

MARCH 23–JUNE 30, 2008 | THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

ALLAN KAPROW ART AS LIFE



Household, women licking jam off a car (detail), 1964, photo by Sol Goldberg, courtesy Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA (980063)

“What is a Happening? A game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing.” – Allan Kaprow

Allan Kaprow (1927–2006) was a pioneer of performance art during the late 1950s and early '60s best known for coining the term “Happening” to describe a staged event or situation meant to be considered as art. *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life* presents Kaprow’s paintings, assemblages, Happenings, Environments, Activities, and other production through a variety of media, including the artist’s Scores (suggestions for actions during the Happenings), photographs, videos, and films, as well as reinventions of key Happenings. The exhibition is divided into two parts: “museum as mediation” presents an archive of material

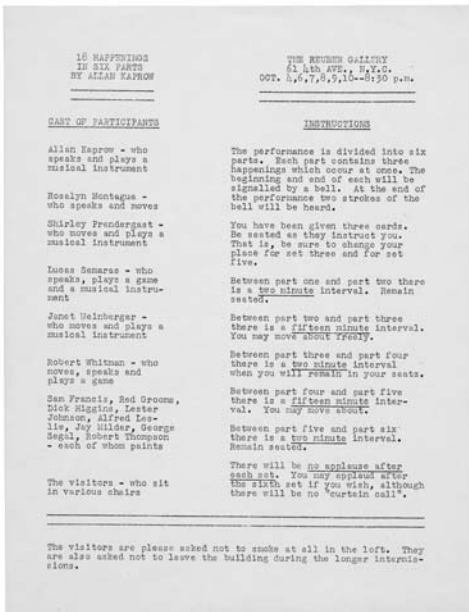
documenting Kaprow’s production, while “agency for action” offers opportunities to experience new versions of the artist’s Happenings and Environments.

Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Kaprow graduated from New York University in 1949 and received his master’s degree in art history from Columbia University in 1951. New York City during the late 1950s was a center of the avant-garde, a place where experimental practices were being cultivated across many disciplines, including the visual arts, music, dance, and literature. Open to a variety of influences,

Kaprow studied with art historian Meyer Schapiro and painter Hans Hofmann and, from 1957 to 1958, attended—along with George Brecht, Al Hansen, and La Monte Young—the weekly experimental music composition class that John Cage taught at the New School for Social Research. Kaprow did not regard art as removed from daily life, but rather as something that should create daily life: in fact, he wished to weave these two categories together, believing “everything is art, art is everything.” Calling himself an “Un-Artist/ Non-Artist,” Kaprow was interested in making work outside of conventional discourse and production. He viewed art as a social instrument with a political dimension and redefined it as a “game,” an idea he often referred to in his writings.

Kaprow’s early production—which includes painting, assemblage, and his *Rearrangeable Panels* (1957–59)—is rooted in his investigations of categories of space, both private (studio, home) and public (subway stations, bridges). These hybrid works, which combine painting and three-dimensional objects in an attempt to affect the space in which they are presented, signal the evolution of Kaprow’s thinking about art as “a situation, an action, an environment, or an event” rather than an object. In 1959, the artist first referred to one of his works, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, as a “Happening.” For this piece, held at Reuben Gallery in New York, Kaprow invited the public to complete tasks he outlined in a Score in an “environment” comprising three rooms and including *Rearrangeable Panels*. Soon after, the artist began creating Environments and Happenings as independent works. In 1962, Kaprow described the Happening as “an art form related to theater, in that it is performed in a given time and space. Its structure and content are logical extensions of ‘environments.’” Environments are rooms designed by Kaprow in which the public can and should be active; unlike installation art, Environments alter and change with the activities of participants.

Happenings, which are often multi-disciplinary and non-narrative, center on questions such as: How can I express myself? How can I communicate with others? What forms of communication are there other than language? How do I explore physical communication between people? In the early years, they primarily took place in public spaces; later, the private realm became more central. The human body and its relationship to its surroundings, physically as well as socially, are thematically important. Happenings also often take on a political dimension through the materials they incorporate. Impermanence is also a fundamental characteristic, in that what remains of them are fragments—photographs, film footage,



18 *Happenings in Six Parts*, cast of participants, 1959, courtesy Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA (980063)

Scores, or the commentary of participants. Kaprow often scheduled talks the day before a Happening was to take place in order to discuss the particular work as well as his practice in general. In addition, he often held workshops after Happenings that allowed participants to speak about their experiences. Kaprow was not interested in the institutional display or preservation of his work, writing in 1967 that “eventually...the modern museum may gradually lose that cloying association of holiness that it presently inherits from another age. Hopefully, it will become an educational institute, a computerized bank of cultural history, and an agency for action.”

