

The Critical Matter of Performance

February 16–18, 2017

Special Note:

In the spirit of recent calls for a general strike against the current administration on February 17, we conceive of this event as one of critical and necessary reflection and planning. We offer this as a generative platform for thinkers and artists who have been involved in or aligned with activism, and hope it serves as a crucial contribution to “no business as usual.” We will hold space in the New Museum’s lobby on February 17, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., where museum visitors will be invited to take the mic and share their own responses to the call for a general strike.

INTRODUCTION

The New Museum, in partnership with the NYU Center for the Humanities and the Sense of Performance Project at Yale University, presents the inaugural New Museum Colloquium from February 16 to 18, 2017. Entitled “The Critical Matter of Performance,” this three-day think tank will convene historians and theorists of performance, dance, and visual art, as well as choreographers, theater artists, visual artists, and performers to explore the relationship of criticism to live art through multiple registers—across time, space, bodies, politics, and institutions. Organized by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Tavia Nyong’o, Johanna Burton, and the New Museum’s Department of Education and Public Engagement, the colloquium will feature presentations and discussions with keynote presenters including Rizvana Bradley, Tania Bruguera, Malik Gaines, Jack Halberstam, Jenn Joy, Thomas J. Lax, Simone Leigh, and Wu Tsang, with special guest speaker Robert Longo.

The format of the colloquium brings together keynote presenters with a focus group of seventeen emerging scholars and critically engaged performing artists (chosen through an application process administered by the organizers and in consultation with the presenters). Public sessions complement a number of closed-door discussions. The public sessions include a “long table” conversation with audience and participants, moderated by the organizers; a series of “duets” in which two presenters are asked to consider the same topic from their different professional or disciplinary perspectives and to respond to each other in dialogue with the audience; and an off-site reading with participants from the colloquium.

In a time of political extremes and unthinkable circumstances, it is more imperative than ever to question the relationship between bodies, actions, critical thought, and institutions. Throughout the colloquium, participants will consider criticism—in its various forms, formats, and temporalities—as a contingent material of performance culture.

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC SESSIONS

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 16

- 7 PM SCREENINGS
by Tania Bruguera, Malik Gaines, Simone Leigh,
and Wu Tsang
- 7:45 PM LONG TABLE
(led by Johanna Burton, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Tavia Nyong'o)

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 17

PART 1

- 11 AM Arrival and Welcome
- 11:30 AM Duets, Part 1
“Haptics” with Rizvana Bradley and Simone Leigh
“Political Gestures” with Tania Bruguera and
Jack Halberstam
- 1:30 PM Break and open mic responses to the call for a general strike

PART 2

- 2:30 PM “The Unthinkable,” a mid-program review and conversation (led
by Johanna Burton, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Tavia Nyong'o, with
special guest speaker Robert Longo)
- 3 PM Duets, Part 2
“Choreographies” with Jenn Joy and Wu Tsang
“Archives and History” with Malik Gaines and
Thomas J. Lax
- 5 PM Wrap-Up/ Discussion Session

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 18

- 7 PM “Adult Contemporary”: Off-site readings by participants (La Mama
La Galleria, 47 Great Jones St.)

BIOS

KEYNOTE PRESENTERS

(in order of appearance)

RIZVANA BRADLEY is Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies and African American Studies at Yale University. A graduate of Williams College, she received her PhD from Duke University and was a Helena Rubinstein Critical Studies Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Currently, she is a visiting Research Fellow in the History of Art at University College London. As a manuscript, her forthcoming book *Resurfaced Flesh: Black Aesthetics Unbound* received a Creative Capital | Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. In addition to serving as guest editor of a special issue of the journal *Women and Performance*, she has published articles in *TDR: The Drama Review*, *Rhizomes*, and *Black Camera: An International Film Journal*, and was recently appointed Assistant Editor at the journal *boundary 2*.

SIMONE LEIGH's practice is an ongoing, object-based exploration of black female subjectivity. She creates sculptures, videos, and installations informed by her interest in African art, ethnographic research, feminism, and performance. Leigh was awarded a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation grant (2013), a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant (2011), an Art Matters research grant (2009), and the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for Sculpture (2009). She has participated in the artist-in-residence program at the Studio Museum in Harlem (2010–11) and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Workspace program (2007–08). Leigh was a facilitator at the Àsìkò Art School in Dakar, Senegal, in 2012 and at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2013. Her recent exhibitions include solo shows at the New Museum, the Museum of Arts and Design, and Tilton Gallery in New York, and group exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; SculptureCenter, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; L'appartement 22, Rabat, Morocco; the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; and the AVA Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa. Her work has been featured in several publications including *Modern Painters*, *BOMB*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *small axe*, and *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*.

