. After the few minutes required to persuade the librarian that this was indeed the book which was asked for on the postcard, he left the room.

In the morning postal delivery a day later a letter arrived from the principal of St. Martins addressed to Mr. Latham. It said he was sorry, he was unable to invite him to do any more teaching.²

About the Artist

John Latham was interested in collaborations between art and science. He spent most of his creative energies considering how these two fields intersect and how sciences such as biology and physics could be depicted visually. His work has been collected and shown in museums around the world, such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Tate Britain.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles (American, born 1939)
*Private Performances of Personal Maintenance
as Art*, 1969

Black-and-white photograph, 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm); later reproduced as contribution to the catalogue of c. 7,500. Index card, 4 x 6 in. (10.2 x 15.2 cm). Valencia, Calif.: California Institute of the Arts, 1974. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. (Photo: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York/www.feldmangallery.com)

About the Artwork

This photograph documents a performance by Mierle Laderman Ukeles. In *Private Performances of Personal Maintenance as Art*, the artist chose to mop her kitchen floor as an everyday activity that according to social convention was (and often still is) considered “women’s work.” Ukeles wrote, “Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the [expletive deleted] time, literally; the mind boggles and chafes at the boredom; the culture confers lousy status and minimum wages on maintenance jobs; housewives = no pay.”³

About the Artist

Mierle Laderman Ukeles is a New York City–based artist known for her feminist and service-oriented works. In 1969 she wrote a manifesto titled *Maintenance Art—Proposal for an Exhibition*, challenging the domestic role of women and proclaiming herself a “maintenance artist.” Maintenance, for Ukeles, is the realm of human activities that keep things going—tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. Her performances in the 1970s included the cleaning of art galleries. One of her best-known projects, *Touch Sanitation* (1970–80), involved shaking hands with more than 8,500 workers in the New York City Department of Sanitation while saying “Thank you for keeping New York City alive.” In 1977, Ukeles became the artist-in-residence at the NYC Department of Sanitation, a position she has held ever since.⁴



Questions for Viewing *Art and Culture* and *Private Performances of Personal Maintenance as Art*

Look at each artwork. What details do you notice?

Compare these two artworks. What similarities do they share? What differences can you find?

These works were made by two Conceptual artists who thought that the process of making art was very important. Read the “About the Artwork” section provided in this packet. How do these physical objects tell the viewer about the performance or event that took place?

What main idea does each artist address in the performance or event and in physical objects that remain as documentation? How does this idea challenge the traditional art world?

What was the role of the artists in making these works? Is this different from traditional art-making practices? What was the political climate like in the United States that may have inspired their work?

What is your opinion of Conceptual art? What do you like about these works of art? What do you dislike? Explain your answer.

Classroom Activities

Art and Social Studies

John Latham and Mierle Laderman Ukeles were working as Conceptual artists at the same time that the Women's Rights, Civil Rights, and anti-Vietnam War movements were active. Consider some of the current events and trends taking place today. Which of these issues do you feel strongly about? Make an artwork inspired by that topic or event. Consider how your artwork can be more about process or ideas than about the visual product.

Performing Arts

Ukeles's artwork focuses on the theme of maintenance. In *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969) she posed the question: “The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?” Think about who maintains the public spaces in your neighborhood. Pick an event, such as a school carnival or dance, graduation, sports game or rally, career fair or international fair, or your lunch break. Consider all the people who help make that event happen. Write a script, block out a scene, or choreograph a dance documenting the steps taken in preparation for, during, and after the event. Perform it. Record or film your performance.

Resources

Lippard, Lucy R., ed. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972 ...* New York: Praeger, 1973. Reprinted, with a new introduction, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

This publication documents the early years of Conceptual art. The book is arranged as an annotated chronology and includes many transcribed discussions among and with the artists involved.

Morris, Catherine, and Vincent Bonin, eds. *Materializing "Six Years": Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*. New York: Brooklyn Museum; Cambridge, Mass. The MIT Press, 2012.

Catalogue of the exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, with a preface by Lucy R. Lippard, contributions by co-curators Catherine Morris and Vincent Bonin, and an essay by art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson.

<http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/1960-2010-Age-of-Post-Colonialism.html>

Visit this site to find out more about Conceptual and process art.

<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2009-03-20/draft-mierle-interview/>

This website features an interview with Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

<http://youtube/aJ9GWIFZz1g>

This excerpt from the documentary *Not Just Garbage* includes an interview with Mierle Laderman Ukeles talking about an early performance piece that led to her work at the Department of Sanitation.

Domestic Workers United: <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org>

National Domestic Workers Alliance: <http://www.domesticworkers.org/>

These websites represent two organizations fighting for the rights of housekeepers and caregivers.

<http://www.flattimeho.org.uk/project/16/>

The website for Flat Time House, the home and studio of the late John Latham.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2006/jan/07/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>

John Latham's obituary, published in a popular newspaper, reviewing his life and work.

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Materializing "Six Years": Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art was organized by Catherine J. Morris, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and Vincent Bonin, an independent curator.

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This packet was written by Cheri Ehrlich, Senior Museum Educator, and Becky Aleman, Museum Educator, with assistance from Alexa Fairchild, School Programs Manager, and Catherine J. Morris.

Notes

1. Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972 ...* (New York: Praeger, 1973; reprinted, with a new introduction, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. vii.

2. Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 16.

3. Excerpts from Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Maintenance Art ...* proposal for an Exhibition "Care," 1969, as cited in Jack Burnham, "Problems of Criticism, IX," *Artforum*, January 1971; printed in Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 220.

4. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2009-03-20/draft-mierle-interview/>