During the early 1970s, Kaprow began to design Activity Booklets as instructional guides to his Happenings. Their organization typically consists of a short introduction at the beginning or end, photographs combined with Scores, and a short summary of the action. Kaprow was unhappy with the way the Activity Booklets were used: they often led those who staged his Happenings to mimic the photographed illustrations rather than develop their own independent interpretations. In 1971, Kaprow began focusing on Activities, intimately scaled pieces for one or several players. These works examined everyday behaviors and habits in a way nearly indistinguishable from ordinary life. The artist explained:

In 1958, I designated as a “Happening” what was for me then a new vocation. It was a neutral word, with no associations of either art or other professionalization. Since that time, “Happening” has acquired a history, the general impression of Happenings is so far from my actual record and interests that after 1968 I used Michael Kirby’s term “Activity,” thus restoring that uninflected, undifferentiated tone of “doing” that I feel is important. It may be impossible, after all is said, to completely escape from the accumulated

popular idea about the older word, but in the following I’ll restrict my remarks to “Activity.”

In 1958, Kaprow began creating new versions of his Happenings and Environments; in early 2005, he began asking others to create new versions. The points of departure for these reinventions are the Scores on display in this exhibition as well as three principles formulated by the artist: site-specificity, impermanence, and doubt in art. Visitors may take part in Happenings and experience them first hand; each new version will be documented (through photographs, films, or writings) and presented in this exhibition. In addition, several of Kaprow’s friends and colleagues will reinvent Environments: John Baldessari and Skylar Haskard will reinvent *Apple Shrine* (1960); Allen Ruppersberg will reinvent *Words* (1962); and Barbara T. Smith will reinvent *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* (1963). Also featured in the exhibition is *Trade Talk* (2008), an Environment created by Suzanne Lacy in collaboration with Michael Rotondi and Peter Kirby. In this unique space, visitors are invited to listen to accounts of participants’ experiences of Kaprow’s work.

Allan Kaprow—Art as Life is organized by the Haus der Kunst, Munich, and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Concept of the exhibition by Stephanie Rosenthal and Eva Meyer-Hermann.

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RELATED EVENTS

MOCA ART TALKS

These informal discussions of current exhibitions feature artists, curators, critics, writers, and other arts professionals. The talks take place in the exhibition galleries unless otherwise noted, and reservations are not required. INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 3pm

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Stephanie Rosenthal, exhibition co-curator and chief curator at the Hayward Gallery, London, will lead a walkthrough of the exhibition.
FREE with museum admission

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 3pm

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY

111 N. CENTRAL AVE., LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

(ADJACENT TO THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA)

Former student and longtime friend of Allan Kaprow
Jeff Kelley will speak about his memories of Happenings.
FREE

SUNDAY, MAY 18, 3pm

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY

111 N. CENTRAL AVE., LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

(ADJACENT TO THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA)

Exploring Kaprow's Environments

MOCA Curator **Philipp Kaiser** will moderate a discussion between **Skylar Haskard**, **Paul McCarthy**, **Allen Ruppersberg**, and **Barbara T. Smith**, exploring the artists' reinventions of Allan Kaprow's Environments created for the exhibition from the directions and indications left by Kaprow.
FREE

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 6:30pm

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Judith Rodenbeck, professor of modern and contemporary art, Sarah Lawrence College, will lead a discussion about the reinvention of Kaprow's work.
FREE

MOCA Art Talks are made possible by The Times Mirror Foundation Endowment.

TRADE TALK PLANNED REFLECTIONS

SATURDAYS: MARCH 29–JUNE 28, 3pm

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Trade Talk, an installation and project by **Suzanne Lacy**, **Michael Rotondi**, and **Peter Kirby**, includes incidental encounters and planned reflections, creating an audio archive of memories from those who have participated in a Happening or Environment. The series of planned reflections by invited artists and scholars will take place in the galleries. These events are free with museum admission and are open to the public. To hear the audio archive, to view a schedule of speakers, or for additional information, visit moca.org/kaprow.

TEENS OF CONTEMPORARY ART (TOCA) EVENT

SUNDAY, MAY 11, 3–5pm

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Be a part of the exhibition *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life* and roll through downtown with TOCA in a unique reinvention of *Round Trip*, one of Kaprow's Happenings. See the CalTrans Building, Union Station, and Little Tokyo like you've never seen them before as two teams of teens move through the area with an artwork that grows and shrinks.

INFO 213/633-5310 or dgray@moca.org

FREE; no reservations required

Teens of Contemporary Art is made possible by The Joseph Drown Foundation and UBS.

HAPPENINGS

Thanks to a generous grant from the Getty Foundation, MOCA invited 29 cultural institutions throughout Southern California to reinvent a diverse selection of Allan Kaprow's Happenings throughout the run of the exhibition. For a comprehensive schedule of events, please pick up a Calendar of Happenings or visit moca.org/kaprow.

For additional programs, visit moca.org.

Education programs at MOCA are supported by The James Irvine Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Endowment for Education Programs; Jean and Lewis Wolff and Family; the Weingart Foundation; The Lura Gard Newhouse Charitable Lead Trust; the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission; Bank of America; Wells Fargo; The Green Foundation; the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles; and David Hockney.

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