TANIA BRUGUERA is an installation and performance artist whose works often expose the social effects of the power of political force. Her work has been shown in documenta 11 and the 2015 Venice Biennale, as well as at Tate Modern, London, and the Guggenheim and MoMA in New York, among others. She established the Cátedra Arte de Conducta (Behavior Art) program at Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana. Bruguera recently opened the Institute of Artivism Hannah Arendt—a school, exhibition space, and think tank in Havana for activist artists and Cubans. Born 1968 in Havana, Cuba, she lives and works in Havana, New York, and Cambridge, MA.

JACK HALBERSTAM is Professor of Gender Studies and English at Columbia University. Halberstam is the author of five books, including *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Duke UP, 1995), *Female Masculinity* (Duke UP, 1998), *In A Queer Time and Place* (NYU Press, 2005), *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke UP, 2011), and *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Beacon Press, 2012), and has written articles that have appeared in numerous journals, magazines, and collections. Halberstam has coedited a number of anthologies including *Posthuman Bodies* with Ira Livingston (Indiana University Press, 1995) and a special issue of *Social Text* with José Esteban Muñoz and David L. Eng titled “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” Halberstam lectures around the country and internationally every year, on topics such as queer failure, sex and media, subcultures, visual culture, gender variance, popular film, and animation. Halberstam is currently working on several projects, including a book titled *WILD THING* on queer anarchy, performance and protest culture, the visual representation of anarchy, and the intersections between animality, the human, and the environment.

JENN JOY founded *collective address* as a choreographic research space in Brooklyn. Her book, *The Choreographic*, was published by MIT Press in 2014. She is a Contributing Editor in Performance for *BOMB* and edited *Planes of Composition: Dance, Theory, and the Global* with André Lepecki (Seagull Press, 2009); other writing has been published in *DANSE: An Anthology* (Les Presses du Réel, 2014), *DANCE* (Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2012), *BOMB*, *BOMBLOG*, *Movement Research Performance Journal*, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, *Dance Theatre Journal*, *Women and Performance*, and *Contemporary*. She was scholar-in-residence at Danspace Project at St. Mark’s Church in NYC, where she coedited the catalogues *Diary of an Image* and

JUDSONOW and curated *Conversations without Walls*, a series of conversations around issues in contemporary choreography, with Judy Hussie-Taylor. Joy taught at Rhode Island School of Design from 2005 to 2016 and was appointed a critic in sculpture at Yale in 2015.

WU TSANG's films, installations, performances, and sculptures move fluidly between documentary, activism, and fiction. Her projects have been presented at museums and film festivals internationally, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Berlinale Film Festival, Berlin; SANFIC, Santiago; Hot Docs Festival, Toronto; and South by Southwest Film Festival, Austin. Her first feature film, *WILDNESS* (2012), premiered at MoMA's Documentary Fortnight, and her work has also been featured in the 2012 Whitney Biennial and in the 2012 New Museum Triennial, "The Ungovernables." She has received grants from Creative Capital, the Warhol Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

MALIK GAINES is an artist and writer based in New York. His book, *Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left* (NYU Press, 2017), traces a circulation of black political ideas in performances of the 1960s and beyond. Gaines has performed and exhibited extensively with the group My Barbarian, whose work has been shown at MoMA, the New Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Kitchen, and Participant Inc., New York; LACMA, the Hammer Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and elsewhere, and was included in the 2014 Whitney Biennial as well as the 2006 and 2008 California Biennials, Performa 05 and 07, the Montreal Biennial, and the Baltic Triennial. He is assistant professor of Performance Studies in NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

THOMAS J. LAX is Associate Curator of Media and Performance Art at MoMA, a position he's held since 2014. At the Museum, he has organized or co-organized projects including *Steffani Jemison: Promise Machine*, Greater New York 2015, *Maria Hassabi: PLASTIC*, *Projects: Neil Beloufa*, and *Modern Dance: Ralph Lemon*, among others. Previously, he worked at the Studio Museum in Harlem for seven years, where he worked on exhibitions such as *Kalup Linzy: If it Don't Fit*, *VideoStudio*, *Fore*, and *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination*

and the American South. Lax writes regularly for a variety of publications and is a faculty member at the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University's Center for the Arts. He is also on the advisory committees of Contemporary And (C&), The Laundromat Project, Recess, and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, among others. Lax holds degrees from Brown University and Columbia University, and in 2015 was awarded the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement.

SPECIAL GUESTS

ROBERT LONGO is a New York–based artist, filmmaker, and musician. He was among the five artists included in the seminal 1977 exhibition *Pictures* at Artists Space in New York. Longo has exhibited extensively throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States, including the Venice Biennale, documenta, and the Whitney Biennial. He has had several retrospective exhibitions, including at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain Nice. His work is represented in numerous major museums and private collections all over the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Tate, London. In 2005, Longo was the recipient of the Goslar Kaiserring, and in 2010 he was inducted as Officier de L'ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture. Longo is also a cofounder and member of the art-rock band the X-Patsys, joined by his wife, the renowned actress Barbara Sukowa, and the artist Jon Kessler. Longo lives and works in New York. He is represented by Metro Pictures, New York; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg/London; and Capitain Petzel, Berlin.

ORGANIZERS

JULIA BRYAN–WILSON is Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at UC Berkeley. Her writing, which has appeared in *Afterall*, *Aperture*, *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *Bookforum*, *October*, *Oxford Art Journal*, and *Parkett*, among many other venues, centers on feminist and queer theory, artistic labor, performance, and craft histories. She is the author of *Art*

Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era (University of California Press, 2009), *Art in the Making: Artists and Their Materials from the Studio to Crowdsourcing* (Thames & Hudson, 2016), and *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (forthcoming 2017). With Andrea Andersson, she is the co-curator of *Cecilia Vicuña: About to Happen*, which opens at the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans in March 2017. She is currently a Visiting Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

TAVIA NYONG'O is Professor of African American Studies, American Studies, and Theater Studies at Yale University. He works in contemporary aesthetic and critical theory with a particular attention to the visual, musical, and performative dimensions of blackness, as well as to the affective and technocultural dimensions of modern regimes of race. His first book, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), won the Errol Hill Award for best book in African American theatre and performance studies. He is completing a study of fabulation in black aesthetics and embarking on another on queer wildness. Nyong'o has published in venues such as *Radical History Review*, *Criticism*, *GLQ*, *TDR: The Drama Review*, *Women and Performance*, *WSQ*, the *Nation*, *Triple Canopy*, the *New Inquiry*, and *n+1*. He is coeditor of the journal *Social Text* and the Sexual Cultures book series at New York University Press. He regularly blogs at *Bully Bloggers*.

JOHANNA BURTON is Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement at the New Museum and the series editor for *Critical Anthologies in Art and Culture*. An art historian, critic, and curator, she has contributed articles and reviews to numerous journals—including *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *October*, and *Texte zur Kunst*—as well as to exhibition catalogues for institutions throughout the world. Burton has curated or co-curated exhibitions including “Sherrie Levine: Mayhem” at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, with Elisabeth Sussman (2011); “Anti-Establishment” at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (2012); “Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology” at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, with Anne Ellegood (2014); and, at the New Museum, “XFR STN” (2013), “Wynne Greenwood: ‘Kelly,’” with Stephanie Snyder (2015), “Cheryl Donegan: Scenes and Commercials” (2016), and “Simone Leigh: The Waiting Room,” with Shaun Leonardo and

Emily Mello (2016); among other projects. She is the editor of *Cindy Sherman* (October Files, MIT Press, 2006) and coeditor, with Shannon Jackson and Dominic Willson, of *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* (New Museum and MIT Press, 2016). Prior to her work at the New Museum, Burton was Director of the Graduate Program at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (2010–13) and Associate Director and senior faculty member at the Whitney Independent Study Program (2008–10).

KATE WIENER is Education Associate at the New Museum.

ALICIA RITSON is Marcia Tucker Senior Research Fellow at the New Museum.

DEREK WRIGHT is Senior Production Manager at the New Museum.

TRAVIS CHAMBERLAIN was formerly Associate Curator of Performance and Manager of Public Programs at the New Museum and is now Managing Director of Queer | Art, New York.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Marc Arthur
Katherine Brewer Ball
Lauren DiGiulio
Jane Gabriels
Joseph Henry
Tiffany Liu
James McMaster
Jordan Musser
Ikechukwu Casmir Onyewuenyi
Will Rawls
Anthony Romero
Amy Ruhl
Ariel Sibert
Cory Tamler
Candace Williams
Tara Aisha Willis
Hannah Yohalem

ABOUT NEW MUSEUM COLLOQUIUMS

New Museum Colloquiums are an outgrowth of the New Museum Seminars program that ran from 2013 to 2016 and provided a weekly platform for postgraduate-level inquiry in a peer-led, seminar-style setting. The new think tank format seeks to produce a space that can support a similar level of inquiry in a more immersive and concentrated period of time, with public and private sessions operating in close dialogue.

SPONSORS

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**Council on
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235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM**